

The socio-emotional dimension in education: A systematic review

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The main goal of this review is to summarise the findings in research articles about the socio-emotional dimension in education in Colombia between the years 2015 and 2021 published in high impact databases such as *Scopus*, *Dialnet*, *Science Direct* and *Redalyc*. Seventy-eight papers were reviewed. It was highlighted that most studies focused on the emotional education and the development of socio-emotional skills in age groups such as children, adolescents, youth, and adults, with a greater number of works on children and adolescents. The development of some interesting intervention proposals is emphasised, although they do not contribute to innovative theoretical models. It concludes that there is a high level of complexity in this field of research and a need to overcome these shortcomings in order to develop new theories that will promote novel methods and strategies to be applied.

Introduction

All members of the United Nations have adopted *The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* (UN, n.d. a), that includes among its 17 goals the *Sustainable Development Goal 4, Quality Education*. The UN's Department of Economic and Social Affairs has illustrated the great importance to the development of socio-emotional competencies and socio-emotional education through its PECTEP program (UN, n.d. a). In this regard and for the purpose of this work, a documentary review was undertaken in research journal articles on aspects of socio-emotionality regarding variables such as socio-emotional competencies, socio-emotional skills, emotional education, and socio-emotional development relating to education, educational programs, curriculum, evaluation and pedagogy categories. In these articles, an extensive review of the subject was carried out, encompassing theoretical foundations, research approaches, methodological designs, sampling and data collection instruments, analyses of results, limitations and conclusions.

The low level of publication of quantitative and qualitative research works on the topic of this research study in indexed scientific journals in Colombia is a concern. However, significant levels of research publication on this topic in some European countries, and the limitations stated in these reports allow the identification of the need to improve the formal processes of research on socio-emotionality. Such research may lead to the emergence of new theoretical constructs in this field, thereby enabling the generation of new strategies that can be applied for diverse age groups. In Colombia, the socio-emotional approach and formative and pedagogical scenarios for it is a pending task for schools, and one that is included on the agenda of Colombian primary school teachers.

It is important to emphasise that the study of emotions was not a central research topic until the end of the 19th century, playing only a tangential role in various issues generally associated with ethics, morality, and human behaviour. However, in recent times a

significant number of studies have been developed from diverse theoretical perspectives, framed here in the thematic axes named in Figure 1.

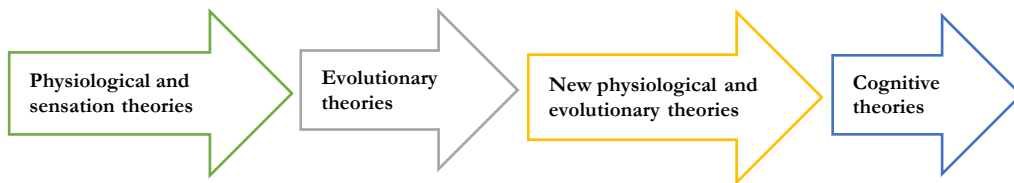


Figure 1: Thematic axes linking the theoretical perspectives under study
Source: Authors' elaboration (2023).

Physiological and sensation theories

This section outlines the union between two physiological theories, physiological (James, 1890) and sensation (Hume, 1739), in the same group as both focus on the way in which the person experiences emotion. However, it is necessary to make a clear distinction about the way each approaches the questioning of the experience of emotion. While physiological theories inquire about the physical issue (proposing that emotion is merely due to physical changes), sensation theories ask about how emotion is experienced, emphasising the mental treatment of the phenomenon.

Evolutionary theories

These focus on the socialisation of emotions as a visible element through behaviour in which possible subjectivity in the analysis of emotion is dismissed. In this perspective, Darwin (1873) assumed emotions as phenomena resulting from public behaviour, not as subjective in individuals, as one might think. In this sense, evolutionary theories are a form of physiological theory insofar as they are also based on explanations that point to bodily adaptations.

New physiological and evolutionary theories

These are the changes proposed to the Jamesian theory by Damasio (2001) in the physiological-evolutionary perspective, in which this researcher argues that first of all, it must be considered that the study of the physiological aspect of emotions must be done from an evolutionary approach.

Cognitive theories

These are divided into strong and evaluative theories. Strong cognitive theories are the antithesis of physiological theories, since they affirm that emotions are forms of cognition that refer to mental contents and have propositional objects. Emotions, from this perspective, evaluate and criticise a situation by contrasting with past experiences and must necessarily be analysed from their rational content (Arnold, 1960). Cognitive-evaluative theories of emotion, such as Solomon (2004) and Robert Gordon (1969),

consider emotions as having cognitive structures and elements and, in Solomon's case, as belonging to a class similar (if not equal) to that of judgments. More specifically, Solomon says that emotions are a form of engagement with the world. This author, although convinced of the relevance of the concept of "judgment" in emotion, believes that the term does not account for the true relationship established between subject and object, this being an emotional one.

Social construction theories

These emerged in the context of psychology in the 1980s with the approach proposed by James Averill (1974). In the beginning, the study of emotions can be seen as a development of cognitive theories and evolutionary theories, since he saw emotions as useful mechanisms for life (which depend on adaptation) and which in turn have cognitive contents, such as beliefs (both socially constructed and subjective), within their essential components. Cornelius (1996), one of Averill's followers and disciples, showed clearly the most accentuated differences between evolutionary theories and those of social construction.

Method

Search procedure and review parameters

In this documentary exploration, research articles selected from the *Scopus*, *Dialnet*, *Science Direct* and *Redalyc* databases were reviewed. The search descriptors on the Internet were: (1) Education AND socio-emotional competencies; (2) Education AND socio-emotional skills; (3) Education AND socio-emotional development; (4) Educational programs AND socio-emotional competencies; (5) Educational programs AND socio-emotional skills; (6) Educational programs AND socio-emotional development; (7) Curriculum AND socio-emotional competencies; (8) Curriculum AND socio-emotional skills; (9) Curriculum AND socio-emotional development; (10) Pedagogy AND socio-emotional competencies; (11) Pedagogy AND socio-emotional skills; and (12) Pedagogy AND socio-emotional development. As it can be seen, key concepts like Education, Educational programs, Curriculum and Pedagogy were articulated with the topics Socio-emotional skills, Socio-emotional development, and Socio-emotional competencies. Key concepts and topics were articulated using the AND connector, which led to a good level of search for qualified papers.

The research criteria for the article selection process were: research report articles with a strong epistemic scientific outreach; publication during the six year range 2016 to 2021 inclusive, in order to work only on relatively recent publications; and full text in Spanish or English.

In this analysis absolute frequency descriptive statistics concepts are used, understood as the number of times an event takes place, as well as the event relative frequency, understood as the part over the whole expressed in percentage numbers.

It should be noted that in the systematisation of the selected information, concepts like education, educational programs, curriculum, pedagogy, and evaluation were articulated with the topics of socio-emotional skills, socio-emotional development, and socio-emotional competencies; these latest were the key concepts used in the search descriptors. The following variables were analysed relating to socio-emotional learning and educational processes, typology of the population involved in the research, and the theories on which the studies were based. The methodological aspects dealt with the research approach and typology, the data collection techniques and instruments, the statistical methods, and data analysis, as well as the limitations, conclusions, suggestions and expectations behind the studies.

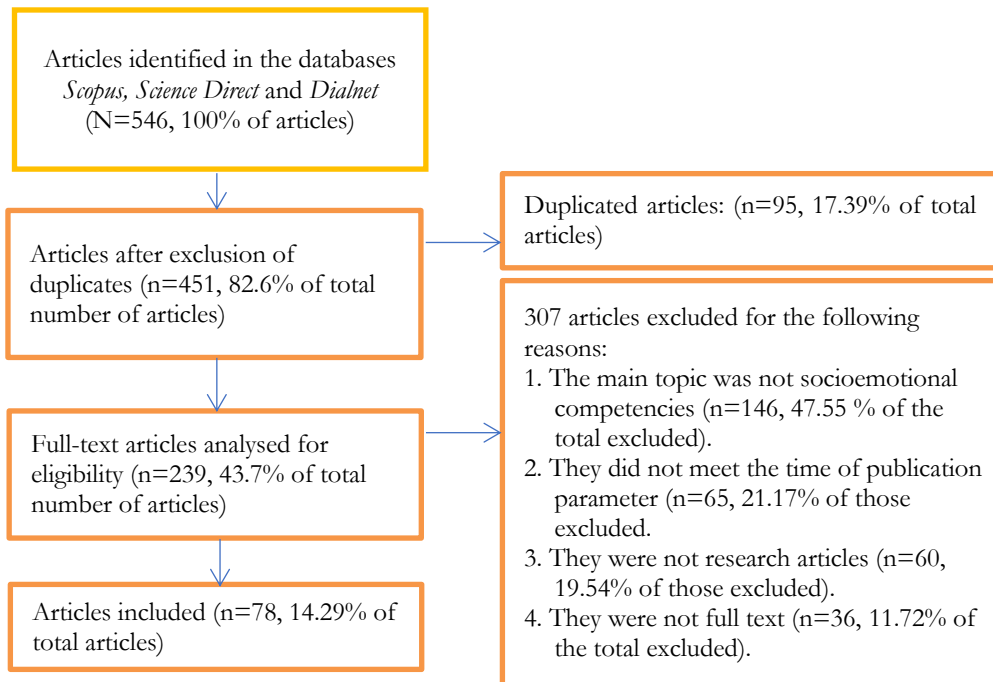


Figure 2: Flow chart related to the study selection process according to the PRISMA guide (Moher et al., 2009). Source: Author's own elaboration (2022).

Results

As noted in the flow chart (Figure 2), based on the 12 search descriptors used, the number of articles identified in the *Scopus, Science Direct* and *Dialnet* databases totaled N=546, with contributions from each as shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Articles identified in the databases and their search criteria

Scopus	84 articles retrieved, 15.38% of the total number of articles reviewed. 57 were excluded under the criteria outlined in Figure 2, leaving 27 articles from this database as references for the structuring of this article. Although 12 search descriptors were used, the number of articles obtained from Scopus represents a relatively low relative frequency.
Science Direct	62 articles retrieved, 11.33% of the total number of articles reviewed. 38 were excluded and 24 were selected.
Dialnet	Dialnet contributed the most articles, 400, 73.26% of the total number of articles reviewed. 251 were excluded (62.75% of the 400) and 149 were included, all in Spanish.

Duplicate articles numbered 95, 17.39% of the total number of articles reviewed.

Source: own elaboration (2023). Supported by articles identified in Scopus, Science Direct and Dialnet databases, as framed in the 12 search descriptors.

General information

Initial examination of the content in all the identified articles enabled us to record following general information:

1. By fields of knowledge, psychology with its educational psychology research lines generated the highest percentage of journals, with 70% of the journals in the databases consulted. Specialised research fields in the same discipline, specifically developmental psychology, health psychology, child psychology, evolutionary psychology, psychology and behavioural development, social psychology, psychology and current values, and psychology and pediatrics, consolidated the supremacy of psychology as the discipline with the highest number of articles in this systematic review of publications concerning the key concepts of the socio-emotional dimension in education.
2. The category with the second largest number of research articles dedicated to socio-emotional competencies and some of the variables with which they can be articulated was the field of education, contributing about 18% of the journals consulted. These included specialised journals in the areas of pedagogy, education and experience, educational research, social pedagogy, educational emotional research, coexistence and educational mediation, sustainability and education, and pedagogical action. However, there were no journals specialising in didactics, curriculum and evaluation represented in relation to socio-emotional studies.
3. An important finding from the initial analysis is two journals containing articles that socialise research studies linking psychology and fields of education with socio-emotionality, one journal in psycho-didactics and the other in psycho-pedagogy.
4. An interesting aspect is that journals specialising in health topics such as pediatrics, mental health and population health provided 10% of the total number of articles selected for this research.

Theoretical foundations of the articles

The theoretical foundations of the selected articles were analysed on the basis of key concepts such as socio-emotional competencies, socio-emotional skills, socio-emotional education and their relationship with the pedagogy, didactics, curriculum and evaluation categories.

Based on this perspective, analyses of selected articles indicate that 60% of the socio-emotional competencies are approached from the integrative perspective of Jacobs and Struyf (2013), while for others the approaches are from concepts of something more related to academic performance determining the performances of students later on in their life after school (Brunello & Schlotter, 2011; Gutman & Schoon, 2013; Alva Castro et al., 2019; Ruvalcaba-Romero et al., 2016; Rodríguez-Ledo et al., 2018; Ramos et al., 2020; Oriola et al., 2019; Murillo et al., 2020; Carrasco et al., 2017). This concept includes, *inter alia*, motivation and aspirations as determining elements in students' educational progress the same way as in labour market supply and demand (Beal & Crockett, 2010; Chowdry et al., 2011; Muñoz Cáceres, 2014; Llorent et al., 2020; Pilar Jiménez et al., 2018), approaching the studies of socio-emotional competencies from the desirable interpersonal action required by reading and social and emotional competencies, and those related to empathy. The conceptual foundations of the socio-emotional well-being and learning program from the perspective of socio-emotional cognition integrating factors both at the individual and contextual levels were also determined (Berger et al., 2020).

It is underlined that children's early skills are intimately interrelated with socio-emotional skills. For example, studies show that children's socio-emotional skills are based on their language skills and vice versa (Daily et al., 2010). A survey model on socio-emotional skills was adapted to diagnose the emotional state, stress and learning experiences of Mexican middle and high school students during the Covid-19 health crisis (Rodríguez-Leonardo & Peña Peralta, 2020). From a more global perspective, social competence may be viewed as a multidimensional concept involving behavioural, affective and cognitive aspects, implying that behaviors schoolchildren must put into play in their social life need to accord with the context in which they interact. For example, a number of authors (Peñalva-Vèlez et al., 2020; Ashiabi, 2007; Gómez-Ortiz et al., 2017; Romera et al., 2008; Gómez-Ortiz et al., 2017; Bisquera Alzina, 2009) approach social and socio-emotional skills as being developed through childhood in coexistence processes.

Emotional education, as an important socio-emotional competence category variable, is addressed in a significant number of reviewed studies, specifically in 25% (Andrés-Roqueta & García García, 2017; García-Martin & García-Sánchez, 2020; Martínez-Álvarez et al., 2020; Sánchez Agostini et al., 2019; Molinar Monsiváis & Cervantes Herrera, 2020; Merino Villeneuve, 2016; Cruz Ordoñez & Cruzata Martínez, 2017; Barrientos et al., 2019; Martínez-Álvarez et al., 2020; Guevara et al., 2020; Echeverría et al., 2020; Sidera et al., 2019; Barrientos-Fernández et al., 2020; Ruvalcaba-Romero et al., 2017), and from the theoretical perspectives of Bizquera Alzina (2005, 2007, 2011) and Agullò et al. (2010) who in a transcendental way articulate it with the family and school environments.

Methodologies of the studies

Studies were classified and analysed according to the research paradigms, qualitative or quantitative, typology, scope, temporality (Hernández et al., 2010; Montero & León, 2002), taking into account that health research articles were consulted, the researchers decided to include those from clinical research (Manterola & Otzen, 2014; Pardo & Cedeño, 1997).

15.3% of the 78 selected articles were identified as being in the quantitative paradigm, characterised by a high level of rigour and sequentiality. In these, hypotheses were established leading to the determination of variables that were corroborated through an experimental design. Statistical analyses were performed in these works and the variables were formally analysed, enabling findings that became bases for recommendations to family, academic and institutional stakeholders.

Qualitative studies, in which one of their most important characteristics is to develop questions and hypotheses before, during or after the collection and analysis of the data (Hernández et al., 2010), represented the highest percentage (66.7% of the selected articles). In qualitative research, the inquiry activity is generally a "circular" process in which there is not always the same sequence, due to its variation according to the singularities of each study; notwithstanding, in this approach reviews with high levels of rigour and systematicity were identified.

As to the mixed approach, that is combining qualitative and quantitative research paradigms, four studies were classified (5.1%), of which two were in a clinical context, and two were in descriptive, observational typologies that combined quantitative and qualitative strategies.

Population

Participants in the selected studies represented high levels of heterogeneity in terms of number of persons, age, gender, status, geographical location, and occupation. It should be mentioned that some studies did not review the sampled population, as they were typified as statistical, theoretical and methodological reviews of research reports. For example, this is the case in works such as Pérez et al. (2019), Casañas et al. (2020).

Based on the age ranges reported in the method sections of the selected articles, the age groups established here comprise children, adolescents, young people and adult categories. The majority of the studies reported homogeneity on age group, but there was also evidence of some studies showing heterogeneity, involving several categories in the population, such as children and adults, adolescents and adults, children and adolescents, children and youth, and all four (Table 2).

Table 2: Some population demographic data

		No. studies	Relative freq.
Age group (reported in 78 articles)	Children	30	38.5%
	Adolescents	21	26.9%
	Young people	11	14.1%
	Adults	16	20.5%
Occupation (reported in 58 articles)	Preschool students	3	3.8%
	Elementary school students	20	25.6%
	High school students	22	28.2%
	University students	6	7.7%
	Teachers	10	12.8%
Status (reported in 5 articles)	Parents	2	2.6%
	Education director	1	1.3%
	Adult women in different jobs	2	2.6%
Geographic location (reported in 78 articles)	National	1	1.3%
	International	77	98.7%

Source: Authors' elaboration (2023)

With regard to status (Table 2), identified categories were parents, educational authorities, and mothers in various professions. In terms of occupation, preschool students, elementary school students, high school students, university students, and teachers were included. It is worth mentioning the difficulty of establishing occupation in some studies where subjects were under one-year old, one-year old and three-years old. In terms of geographic location, only one study from Colombia was reviewed, the highest percentage being from Europe and the second highest from Latin America.

In the age group category (Table 2), children account for the highest relative frequency (38.5%). This seems to suggest the systematic application of what has been raised by the UN in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (UN, n.d. a) about the need to energise and offer effective training in socio-emotional competencies (UN, n.d. b).

Regarding occupation (Table 2), the categories elementary school students (25.6%) and high school students (28.2%) suggests that research is becoming well-focused on the development of emotional education that is oriented towards socio-emotional competencies in students at these levels of education. However, the low frequency (7.7%) in the university students category should raise alarm, in view of the complexity and multiplicity of socio-emotional problems faced by university students in their professional and comprehensive education. A similar alarm arises in relation to teachers (12.8%). The figures for geographic location generates high concerns for Colombia and and perhaps also Latin America generally about how a lack of research may hinder emotional education and the development of emotional competencies.

Risk groups

It seems possible that the category age group (Table 2) could give some insights into the topic of risk groups. If that is the case, the highest risk group could be children (38.46%), while the second highest could be adolescents (26.9%). It should be noted that research was conducted on children in a range of ages, including 1 year; 36 months; from 3 to 6 years; 7 years; 8 years; and 9 years. Note also that young people (14.1%) and adults (20.5%) are also accorded attention in relation to socio-emotional issues. Another aspect that is of high interest, though not detailed in this research, is mental health issues in all of the age groups. This is another reason behind an awakening of interest in the training and research to deal with the socio-emotional issues.

Limitations in the studies consulted

After reviewing the main limitations mentioned in the studies, the researchers compiled the categories outlined below. Some examples are cited to illustrate each of the identified areas of limitations.

1. *The sample*

Limitations in sampling were detected for some variables in terms of specific characteristics that were detrimental to the effectiveness of the evaluated program (Berger et al, 2014). For example, samples with deficiencies in their configuration limited the capacity to observe study patterns (Iruka et al, 2020); small size, loss of the sample, variety of the sample, usually not probabilistic due to the diversity of field work condition variables that necessarily determine the adoption of a particular type of sampling, could explain difficulties in the generaliseability of the results and conclusions (Holochwost et al, 2021; Ramos et al, 2020; Vásquez-Villegas, 2021; Martínez-Álvarez et al, 2020; Sidera et al, 2019; Carrasco et al, 2018; Rodríguez-Leonardo & Peña Peralta, 2020; Carbonero et al, 2017; Morilla Portela & Pichardo Martínez, 2018). It should be mentioned that, in addition to the variables mentioned in this category, some issues with samples arose with regard to the training of teachers and personnel in general (Urrea-Monclús et al., 2021; Jacobs and Struyf, 2013); and bias problems (Zhang et al, 2020). Lastly, with reference to sampling, articles with limitations noted under this category represented 41.0% of the total number of articles consulted.

2. *Instruments*

Limitations in this category included a lack of cyberbullying behavioural assessment instruments adapted to the formative level of primary education (Flores Buils et al, 2020); and the need to apply self-report instruments by teachers and family members that could continue to ensure reliability and validity (Morales Rodríguez, 2017). This category accounted for 7.0% of the total number of works analysed.

3. *Data*

Examples of difficulties in this category included data collection to measure classroom climate (Barrientos Fernández et al, 2019); obtaining data through a self-report

questionnaire, which despite offering great advantages, also presented disadvantages (Peñalba-Vélez, 2020). This type of limitation occurred in 7% of the studies.

4. Data analysis

Researchers need to be cautious when making causal inferences, in cases of a cross-sectional design of a study (Álvarez-Hernández & Delgado-DelaMora, 2015); the use of self-reports with the social desirability biases they imply, which suggests that when replicating the research in future studies evaluation instruments completed by parents/teachers and/or an observational methodology should be used (Sarrionandia & Garaigordobil, 2016). A frequency of 15% corresponded to this category.

5. Method design

In this category we found, among other things, works such as Hod et al. (2020) that raised the need to consider a longer research duration for qualitative ethnographic studies; Martínez-Álvarez et al. (2020) enunciated the difficulty of controlling extraneous variables that may be interfering in the effects found; Alva Castro et al. (2019) and González del Yerro et al. (2019) reported the lack of a control group and a longitudinal follow-up; Lucas-Molina et al (2020) mentioned as a limitation in their research the short duration of the intervention implemented; Villarreal et al. (2019) showed as a limitation of their research work the lack of a broader consideration of the diversity of variables underlying socio-emotionality. Twenty percent of the works referenced for this article were classified in this category.

6. Results

In the work of Rubiales et al (2018), among others, the most important limitation mentioned is that studies not published in scientific journals or graduate and postgraduate theses dealing with the subject were not included, and that it was not possible to perform statistical meta-analyses to compare the research because not all the studies published all their results. A relative value of 8% was identified for this type of limitation.

7. Lack of resources

This category, mentioned in 9% of the total number of studies, was referred to in Green et al. (2020) in connection with problems of restriction due to the effects of Covid-19 on state services for children's mental health activities; a special situation was reported by Ibáñez-Martínez and Romero-Pérez (2019) due to the reduced number of early childhood education centres throughout Andalucía during the 2018-2019 academic year, an educational innovation project that had been approved by the Ministry of Education (Junta de Andalucía) and focused on the development of socio-emotional competence in early childhood education.

Challenges and suggestions

Regarding this aspect in the studies reviewed, attention is drawn to the need to generate and qualify training processes in socio-emotional education for children (30% of the studies) and adolescents (21%). Similarly, as in previous cases, training proposals for young university students (6% of the articles) and for adults, including adult women heads

of households (13% of the papers) are highlighted. A smaller number of papers (10% of all) addressed and proposed to improve mental health aspects from a socio-emotionality perspective. Four percent suggested the need for continuity and replication of the studies with larger samples and in different contexts. Eight percent recommended the validation of intervention strategies, and finally, 4% examined and proposed the achievement of new theoretical approaches related to socio-emotionality.

Discussion

The main objective of this research exercise was to unveil in the national (Colombian) and international contexts the results of work on socioemotional competencies in the period from 2015 to 2021, especially in categories such as research education, educational programs, pedagogy, curriculum and evaluation, taking into account specifically the socio-emotional competence, socio-emotional skills and socio-emotional development variables.

First, it is highlighted that in looking for research reports carried out in Colombia, published in specialised journals with a high level of indexation in the categories and variables mentioned, a deficiency is evidenced, with two articles published in this work representing a 2.6% of the articles reviewed. This is a worrying issue leading to the suggestion that research on the subject of socio-emotionality should be carried out with greater assiduity within Colombian research groups .

Second, the discussion in this review is centred on a significant number of works in Latin American countries such as Mexico, Chile, Argentina and Costa Rica, quantified as 7.7 % of the total sample collected, which, in a certain way, represents a hopeful indicator of a beginning of the realisation and socialisation of these studies in Latin America.

Third, it is important to emphasise the high percentage of work being done on the subject of socio-emotionality in European countries, with Spain prominent, where associations of disciplines with various fields of research, such as psychology and pedagogy, have developed an interesting body of high-quality research publications. Special mention should be made of some studies from China and Pakistan, where an interesting and restless awakening to the multiplicity of underlying variables involved in socio-emotionality problems can be observed, in the context of their religious and political beliefs.

The limitations listed in the written works analysed, categorised in this work under "The sample"; "The instruments"; "Data"; "Data analysis", "Method design"; "Results"; and "Lack of resources", are a reliable sample of the level of complexity found in the thematic area objectives of this inquiry. Likewise, it is a warning about the need to improve the formal research logic processes in the socio-emotional field, regardless of the research approach undertaken.

Finally, it is of outmost importance to underscore that the age group made up of children and adolescents stands out as the one to which the highest percentage of research

processes have been devoted, specifically in the area of emotional education. It is worth noting likewise, although not to the same extent as the cases above, the significant interest seen in the percentage of research reports published about the socio-emotional theme in working with young people and adults.

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