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Development of social intelligence in older preschool children

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Abstract. The relevance of the study layed in the fact that the targeted development of social intelligence in preschool children was a key preventive measure that ensured their readiness for school, future academic success, and overall well-being. The purpose of this study was to theoretically substantiate the concept of social intelligence and to examine the specific features of its development in preschool children. To achieve this objective, a comprehensive approach was employed, incorporating theoretical analysis, synthesis, systematisation, and comparative analysis of both classical and contemporary scholarly works in psychology, pedagogy, and related disciplines. The main findings indicate that social intelligence is a multidimensional construct encompassing cognitive, emotional, and communicative-organisational components, with emotional intelligence playing a pivotal role. The study traces the evolution of the concept of "social intelligence" and identifies its key components, such as empathy, respect, self-efficacy, social awareness, and adaptability. A direct correlation was established between the level of development of these skills during the preschool years and children's readiness for formal schooling, their subsequent academic success, and overall well-being in adulthood. Furthermore, it was clarified that active play activities – particularly role-play and communicative games – along with targeted drama-based interventions and emotional intelligence development programmes, are most effective in fostering socio-emotional skills, with adult involvement being of critical importance. Accordingly, it has been demonstrated that the intentional development of social intelligence in preschool children serves as a preventive measure to ensure not only individual well-being but also broader societal welfare. The practical significance of the findings lies in their applicability by educators, early childhood teachers, and practising psychologists in designing innovative methodologies for diagnosing, developing, and enhancing social intelligence among children in preschool educational settings

Keywords: psychological development; developmental stages; intellectual development; social environment; cognitive abilities

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INTRODUCTION

In the context of societal transformations in Ukraine, the formation of intellectual potential and the development of personal intelligence acquire paramount importance, as they are essential for social adaptation, well-being, quality of interpersonal relationships, and overall life success. The preschool period constitutes a critical stage in the development of the intellectual sphere, as it is during this time that the foundations of effective interaction with the social environment are laid. Older preschool children actively

integrate into social groups, gain new communicative experiences, and transition to more complex forms of thinking, accompanied by psychological and physiological changes. Consequently, exploring the development of social intelligence in older preschoolers is highly relevant, as timely formation of these skills facilitates successful social communication and adaptation in later life.

The socialisation of older preschool children currently occurs under conditions of societal change and digitalisation.



These factors create new opportunities for child development while simultaneously posing specific challenges to the formation of social intelligence. In this regard, scholarly research by E. Kirilova (2020), O. Babiak (2020), and O. Mateyuk & Yu. Sukhodolia (2021) has emphasised the interconnection between emotional and social dimensions of intellectual development in older preschool children. Specifically, E. Kirilova analysed the process of emotional intelligence development in pre-schoolers, highlighting the significance of peer interaction and teacher communication styles. The researcher underscored that the ability to recognise one's own emotions and those of others substantially influences the success of social adaptation. O. Babiak focused her study on emotional intelligence as a mechanism of psychological self-regulation in communication. Her findings indicated that pre-schoolers with a high level of emotional competence exhibit stronger empathy and greater readiness for cooperation. In parallel, O. Mateyuk & Yu. Sukhodolia conceptualised social intelligence as a multidimensional phenomenon closely linked to cognitive and emotional domains. These scholars pointed out that situational games and role-playing interactions play a pivotal role in acquiring social norms and behavioural models during the older preschool years.

N. Kogutiak & N. Borovska (2022) addressed pedagogical diagnostics of social intelligence. Their studies proposed criteria and methodologies for assessing children's social skills, arguing for the importance of timely diagnostics in targeted development of communicative abilities. In research, D. Ghosh (2024) observed that preschool education as a whole influence the comprehensive development of children aged 3 to 6 years, focusing on cognitive growth, emotional intelligence, and social behaviour. D. Ghosh's findings demonstrated the effectiveness of methods such as play therapy, art therapy, and interactive approaches in fostering social competence. Similarly, X. Fayzullayeva (2024) asserted that enhancing social skills in preschoolers through learning development strategies – emphasising interactive play, guided discussions, and collaborative projects – is crucial for promoting social intelligence and supporting cognitive, emotional, and behavioural growth. A comparable position was reflected in the study by L.C. Luen *et al.* (2024), which suggested that play-based experiences (including imaginative, constructive, and social play) and appropriate toys contribute to the development of multiple intelligences in preschool children by encouraging cognitive, emotional, and social growth. The reviewed research underscores that successful socialisation of pre-schoolers amid societal change and digitalisation is closely linked to the formation of emotional and social intelligence.

Given that the goal of early childhood education is to promote social development and social adequacy in children, the mastery of these skills affects their individual and social well-being. A descriptive-correlational study by N. Moghaddamfar *et al.* (2020) demonstrated that effective intelligence and social adequacy significantly facilitate the social development of preschool children and can be integrated into basic skills within formal education as

well as parental strategies for preventing and resolving interpersonal issues. Findings from J. Leon (2023) indicated that social-emotional competence in pre-schoolers is critical for navigating social norms and achieving emotional regulation. Accordingly, social workers play a vital role in supporting this development, addressing issues that affect children's social intelligence and overall academic achievement. According to J.M. Froiland & M.L. Davison (2020), a positive emotional climate in interactions with adults fosters children's confidence in their social abilities. Thus, in line with the findings, social-emotional competence is essential for preschool children to navigate social norms and regulate emotions effectively.

Despite the substantial body of research confirming the importance of social intelligence and its components during the preschool years, there remains a noticeable gap in examining emotional intelligence in the context of pre-schoolers' socialisation. Therefore, the aim of this study was to substantiate the concept of social intelligence and investigate the specific characteristics of its development in preschool children. To achieve this objective, the following tasks were formulated: to analyse approaches to studying social intelligence within psychology; to examine the key components and factors influencing the formation of emotional intelligence; and to justify effective methods for developing social intelligence in older pre-schoolers.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

In conducting this study, a range of key methods were employed to enable an in-depth analysis and systematisation of information concerning the development of social intelligence in preschool children. Theoretical literature analysis served as the foundational method, encompassing the review and synthesis of both classical works – H.A. Marlowe (1986), J.P. Guilford (1967), G.W. Allport (1937) – and contemporary studies – Y. Ma *et al.* (2024), C. Zehir & D. Karaca (2021), A. Sop (2024) – from psychology, pedagogy, and related domains. This method facilitated the identification of the fundamental concepts of social intelligence, its historical evolution, its key components, and its interrelationship with emotional intelligence. To ensure comprehensiveness and validity, the selection of scholarly works was based on relevance to the research topic, scientific significance, and credibility of sources; chronological coverage (including both foundational works, dating from the early 20th century, and recent research up to 2025 reflecting current approaches and trends in studying and fostering social intelligence in preschool children); and diversity of scientific schools and perspectives.

The method of synthesis and systematisation was employed to integrate disparate data from various sources into a coherent logical framework. Specifically, diverse definitions of social intelligence were systematised, along with its core components (empathy, respect, self-efficacy, social awareness, social adaptability) and psychological dimensions (cognitive, emotional, communicative-organisational). Additionally, comparative analysis was applied to evaluate the

effectiveness of different types of interventions (drama-based interventions, emotional intelligence development programmes, role-playing games), confirming their relevance in cultivating socio-emotional skills in pre-schoolers. The interpretation of findings was grounded in an interdisciplinary analysis of data from developmental psychology, pedagogy, and social psychology. Emphasis was placed on identifying the interconnections between theoretical concepts of social and emotional intelligence and their practical application in early childhood. The results were interpreted to reveal their impact on the holistic development of the child, particularly academic achievement, psychological well-being, and social adaptation. Conclusions regarding the effectiveness of role-playing and other interactive methodologies were considered as evidence supporting the leading role of play in the development of socio-emotional competencies. This analysis helped to identify and justify the most effective methods for developing social intelligence in preschool children. In particular, the consolidated information on key components of social and emotional intelligence, as well as effective interventions, provided a robust theoretical foundation for developing practical recommendations and programmes.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Social intelligence is not merely a collection of isolated abilities, but rather a complex of psychosocial skills enabling individuals to interact effectively with the world. It encompasses the capacity for effective self-expression, comprehension of complex social contexts, and the demonstration of prudent behaviour across various interactions. These abilities constitute cornerstones for personal well-being, professional success, and lifelong adaptability. Research conducted by M. Wirahandayani *et al.* (2023) and R.C. Ghiță & C.C. Sicrea (2024) has confirmed that the early years of childhood represent a true “golden age” for development. During this period, children are most receptive to diverse stimuli shaping their potential, including essential socio-emotional growth. Socio-emotional skills acquired at an early age are not merely desirable but act as critical drivers of school readiness. Indeed, children who can cooperate, comprehend others’ emotions, and resolve conflicts adapt more easily to new environments, interact more effectively with teachers and peers, and thereby directly enhance their academic achievement. Furthermore, these skills constitute the foundation for building strong relationships, achieving career success, developing psychological resilience, and attaining overall life satisfaction (Chen *et al.*, 2024). If social intelligence is insufficiently developed in the preschool years, this may trigger cascading adverse consequences for the child’s entire future life. Such deficiencies may manifest at multiple levels: academic, mental health, and social integration.

At the academic level, children with low social intelligence may struggle with maintaining attention in group settings, adhering to classroom behaviour rules, and collaborating with peers during joint tasks. This may lead to

learning delays and diminished motivation. Inability to interact effectively with others and to understand both their own and others’ emotions may provoke feelings of loneliness, anxiety, and low self-esteem. Such children are more frequently exposed to bullying or, conversely, may themselves display aggressive behaviours due to the inability to adequately express their feelings. Difficulties in communication and in interpreting social cues may result in peer isolation, the formation of a limited social circle, or even the absence of friendships. This, in turn, complicates subsequent social integration, whether within a school community, a higher education environment, or the workplace. Thus, investing in the understanding and purposeful development of social intelligence in preschool-aged children is not merely “useful” or “desirable”; it is a preventive measure ensuring not only individual but also broader societal well-being. By fostering in children, the capacity to understand themselves and others, communicate effectively, and adapt to social demands, educators and parents lay the foundation for a future generation capable of empathy, cooperation, and constructive conflict resolution – thereby contributing to the creation of a more harmonious and productive society. Social intelligence remains a relatively recent construct within scientific research, originating from an in-depth analysis of human behaviour in social contexts and within the scope of social psychology. Its roots trace back to the first half of the twentieth century, when the concept emerged in response to growing interest in interpersonal interaction. According to C. Zehir & D. Karaca (2021), the term was first employed in the context of American psychology and philosophy. Although scholarly interest in the phenomenon of social intelligence dates to the 1920s, its recognition and popularity as a distinct construct have increased significantly only over time.

Historically, E.L. Thorndike (1920) defined social intelligence as “the ability to understand men and women, boys and girls – to act wisely in human relations”. This concept formed part of broader classification of intelligence into three primary categories: abstract intelligence (the ability to manage ideas and symbols); mechanical intelligence (the ability to work with objects and mechanisms); and social intelligence (the ability to interact effectively with other people). E.L. Thorndike considered social intelligence a separate yet equally important form of intelligence that plays a crucial role in an individual’s successful adaptation to society. This definition emphasised the practical dimension of social interaction, highlighting the importance of understanding others’ motives and emotions as well as the ability to influence them to achieve desired outcomes. This idea became a starting point for subsequent research in social and personality psychology. N.A. Marlowe (1986) broadened this definition by incorporating the individual’s ability to understand their own feelings, thoughts, and behaviour, as well as those of others, and to respond accordingly, including through problem-solving skills in interpersonal relationships. Later, J.P. Guilford (1967) developed a multidimensional model of the structure of intelligence, known as the “Guilford’s cube”.

In this model, comprising 120 (later 150) distinct intellectual abilities, social intelligence was identified as one of the five major groups of abilities related to behavioural content. According to J.P. Guilford, social intelligence involves cognition of behavioural information, expressed through the understanding of non-verbal cues (facial expressions, gestures, postures, intonation – conveying significant information about emotional states and intentions); verbal communication (the ability to interpret spoken language, considering context, implicit meanings, and speaker intentions); social situations (the ability to rapidly and accurately assess social contexts, role positions, norms, and expectations); and behaviour prediction (the ability to anticipate others' future actions based on existing information about their emotions, motives, and social situation). For preschool children, the development of the ability to recognise others' emotions and moods is particularly relevant, as it underpins the formation of empathy and appropriate social responses. J.P. Guilford regarded these abilities as integral components of overall intelligence, measurable and developable. G.W. Allport (1937) conceptualised social intelligence as a "special social gift" or "social sensitivity", enabling individuals to adapt effectively to their social environment. It was stressed that it is not merely a set of skills but rather an integrative personality trait allowing comprehension of social contexts, others' motives, and appropriate responses. Consequently, individuals with high social intelligence navigate social norms more effectively, establish relationships more

rapidly, and resolve conflicts more successfully, which collectively fosters their social well-being and life satisfaction.

Building on E.L. Thorndike's research, R.J. Sternberg (1985) expanded the traditional conception of intelligence beyond academic abilities, distinguishing three main components: analytical (componential) intelligence – traditional academic intelligence encompassing analysis, evaluation, comparison, and contrast; creative (experiential) intelligence – the ability to handle novel situations, employ insight, and generate new ideas; and practical (contextual) intelligence – the capacity to adapt to, shape, or select appropriate real-world environments. Within practical intelligence, R.J. Sternberg addressed what many define as social intelligence, describing it as "situational" intelligence manifested in social adaptation and the ability to solve everyday problems in interpersonal interactions. It was emphasised that practical intelligence, or social intelligence in this context, often does not correlate with traditional measures of intelligence quotient (IQ) but is critical for success in real life, particularly in social and professional domains.

Contemporary scholars conceptualise social intelligence as a "set of psychosocial skills", including effective self-expression, comprehension of social contexts, and wise behaviour in social interactions – a perspective shared by Y. Ma *et al.* (2024), C. Zehir & D. Karaca (2021), and M. Frankovsky & Z. Birknerová (2014). Table 1 presents the key components of social intelligence identified through the analysis of the aforementioned studies.

Table 1. Constituents of the social component in preschool-aged children

Component	Characteristic
Empathy	The capacity to understand and share the feelings of another person. The individual determines how well a person relates to the thoughts and emotions of others, recognises moods, and adjusts their reactions accordingly. Both affective empathy (responding to emotions) and cognitive empathy (understanding emotional states and perspectives) enhance relationships with peers
Respect	Adapting one's communication style to the needs of others, seeking compromises, and demonstrating a positive attitude towards the intrinsic worth of others
Behaviour/self-expression	How individuals conduct themselves in social situations, making others feel at ease or uncomfortable, as well as the ability to modify behaviour while retaining core traits
Self-efficacy	The individual feels confident in their own social abilities, leading to reduced stress or anxiety during interaction
Social awareness	The individual recognises and responds to emotional cues and an understanding of group psychology
Social capacity	The individual is capable of establishing communication within groups, organisations, or communities

Source: compiled by the author based on Y. Ma *et al.* (2024)

The analysis of the components of preschool children's social intelligence presented in Table 1 reveals the multi-dimensional nature of this construct: emotional aspects (empathy, respect, social awareness) reflecting the ability to understand and respond to others' feelings; behavioural and cognitive components (behaviour/self-expression, self-efficacy, social competence). Thus, social intelligence in early childhood extends beyond emotional understanding to encompass adaptive behaviour, confidence in social interactions, and effective communication within group settings – underscoring its pivotal role in shaping harmonious interpersonal relationships and successful social

adaptation. Emotional intelligence constitutes a core component in the development of social intelligence, defined as the ability to understand one's own and others' emotions, express them appropriately, and regulate them, as well as comprehend the feelings and experiences of others. M. Brackett & C. Cipriano (2020) conceptualised emotional intelligence as the ability to recognise, monitor, and control one's own emotions and to influence others' emotions, emphasising its critical role in interpersonal relationships and social adaptation. D.N. Singh *et al.* (2021) proposed a four-factor model, framing emotional intelligence not only as the ability to identify and regulate emotions but also as

the competence to perceive, analyse, and utilise emotions to enhance thinking and decision-making. E. Savina *et al.* (2025) and H. Antonopoulou (2024) provided detailed accounts of the key factors contributing to the development of emotional intelligence, identifying self-awareness (awareness of one's own emotions) as its foundational basis in children. Moreover, H. Antonopoulou highlighted the regulatory, adaptive, and stress-protective functions as structural components of emotional intelligence competence, underscoring its applied significance in ensuring emotional comfort, effective adaptation to change, and successful stress management. Although emotional intelligence remains a relatively new and underexplored phenomenon, its development requires a harmonious integration of cognition, emotion, and volitional effort (Tjimuku *et al.*, 2025).

The study by X. Zeng *et al.* (2024) focused on the role of empathy as a key element in the development of emotional intelligence, particularly in early childhood. Findings demonstrated that the ability to understand and share others' feelings forms the basis for the development of social and emotional skills, interpersonal relationships, and moral awareness. In the context of child development, C. Audrin & V. Audrin (2023) emphasised the rapid progress of the emotional sphere during the preschool years. Their research revealed that a child's emotional state significantly influences cognitive processes, and it is at this stage that the formation of basic reflective skills begins. Furthermore, the researchers noted that despite the emerging capacity

for emotional decentration (considering others' feelings), older pre-schoolers remain primarily driven by self-centred desires, indicating the gradual and non-linear nature of emotional intelligence development, where self-orientation tends to prevail over altruistic motives in early stages. The results of the reviewed studies align with the present research findings, confirming that emotional intelligence is crucial for effective social interaction. Although emotional intelligence remains an area of active inquiry, its core components – self-awareness, self-regulation, empathy, and social skills – are essential for social adaptation, psychological well-being, and successful engagement in society. Within the phenomenological approach, intelligence has been conceptualised through the lens of human consciousness and knowledge, assuming that the degree of informational organisation reflects intellectual competence and professional maturity. Intelligence is also understood as a dynamic process of interaction between an individual and their environment, with cognitive flexibility – developed through experience and mediated learning – constituting one of its developmental criteria (Yurchenko, 2023). Contemporary psychological approaches (observational, self-report, neurobiological) aimed at examining the structure of social intelligence view it as a complex, multi-layered, and multidimensional construct, reflected in the diversity of theoretical frameworks for its analysis and substantiation. The core features and key components of these approaches are presented in structured form in Table 2.

Table 2. Psychological traits of social intelligence

Traits of social intelligence	Characteristic
1. Cognitive Component. 2. Emotional Component. 3. Communicative-Organisational Component.	Social knowledge, collective memory, cognitive thinking, predictive ability, perceptual processes, sensitivity, self-regulation potential, adaptability in a social context, as well as social interaction skills
1. Potential Abilities. 2. Actual Abilities. 3. Resultative Level.	Capacity for reflective analysis, empathy, communicative needs, individual aspects of temperament, emotional constituent, creative potential of the individual, diverse role states, behavioural aspects, social creativity, level of self-esteem, and communicative-social competence
1. Social Perception. 2. Emotional Experiences and Feelings. 3. Social Intuition.	Social memory, predictive skills, flexibility in decision-making, cognitive thinking, and reflective capacity

Source: compiled by the author based on Y. Ma *et al.* (2024)

Analysis of Table 2, which presents the psychological characteristics of social intelligence, indicates its multi-level structure integrating cognitive, emotional, and communicative-organisational dimensions. All three represented groups of traits complement one another, conceptualising social intelligence as a complex system. This system encompasses social knowledge, the capacity for prediction and reflection (cognitive dimension), empathy, sensitivity, and the emotional component (emotional dimension), as well as communicative needs, social interaction skills, and flexibility in decision-making (communicative-organisational dimension). Therefore, social intelligence constitutes a dynamic synthesis of internal psychological processes and their external manifestations, aimed at effective interaction

with the social environment. Research in preschool psychology highlights a range of key features and patterns that are fundamental to understanding child development. J. Chu & L.E. Schulz (2023) noted that preschool psychology is characterised by a marked emotional colouring of cognitive processes (sensation, perception, thinking, imagination) and a high degree of emotional saturation across various activities, particularly in play and communication. Significant changes include the development of affects, which manifests in the ability to empathise and feel compassion, prompting the child towards prosocial behaviour. Emotional experiences become more verbalised, although children's utterances remain concise. At this stage, emotional behaviour appears natural and feelings are expressed with sincerity, yet

the child gradually acquires skills for controlling emotional expression. In older preschool years, the socialisation of intelligence reaches a new level, as the child's social orientation shifts from objects to other people. Empathy develops, and although not yet fully stabilised, it enables the child to demonstrate empathy and compassion, contributing to the formation of interpersonal emotional intelligence.

E.J. Short *et al.* (2020) emphasised the importance of the preschool stage as foundational for subsequent intellectual, emotional, and psychological growth. During this period, lasting approximately from 3 to 6-7 years, the child demonstrates high receptivity to environmental influences, which substantially shape worldview and behavioural patterns. Active self-exploration and discovery of the world occur through play, communication, and novel experiences. Complex conditioned reflexes are formed, with the word (the second signal system) playing a pivotal role, and conditional inhibition develops, although irradiation of excitation still characterises behavioural responses. A. Sop (2024) underscored the preschool period as one of the most sensitive stages for establishing fundamental personality characteristics. During this time, favourable conditions are created for the development of motivation for learning and the formation of stable cognitive needs. Particular emphasis is placed on the development of productive strategies and specialised skills necessary for educational activity, such as independent knowledge acquisition and effective learning in structured environments. Individual characteristics and innate talents are revealed and supported. Mechanisms of self-control, self-organisation, and self-regulation improve, facilitating awareness of one's actions and emotions. An adequate self-concept is formed, which is

crucial for psychological well-being and the development of critical thinking. Furthermore, the child assimilates social norms, moral values, and behavioural rules, while developing communicative competence through peer interaction.

C. Guedes *et al.* (2024) highlighted the continuity of intellectual activity in preschool children, which persists across all stages of activity and even after its completion. The findings of C. Guedes *et al.* revealed that pre-schoolers' cognitive processes are emotionally coloured and closely intertwined with the emotional saturation of activity. This underscores that intellectual activity is not purely rational but inseparably linked to the emotional sphere, aligning with the notions of "continuity" and "progressiveness" of development. Accordingly, the results of C. Guedes *et al.* correlate with the current study's findings that the preschool period constitutes a phase of intensive, holistic, and continuous intellectual development, intrinsically connected with emotional processes and social interaction. The intellectual development of personality is inextricably linked to the formation of individual character traits, and these two processes form a complex interplay deeply influencing the overall mental structure of the individual. The process of intellectual development is spontaneous by nature, yet it simultaneously adheres to clearly defined laws of psychological evolution (Rabindran & Madanagopal, 2020). These laws manifest through the sequential formation of operational structures of thinking, which provide the individual with the capacity for complex analytical and creative processes. The developmental process unfolds through several key stages, each characterised by specific changes and achievements. The principal aspects of this development are summarised in Table 3.

Table 3. Key features of intellectual development

Type of intelligence	Age
Sensorimotor	from 8-10 months – 1.5 years
Symbolic	from 1.5-2 – 4 years
Intuitive	from 4 – 7-8 years
Concrete-operational	from 7-8 – 11-12 years
Reflective intelligence	from 11-12 – 14-15 years

Source: compiled by the author based on Rabindran & D. Madanagopal (2020)

According to Table 3, the stages of intellectual development are inseparably linked to the establishment of individual character traits. This periodisation underscores that each subsequent stage builds upon the achievements of the previous one, characterised by the formation of increasingly complex operational structures of thinking, enabling the transition from simple interaction with objects to abstract thought and self-analysis. The proper development of social intelligence is crucial in shaping the growth of preschool children. Researcher S.V. Kharchenko (2017) observed that optimal conditions for the development of social intelligence in pre-schoolers are provided through extra-situational, person-oriented communication with adults, active play, and the implementation of specialised programmes in preschool settings. The researcher placed particular emphasis on engaging children in organised

play and creative activities, as well as artistic endeavours. Narrative role-playing, active, communicative, dramatic, didactic, creative, and linguistic games are especially important and recommended for integration into educational programmes for older pre-schoolers. Play constitutes an essential aspect of child development, fostering cognitive, emotional, physical, and social growth. Symbolic play, characterised by "pretence" or "imaginary" actions, represents cognitive advancement, whereby children use objects to signify others (Wirahandayani *et al.*, 2023). Role-play methodologies have proven highly effective in promoting socio-emotional development in pre-schoolers, leading to increased prosocial behaviour and improved emotional regulation (Frankovsky & Birknerová, 2014). Active participation in role-play stimulates children to express and regulate emotions, fostering communication, interaction,

creativity, and self-confidence. Role-play, in particular, stands out as an active means of teaching socio-emotional competencies. However, E.J. Short *et al.* (2020) noted an important nuance: language, though generally beneficial, may distort play assessment by either masking deficits (e.g., Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder) or unfairly penalising children (e.g., Developmental Language Disorder). This implies that educators and researchers must exercise exceptional sensitivity to the interplay between language and play, especially in diverse populations, to accurately assess and support social intelligence.

Self-regulation, defined as the capacity to manage emotions, behaviour, and cognition in accordance with social demands, constitutes a critical developmental achievement. It is essential for social and academic learning and undergoes significant acceleration during the preschool years (Sop, 2024). Self-regulation fully mediates the association between preschool children's anxiety and life skills, implying that anxiety indirectly exerts a negative effect on life skills by weakening self-regulation. Emotional self-regulation in children positively correlates with academic attainment. High-quality teacher-child relationships (TCRs) and teachers' socio-emotional competence foster emotional self-regulation (Nilfyr & Ewe, 2025). Mediation analysis conducted by A. Sop established self-regulation not merely as a skill but as a mediating mechanism through which anxiety impacts broader life skills. Coupled with its strong correlation with academic achievement and its role in emotional management, self-regulation emerges as a central, foundational competence. This indicates that interventions aimed at enhancing self-regulation in preschool children will yield wide-ranging positive outcomes for their social, emotional, and academic development, rendering it a high-priority objective in early childhood education. Executive functions (attention shifting, working memory, inhibitory control) at age 3 are positively associated with attentional persistence at age 6. Executive functions

significantly influence the development of literacy and numeracy skills as well as learning behaviours (Slot *et al.*, 2017).

The development of a child's social intelligence occurs within a complex "social ecosystem". Family engagement positively affects children's socio-emotional development, with school engagement serving as a complete mediator. Empathy (both affective and cognitive) in preschool children significantly predicts peer relationships (degree and closeness of centrality) one year later. This influence is unidirectional in pre-schoolers: empathy promotes peer relationships rather than vice versa. Cognitive empathy demonstrates a stronger association with peer relationships than affective empathy (Zeng *et al.*, 2024). The development of social intelligence in older pre-schoolers can also be effectively supported through targeted interventions and programmes employing interactive and experiential approaches. The "Dramacionante" programme, a drama-oriented intervention for early childhood education (ages 4-5), aims to foster learning and create an educational environment that maximises opportunities for dynamic engagement with emotions, thereby enhancing social and expressive skills. According to M.A. Arias *et al.* (2025), the programme successfully reduced negative behaviours associated with social skills (externalising and internalising problems) and improved socio-emotional competences, particularly social independence. Research by J. Ounprasertsuk & W. Suksatan (2021) reported that the Emotional Intelligence Promotion Programme (EIPP) for pre-schoolers proved effective in significantly enhancing emotional intelligence. EIPP encompasses five key activities: recreational events, situational analysis, emotional regulation training and practice, creative problem-solving, and self-expression. These programmes underscore the critical role of early childhood in learning and consolidating emotional intelligence, fostering children's development into "quality adults". Table 4 presents a synthesis of intervention types for fostering socio-emotional skills in preschool children.

Table 4. Effective interventions for developing social-emotional skills in preschool-aged children

Type of Intervention	Target skills	Key activities/components	Age group	Effectiveness
Drama-oriented interventions	Emotional intelligence, social skills, social independence, reduction of negative behaviour	Shared reading of children's picture books, facial expression mimicry, imitation, puppets, music-and-movement, and drawing activities	4-5 years (adaptable for 3-6 years)	Reduction of negative behaviour (externalising/internalising problems); improvement of social-emotional skills, notably social independence; sustained positive effects
Emotional intelligence development programmes	Emotional intelligence, emotional regulation, creative problem-solving, self-esteem	Recreational activities, situational analysis, teaching and practising emotional regulation, creative problem-solving, demonstration of self-esteem	Preschool children (3-6 years)	Significant improvement in the level of emotional intelligence post-programme
Role-play game methods	Prosocial behaviour, emotional regulation, communication, interaction, creativity, self-confidence	Direct participation in characterising roles (chef, doctor, parents), use of symbolic props	Preschool children (3-6 years)	Increase in prosocial behaviour, improvement in emotional regulation, development of control over emotional reactions

Source: compiled by the authors based on M. Frankovsky & Z. Birknerová (2014), E.J. Short *et al.* (2020), J. Ounprasertsuk & W. Suksatan (2021), M. Wirahandayani *et al.* (2023), A. Sop (2024)

According to the synthesis in Table 4, drama-based interventions (Dramacionante), emotional intelligence development programmes (Emotional Intelligence Promotion Programme), and role-play methodologies substantially enhance levels of emotional intelligence, emotional regulation, creative problem-solving, and self-esteem in preschool children through recreational activities and practical exercises. Specifically, they promote prosocial behaviour, communication, and self-confidence, enabling pre-schoolers to enact various social roles directly. These approaches demonstrate that intentional, interactive, and play-based methods constitute pivotal strategies for the harmonious socio-emotional development of preschool children. The impact of role-playing methods on the socio-emotional development of preschool children is substantial, as evidenced by various studies. In particular, in their research, L.E. Mureşan & E.S. Turda (2022) concluded that role-play activities provide children with opportunities to engage in social interactions, express emotions, and develop empathy, which are crucial for their overall emotional and social growth. The findings of research demonstrated that children who participate in role-playing games exhibit better emotional regulation and an enhanced understanding of social cues, both of which are essential for building relationships. Similar conclusions were observed in the study by Irmayanti *et al.* (2025). The quantitative results of research revealed that children's socio-emotional skills improved from a very low to a moderate level following participation in role-play activities. According to the study by E. Dowswell & D. Chessor (2014), social intelligence in older preschool children can be developed through targeted social education programmes, such as the 4S programme, which aims to enhance social competence by teaching essential social skills necessary for effective social interaction. In the study by L.S. Daulay & Khadijah (2023), it was noted that the involvement of educators and parents is critical in facilitating role-play experiences, as they provide children with the necessary guidance and support to explore their emotions and social interactions. Therefore, the findings of L.E. Mureşan & E.S. Turda, Irmayanti *et al.*, and E. Dowswell & D. Chessor correlate with the results of the current study regarding the significance of role-playing and adult engagement in fostering the socio-emotional development of preschool children.

Based on the analysis of the studies presented, it can be concluded that social intelligence is an integral and multi-component element of the harmonious development of preschool children, which is essential for their future success. Early childhood is considered a "golden period" for its formation, as children at this stage are highly receptive to external influences shaping their socio-emotional skills. Insufficient development of these skills in the preschool years may lead to significant challenges in academic achievement, mental health, and social integration, manifesting in difficulties with concentration, anxiety, low self-esteem, and social isolation. Emotional intelligence, as a key component of social intelligence, encompasses the

ability to understand and regulate one's own and others' emotions, and its development requires a balanced integration of cognition, emotions, and volitional efforts. Effective methods for developing social intelligence include drama-based interventions, emotional intelligence development programmes, and role-play activities, which contribute to improved emotional regulation, prosocial behaviour, and social independence. In this process, the involvement of adults (educators and parents) plays a crucial role in providing the necessary support and guidance, as intellectual development, while spontaneous, follows specific psychological principles and requires purposeful formation. Thus, investing in the development of social and emotional intelligence in preschool children constitutes a fundamental preventive measure that lays the foundation for creating an empathetic, adaptive, and socially competent future generation.

CONCLUSIONS

The current study identified social intelligence as a multi-component construct encompassing not only cognitive aspects of understanding social situations but also emotional sensitivity, self-regulation, and communicative competence. The paper traced the historical development of conceptualisations of social intelligence, from early definitions to multidimensional models in contemporary research, and established that the concept of "social intelligence" remains under active investigation. The study also identified the key components of social intelligence, including empathy, respect, self-efficacy, social awareness, and social competence. A key finding was the confirmation that emotional intelligence is an essential component of social intelligence, particularly during the preschool period. It was determined that emotional intelligence enables children to recognise and manage their own emotions as well as understand and empathise with the emotions of others, forming the basis for empathy and prosocial behaviour. Importantly, the study established a direct link between the development of these skills in early childhood and children's school readiness, subsequent academic achievement, and overall well-being in adult life.

Based on the theoretical analysis, the study systematised various definitions of social intelligence, identifying its structural components and psychological dimensions (cognitive, emotional, and communicative-organisational), thereby creating a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon. Specifically, the cognitive aspect of social intelligence encompasses social knowledge, the ability to anticipate others' behaviour, and reflection on one's own and others' actions, enabling preschool children to interpret complex social contexts and evaluate situations. The emotional dimension includes empathy, sensitivity to others' emotions, and the overall emotional component expressed in the ability to understand, express, and regulate one's emotions, as well as to recognise others' feelings. Emotional intelligence is a key element in shaping social intelligence, particularly in early childhood. The communicative-organisational

dimension represents communication needs, social interaction skills, and flexibility in decision-making within social contexts. These skills allow the child to express themselves effectively, collaborate, resolve conflicts, and adapt to diverse social demands. The study also clarified that active play activities, especially socio-dramatic and communicative play, as well as targeted drama-based interventions (e.g., “Dramacionante”) and EIPP, are effective in fostering socio-emotional competencies.

The research emphasised the critical role of adults (educators and parents) in this process, underlining the need for extra-situational interpersonal communication and the creation of a supportive environment. Thus, the study not only provided a theoretical rationale for the importance of social intelligence but also offered specific practical recommendations for its development. A limitation of this research is that it is based on a theoretical analysis and synthesis of existing scholarly data and does not include original empirical research involving preschool children. Furthermore, the dynamic nature of developmental

psychology means that new data and approaches continually emerge, necessitating regular updates. Future research on this topic should include empirical validation of the proposed programmes and techniques in the context of Ukrainian preschool institutions. Another promising direction is an in-depth examination of the influence of cultural and socio-economic factors on the development of social intelligence, as well as the development of standardised tools for its assessment and diagnosis in preschool children. This would enable the creation of more tailored and effective interventions.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

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Становлення соціального інтелекту дітей старшого дошкільного віку

Анотація. Актуальність дослідження полягала в тому, що цілеспрямований розвиток соціального інтелекту у дітей дошкільного віку був ключовим превентивним заходом, який забезпечував їхню готовність до школи, подальшу академічну успішність та загальний добробут. Метою роботи було теоретично обґрунтувати поняття соціального інтелекту та вивчити особливості його розвитку у дітей дошкільного віку. Для досягнення поставленої мети було використано комплексний підхід, що включав теоретичний аналіз, синтез, систематизацію та порівняльно-зіставний аналіз класичних та сучасних наукових праць з психології, педагогіки та суміжних галузей. Основні результати роботи показали, що соціальний інтелект є багатокомпонентним конструктом, що охоплює когнітивні, емоційні та комунікативно-організаційні аспекти, де емоційний інтелект відіграє ключову роль. У дослідженні простежено еволюцію поняття «соціальний інтелект» та ідентифіковано його ключові складники, такі як емпатія, повага, самоефективність, соціальна обізнаність та здатність до адаптації. Було встановлено прямий зв'язок між рівнем розвитку цих навичок у дошкільному віці та готовністю дітей до школи, їхньою подальшою академічною успішністю та загальним добробутом у дорослому житті. Також було конкретизовано, що активна ігрова діяльність, особливо сюжетно-рольові та комунікативні ігри, а також цілеспрямовані драма-орієнтовані інтервенції та програми сприяння емоційному інтелекту, є найбільш ефективними у формуванні соціально-емоційних навичок, при цьому ключове значення має залученість дорослих. Відповідно, було доведено, що цілеспрямований розвиток соціального інтелекту у дітей дошкільного віку є превентивним заходом для забезпечення не тільки індивідуального, а й ширшого суспільного благополуччя. Практична значущість отриманих результатів дослідження полягає у можливості їхнього застосування педагогами, вихователями та практичними психологами з метою розробки інноваційних методик, спрямованих на діагностику, розвиток та вдосконалення соціального інтелекту дітей у дошкільних навчальних закладах.

Ключові слова: психологічний розвиток; віковий розвиток; інтелектуальний розвиток; соціум; розумові здібності