

From The Prescribed Curriculum to the Lived Curriculum: Teachers' Meanings and Practices for the Development of Life Skills in Early Childhood

Fulvia Duré de Irala^{1*}

¹ Universidad Iberoamericana. Faculty of Graduate Studies, Doctorate in Education. Asunción, Paraguay.

Email: lic.fulviadureirpy@gmail.com

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0008-3988-3249>

* Corresponding Author

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ABSTRACT:

The development of life skills in early childhood constitutes a relevant component of comprehensive development and socio-emotional well-being; however, their effective integration into pedagogical practices depends on the meanings, knowledge, and contextual conditions through which teachers interpret and implement these competencies. The aim of this study was to understand teachers' perceptions and pedagogical practices regarding the development of life skills in early childhood in public educational institutions in Coronel Oviedo, Paraguay, during 2026. A qualitative study was conducted within an interpretive paradigm using a phenomenological-hermeneutic design. The participants were 25 teachers and 3 school administrators from three public educational institutions. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, focus groups, and documentary analysis of institutional and pedagogical documents, specifically the Institutional Educational Project, Annual Operational Plan, and Classroom Plan. Data analysis involved open, axial, and selective coding, thematic analysis, and triangulation across sources and techniques. The findings were organized into three categories: contribution to socio-emotional well-being; pedagogical strategies for the development of life skills; and challenges and opportunities for implementation. The results indicate that teachers primarily associate life skills with emotional self-regulation, autonomy, communication, empathy, and social coexistence. Play, daily routines, dialogue, storytelling, and group activities emerged as the main pedagogical strategies. Nevertheless, a tension was identified between the positive value attributed to these competencies and their limited curricular systematization, together with challenges related to instructional time, teacher training, group size, and irregular family participation. The study concludes that the educational context provides a favorable pedagogical foundation, but greater intentionality, systematic planning, and professional support are

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of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).	required to consolidate life skills as a transversal dimension of the lived curriculum in early childhood education. Keywords: life skills; early childhood; socio-emotional development; pedagogical practices; early childhood education; qualitative research.
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1. Introduction

The development of life skills during early childhood is a substantive dimension of comprehensive education, insofar as it comprises capacities that make it possible to face everyday demands, regulate emotional responses, establish relationships with other people, and participate in an increasingly autonomous way in different social contexts. In the educational field, these capacities have gained growing relevance owing to the convergence of approaches to comprehensive development, socio-emotional learning, and education for well-being. The World Health Organization early on incorporated the life skills approach into health promotion and education policies, understanding them as psychosocial competencies that can be taught and developed in educational contexts (World Health Organization [WHO], 1997). In later developments, education for health and well-being has continued to recognize the importance of capacities linked to self-regulation, resilience, and responsible decision-making (WHO, 2021).

In recent decades, the accumulated evidence has progressively displaced the conception of socio-emotional competencies as a peripheral complement to school learning. Social and emotional learning is now recognized as a component related to school engagement, coexistence, well-being, and the development of competencies that go beyond strictly academic performance. The results of a meta-analysis of 213 school programs showed positive effects of socio-emotional learning interventions on social and emotional competencies, behavior, and academic performance (Durlak et al., 2011). Likewise, a later meta-analysis that examined follow-up effects found socio-emotional and well-being-related benefits that persisted after the interventions had ended, although the magnitude and persistence of such effects depended on

various implementation conditions (Taylor et al., 2017).

In the specific case of early childhood education, the evidence is particularly relevant. Murano et al. (2020), drawing on 48 studies involving 15,498 preschool-age children, identified favorable effects of universal and targeted interventions on social and emotional competencies and on the reduction of problem behaviors. The systematic review by Ştefan et al. (2022), in turn, showed that although a small number of school-based interventions can be considered consolidated as evidence, socio-emotional learning programs implemented in preschool classrooms are associated with improvements in socio-emotional competencies and with reductions in emotional and behavioral problems. These results support the need to understand not only which programs work, but also how teachers translate, interpret, and contextualize this field of learning in the everyday life of classrooms.

This last question is particularly relevant because life skills are not developed exclusively through formalized teaching units. In early childhood education, a large part of social and emotional learning takes place through interactions, routines, games, conversations, peer conflicts, negotiation processes, and recurring experiences in which children learn to express emotions, wait for their turn, cooperate, and make small decisions. In a qualitative study with 30 early childhood education professionals, Blewitt et al. (2021) found that educators incorporated social and emotional learning mainly into everyday relationships and interactions, including joint work with families. However, they also identified constraints associated with available time, group size, professional confidence, staff turnover, and the insufficiency of specific guidance for a quality socio-emotional pedagogy. These difficulties

closely correspond to the problem investigated in the present research.

The relationship between what teachers consider important and what they actually do is, moreover, a central problem for the study of educational implementation. Professional beliefs are not automatically translated into practices. Hanno (2022), studying patterns of beliefs and practices among 281 preschool educators, found differentiated teacher profiles and showed that a coaching process could change the likelihood of belonging to profiles characterized by stronger beliefs and practices. In a convergent line, Chen (2026) showed, through a qualitative study, that certain preschool teachers intentionally integrated direct and indirect strategies of socio-emotional teaching, especially through modeling, conversation, play, and routine activities. Consequently, understanding the development of life skills requires examining the relationship among teachers' meanings, learning opportunities, and pedagogical institutionalization.

The socio-emotional competence of the educator is another dimension of this problem. A meta-analysis of 51 studies and 19,738 participants found positive associations between the socio-emotional competence of early childhood educators and their well-being, teacher-child relationships, classroom management, the implementation of socio-emotional learning, and various organizational outcomes (Xu et al., 2024). These results suggest that the teacher's professional conditions are not external to the phenomenon under investigation, but are part of the pedagogical ecosystem within which children's socio-emotional experiences are built.

In Paraguay, concern for comprehensive development in early childhood is backed by intersectoral policies. The National Strategy for Comprehensive Care of Early Childhood, *Kunu'ũ*, was promoted as a policy aimed at strengthening the care of children from a comprehensive perspective, coordinating different sectors and recognizing the decisive character of the first years of life. Documents developed by UNICEF Paraguay together with

national actors highlight the importance of comprehensive care, family participation, and the creation of favorable contexts for child development (UNICEF Paraguay, 2022). This orientation is in line with educational materials developed for the initial level, in which play, interaction, and family participation appear as components of special relevance.

However, the existence of favorable regulatory or institutional frameworks does not by itself guarantee a homogeneous translation into the classroom. Between the prescribed curriculum and the lived curriculum there is a space of interpretation in which teachers' beliefs, professional training, available resources, school organization, relationships with families, and the concrete characteristics of children's groups intervene. This space constitutes precisely one of the main knowledge gaps in the Paraguayan context: although there is institutional recognition of the importance of socio-emotional development, the empirical evidence that would allow us to understand how early childhood teachers give meaning to life skills, and how those conceptions become, or do not become, systematic pedagogical practices, is still limited.

The problem takes on special relevance in specific territorial contexts. This research is situated in Coronel Oviedo, Paraguay, and deals with three public educational institutions that offer early childhood education. The choice of context responds to the need to produce situated knowledge about the relationship between educational prescriptions and teachers' everyday experiences. Rather than determining a causal relationship between particular strategies and children's outcomes, the interest lies in understanding how educational actors interpret the phenomenon, what practices they carry out, and what conditions they recognize as obstacles or possibilities for transformation.

The research starts from an interpretive perspective and a phenomenological-hermeneutic design. This methodological decision responds to the nature of the question, which is oriented toward understanding meanings and experiences. From the

sociocultural approach, learning is conceived as a process mediated by social interactions, language, and cultural tools (Vygotsky, 1978). This perspective makes it possible to interpret teaching practice not as an isolated sequence of techniques, but as an activity situated in relationships, norms, routines, values, and shared meanings.

Based on this framework, the question that guided the study was: What are teachers' perceptions and pedagogical practices regarding the development of life skills in early childhood in Coronel Oviedo in 2026? Three specific objectives were derived from it: to identify teachers' conceptions of the relationship between life skills and socio-emotional well-being; to characterize the pedagogical strategies used to foster skills such as communication, autonomy, and peaceful conflict resolution; and to describe the challenges and opportunities identified by the participants in implementing those strategies.

The potential contribution of the study therefore lies in shifting the discussion from the mere prescription of competencies toward the analysis of the curriculum as it is actually lived. This perspective makes it possible to recognize both the pedagogical richness of everyday practices and the existing gaps between formative intention and curricular systematization. In this way, the article seeks to contribute to the debate on the quality of early childhood education from a situated perspective, attending to the need for life skills to be recognized as intentional and progressive learning, without losing their relational, experiential, and culturally contextualized character.

2. Methodology

Design and approach

A qualitative investigation was carried out, with an interpretive orientation and a phenomenological-hermeneutic design. The study sought to understand the experiences, meanings, and practices that teachers and administrators attribute to the development of life skills in natural early childhood education settings. The qualitative approach was selected

because the object of study could not be reduced to the measurement of variables, but required access to the meaning that actors attribute to their actions and experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Denzin & Lincoln, 2018).

The phenomenological component made it possible to center the analysis on lived experience, while the hermeneutic dimension made it possible to interpret the discourses in relation to their educational and institutional context. Combining both perspectives made it possible to examine not only which practices the participants described, but how those practices were given meaning and justified within the concrete reality of the institutions studied.

Context and participants

The study was carried out during 2026 in three public educational institutions in Coronel Oviedo that offer early childhood education. The accessible population consisted of teachers and administrators directly involved in the pedagogical processes of the level. Twenty-five teachers and 3 administrators participated.

Selection followed intentional, or criterion-based, non-probability sampling. Given the qualitative nature of the study, the fundamental criterion was not statistical representativeness, but the direct experience and informative capacity of the participants with respect to the phenomenon analyzed. All accessible participants who met the established criteria were included in the study. This procedure is consistent with the logic of purposive selection characteristic of qualitative research (Patton, 2015).

To preserve confidentiality, participants and information units were identified by alphanumeric codes. Administrators' voices were coded as DIE and teachers' contributions from the focus groups as GF; institutional documents were identified as AD-P.

Techniques and instruments

Data production combined three techniques. First, semi-structured interviews were conducted with the three participating administrators. Second, focus groups were held with the participating teachers, using a guide designed to

explore conceptions of life skills, pedagogical strategies, classroom experiences, difficulties, and opportunities for improvement. Third, a documentary analysis was carried out of institutional and pedagogical instruments, specifically the Institutional Educational Project, the Annual Operational Plan, and the Classroom Plan.

The combination of techniques made it possible to contrast different levels of evidence: institutional discourse, the experiences shared by teachers, and the way in which certain purposes appeared formalized in planning documents. Documentary analysis was taken as a complementary source of evidence and not as a substitute for the participants' voices, following the perspective of Bowen (2009).

The instruments were submitted to expert judgment before being applied. Data collection included institutional authorization, informed consent, audio recording with prior permission, verbatim transcription, and the preparation of field notes. Procedures aimed at protecting the anonymity and confidentiality of the information were adopted.

Data analysis and rigor

The analysis was carried out through qualitative content analysis, complemented with open, axial, and selective coding procedures and a thematic organization of the data. The process began with repeated reading of the interviews, focus groups, and documents, followed by the identification of meaningful units, grouping of codes, and construction of categories and subcategories. A cross-comparison was then carried out to identify recurrences, convergences, divergences, and particularities.

The analytical matrix was structured around three major categories: contribution to socio-emotional well-being; pedagogical strategies for the development of life skills; and challenges and opportunities for their implementation. The sufficiency of the information was assessed using a saturation criterion, understood as the point at which the incorporation of new data stopped

substantially broadening the interpretive categories developed.

A central procedure was the triangulation of sources and techniques. Administrator interviews, teacher focus groups, and institutional documents were systematically contrasted in order to identify coincidences and discrepancies between discourse, declared practice, and planning. This strategy strengthened the credibility of the study and made it possible to avoid an interpretation supported by a single source of information.

The reporting process was organized following transparency criteria characteristic of qualitative research. In particular, aspects related to participant selection, context, data collection procedures, analysis, derivation of categories, and the use of participant quotations were considered, in line with the COREQ and SRQR standards (O'Brien et al., 2014; Tong et al., 2007).

On the ethical level, the principles of autonomy, confidentiality, beneficence, non-maleficence, justice, and scientific integrity were respected. Participation was voluntary, and participants were informed of the purpose of the study, the academic use of the information, and their right to withdraw without consequences.

3. Results

Life skills as a horizon of socio-emotional well-being

The first finding shows that participants place a high value on socio-emotional development, although the meanings associated with the concept are not entirely homogeneous. In their discourses a practical understanding of life skills appears, linked mainly to self-regulation, autonomy, communication, empathy, respect for rules, and coexistence.

Triangulation showed that the category of socio-emotional well-being is organized around two major dimensions: intrapersonal and interpersonal. The first included emotional self-regulation, autonomy, decision-making, and emotion management. The second included communication, empathy, social skills, and coexistence.

Regarding self-regulation, administrators described practices related to respecting turns and rules in different spaces of the institution, while teachers pointed to situations of dysregulation and frustration. One of the testimonies stated: “Some can’t regulate their emotions... they cry, they throw objects” (GF1-D1). Another noted: “They manage to calm down with support” (GF3-D1). These expressions reveal that self-regulation does not yet appear as a fully autonomous competence, but as a capacity under construction that depends largely on adult support.

This finding represents one of the most relevant points of the study. Triangulation made it possible to observe a correspondence between institutional intention and the existence of practices aimed at regulation, but it also showed a persistent dependence on adult intervention. In other words, the classroom provides the conditions to move from external regulation toward progressively internalized forms of self-regulation, but this transition still requires continuous mediation.

Autonomy presented a different pattern. In this case a greater coincidence was observed among institutional discourse, teaching practices, and planning. Participants described opportunities to choose materials and activities, tidy up the classroom, take on small responsibilities, and participate in routines. Among the expressions collected are: “You can tell when they take initiative without needing so much help” (GF1-D1); “Choosing materials or activities” (GF2-D1); and “They take part in organizing the classroom” (GF3-D2). Likewise, the documents analyzed included options for choice and participation.

The management and expression of emotions constituted another relevant dimension. Teachers noted that children progressively begin to identify and verbalize emotional states: “They begin to express what they feel in words” (GF1-D1) and “They learn to identify whether they are sad or angry” (GF2-D1). The documents, in turn, included dialogues, circles, and stories to encourage this expression. The convergence

among the three levels of information indicates that language plays a central role in building an incipient emotional literacy.

In the interpersonal sphere, empathy and social skills were related to sharing, respecting turns, listening to others, and resolving conflicts through dialogue. Teachers stated: “We teach them to share and respect turns” (GF3-D1), “Respect for others is promoted” (GF2-D1), and “Conflicts over toys... we work on it with dialogue” (GF1-D1). The institutional documents likewise reflected group activities, cooperative games, and coexistence rules.

Taken together, the results show that life skills are indeed present in school experience, but they often appear integrated into everyday coexistence rather than as a clearly delimited curricular field.

Pedagogical strategies: the centrality of everyday life

The second category revealed that pedagogical strategies are organized mainly around the everyday life of the classroom. Play, routines, dialogue, storytelling, conflict mediation, and group activities constitute the main settings for socio-emotional learning.

Pedagogical mediation and formative dialogue appear as central strategies. One of the teachers said: “Sometimes the pace of the day doesn’t allow them to resolve things on their own; you step in quickly, tell them what to do so they don’t hit each other, and we carry on with the planned activity, because time is gold” (GF1-D2). This testimony synthesizes a structural tension of the phenomenon: the teacher recognizes the value of autonomy, but time constraints can favor quick, directive interventions.

In contrast to this reactive mode, more formative mediation practices were also identified. Administrators pointed to the modeling of behaviors, listening, and the lived experience of rules. Conversation circles and other dialogic spaces allowed children to share experiences and express emotions.

Play was consolidated as one of the most used and most highly valued strategies. Participants described guided games, cooperative games,

dramatizations, and role-plays as mechanisms for experiencing social situations, rehearsing solutions, and understanding emotions. Triangulation with the documents showed that play was not absent from planning, but appeared as a formal component of the pedagogical experiences.

Storytelling was another relevant strategy. Teachers indicated that they use images, tales, and stories to address communication, emotions, values, and coexistence. The documentary information confirmed the presence of narrative in the lesson plans. This result is especially important because it shows that narrative practices function as devices for representing social and emotional situations in a symbolic and safe context.

Emotional climate and school coexistence appeared closely associated with the strategies mentioned. The construction of rules, mutual respect, listening, and dialogue were described as everyday mechanisms for fostering positive relationships. This makes it possible to interpret classroom climate not merely as an institutional condition, but as a dynamic result of interaction practices.

The promotion of autonomy showed a relevant integration between practice and planning. Children take part in activities of organizing, selecting, and making small decisions, although always within frameworks structured by the adult. The finding suggests that an incipient form of recognition of children's agency exists, but it is still mediated by teacher control and organization.

Finally, family-school articulation was recognized as strategic. Participants mentioned meetings, workshops, guidance for the home, and communication with families. However, this articulation proved irregular and, therefore, still insufficient to guarantee systematic continuity between school and family experiences.

Challenges and opportunities for implementation

The third category made it possible to identify a structure of tensions in which pedagogical,

training-related, institutional, and family obstacles coexist with opportunities related to the relational capital of the schools.

Among the pedagogical challenges, the difficulty of managing frustrations and conflicts in heterogeneous groups stood out. Teachers said: "It's very hard for them... they can't tolerate anything" (GF1-D1), alluding to difficulties with emotional regulation. They also pointed to recurring conflicts over toys and turns. In this context, available time appeared as an important constraint on developing more reflective mediation.

The second challenge concerned teacher training and support. Teachers recognized the complexity of their role: "It's a task with a lot of responsibility... it requires patience and sensitivity" (GF2-D1) and "I hope I can learn more" (GF1-D1). Administrators mentioned workshops, professional support, and psychological support; however, the documents showed little systematicity in permanent programs of specific training.

At the institutional and structural level, the number of children and the size of the groups were described as obstacles to individualized attention. Expressions such as "Number of children" (GF1-D1) and "Large groups" (GF2-D1) reflect a tension between a child-centered pedagogy and organizational conditions that restrict the possibility of attending individually to socio-emotional processes.

In the family sphere, teachers perceived inequalities in the support and in the opportunities that children have to develop autonomy at home. The expression "Little support from the family" (GF1-D2) synthesized a recurring concern. However, the participants themselves identified meetings, workshops, and family guidance as mechanisms with potential for improvement.

Despite these barriers, the classroom showed an important set of pedagogical opportunities. The statement "Every situation is a learning opportunity" (GF-D) expresses a conception of everyday life as a pedagogical resource. Likewise,

the idea that “Play allows them to express emotions” (GF-D) shows a positive reading of the formative value of play experiences.

Institutional opportunities linked to collaborative work and the presence of external professionals were also identified. Teachers mentioned “Support from professionals such as psychologists” and “Teacher teamwork,” while administrators highlighted collaboration with universities and external organizations. These networks constitute a resource for strengthening the institutional capacity to respond to complex situations.

Consequently, the evidence does not portray an institutional reality characterized exclusively by deficits. On the contrary, it shows a dual structure: there are material, temporal, and training-related limitations, but also internal and external capacities that can be mobilized to strengthen pedagogical practices.

4. Discussion

The results allow us to maintain that the phenomenon studied cannot be explained through a simplistic opposition between “adequate” and “inadequate” practices. What was observed in Coronel Oviedo shows a process of transition in which life skills are recognized as valuable by educational actors and are incorporated into numerous everyday experiences, but have not yet reached a uniform level of curricular systematization.

This conclusion coincides with Blewitt et al. (2021), who found that early childhood education professionals integrate socio-emotional learning into everyday relationships and activities, but face barriers related to time, group size, and professional confidence. The coincidence is relevant because the present study, carried out in a specific Latin American context, identifies constraints of a similar nature without assuming that the contexts are equivalent. Rather, it suggests that certain implementation problems cut across different educational systems and that their concrete expression depends on institutional and cultural conditions.

The main interpretive contribution of the study lies in showing the existence of a gap between valuing and systematizing. Teachers recognize the importance of self-regulation, autonomy, communication, and coexistence; however, these competencies frequently appear integrated into situational pedagogical responses. In other words, the lived curriculum incorporates life skills, but not always within an intentional sequence that makes it possible to set progressive objectives and systematically observe their development.

This result is in dialogue with Hanno (2022), who demonstrates that teachers’ beliefs and practices can appear in diverse configurations and that professional coaching is a potential route for strengthening the coherence between what teachers believe and what they do. In the present study, the gap identified does not seem to derive from a lack of appreciation for the socio-emotional approach, but from an insufficient technical-pedagogical translation of that appreciation.

The evidence also corresponds with Chen (2026), whose qualitative study identified integrated forms of socio-emotional teaching, in which the teacher combines modeling, explicit instruction, and the use of everyday activities. The results from Coronel Oviedo show similar elements: teachers model behaviors and use dialogue, play, storytelling, and everyday situations. However, the relevant difference lies in the degree of formalization. Whereas the recent literature shows experiences in which strategies are expressly conceptualized as socio-emotional teaching, in the present study an important part of the actions appears to remain within the teacher’s practical and intuitive repertoire.

The centrality of play is a particularly significant finding. The specialized literature has documented that socio-emotional learning in preschool benefits from strategies adapted to the particularities of child development (Murano et al., 2020; Ştefan et al., 2022). In the study carried out, play did not appear simply as a recreational resource, but as a space for practicing cooperation, negotiation, turn-taking, emotional

expression, and conflict resolution. This reinforces the need to move beyond a curricular conception in which life skills are treated as content independent of experience. In early childhood education, the way of learning is a substantive part of what is learned.

The finding on self-regulation deserves special consideration. The evidence indicates that children still depend heavily on the adult to manage frustration and conflicts. The result is compatible with a sociocultural understanding of development, in which initially external forms of regulation can be progressively transformed through interaction and language (Vygotsky, 1978). The pedagogical relevance of this interpretation lies in preventing children's responses from being considered solely as disciplinary problems. When regulation is under construction, adult intervention must serve a scaffolding function and not be limited to quickly restoring order.

This matter is directly related to the problem of pedagogical time. The teacher's phrase "time is gold" allows us to interpret that the conflict between child development and school organization is not merely an administrative difficulty. It constitutes a curricular tension: when conflict interrupts the planned sequence, the teacher may choose between turning the situation into a socio-emotional learning opportunity or resolving it immediately in order to continue with the planned activity. The results suggest that both modalities coexist.

The family dimension is another relevant contribution. The meta-analysis by Denham and other works on emotion socialization have shown that the practices of significant adults influence children's opportunities to understand, express, and regulate emotions. In a meta-analytic review focused specifically on parenting practices, the processes of emotional modeling, response, and instruction showed positive associations with children's emotional competencies, although generally of small magnitude (Lunkenheimer et al., 2021). The present study did not directly assess family practices nor does it allow children's outcomes to

be attributed to families; however, it does show that teachers perceive school-home continuity as a relevant condition for consolidating learning.

Family-school articulation should therefore be interpreted as a challenge of shared responsibility and not as a delegation of responsibilities from the education system to households. The study's evidence shows that workshops and communication channels exist, but participation is irregular. Recent research on the implementation of SEL programs in early childhood education has also drawn attention to the need to consider context and sustainability factors, since the existence of effective interventions does not automatically ensure their scaling up or continuity (Lum et al., 2024).

Another important finding concerns teacher professional development. Xu et al. (2024) found associations among educators' socio-emotional competence, well-being, classroom management, teacher-child relationships, and the implementation of socio-emotional learning. This provides external support for one of the study's conclusions: teacher training cannot be limited to conceptual knowledge of life skills. It requires opportunities to practice mediation, conflict regulation, emotional conversation, observation of development, and reflection on one's own practice.

From this perspective, the main implication is not to introduce a new subject separate from the curriculum, but to increase the pedagogical intentionality of experiences that already exist. Routines, games, conversations, stories, and everyday conflicts can operate as true settings for socio-emotional learning when they are accompanied by explicit purposes, adequate pedagogical language, opportunities for participation, and follow-up criteria.

The triangulation carried out also provides a methodological contribution. The comparison among administrator discourse, focus groups, and documents made it possible to detect coherences and tensions simultaneously. In some cases, planning backed up the practices described; in others, it showed general objectives without the same level of contextualization that teachers

reported needing. This finding confirms the value of documentary analysis as a complementary source in educational research, especially when the aim is to study the distance between institutional prescription and pedagogical experience (Bowen, 2009).

Consequently, the phenomenon can be summarized as a transition from a mainly implicit and reactive socio-emotional pedagogy toward a progressively intentional, reflective, and systematic pedagogy. This is not to claim that current practices are ineffective. The evidence indicates, on the contrary, an important relational and pedagogical richness. The challenge consists in making visible, grounding, and organizing what currently often happens spontaneously.

5. Conclusion

The research allows us to conclude that the teachers in the institutions studied in Coronel Oviedo recognize life skills as a relevant dimension of children's socio-emotional well-being and relate them mainly to self-regulation, autonomy, emotional expression, communication, empathy, and coexistence. However, the conceptions identified show different levels of depth and tend to interpret well-being, in certain cases, from a functional perspective linked to behavior and group order.

Pedagogical practices show a significant richness based on the everyday life of the classroom. Play, routines, conversation circles, storytelling, conflict mediation, and children's participation constitute real opportunities for socio-emotional learning. The main weakness lies not in the absence of strategies, but in their limited systematization and curricular intentionality.

The most relevant challenges relate to pedagogical time, the heterogeneity of the groups, the size of classrooms, the needs for teacher training and support, and the irregularity

of the articulation with families. Despite these conditions, the institutions have strengths linked to a positive school climate, collaborative work, and interdisciplinary and inter-institutional support networks.

In scientific terms, the study contributes situated qualitative evidence on a phenomenon scarcely explored in the Paraguayan context: the way in which teachers translate the discourse of life skills into concrete early childhood education experiences. Its main conceptual contribution is the identification of a tension between the prescribed curriculum and the lived curriculum, in which there is a high valuation of socio-emotional competencies but a pedagogical institutionalization that is still uneven.

From an applied perspective, the results suggest that strengthening life skills in early childhood requires practice-centered professional development programs, explicit pedagogical planning, non-reactive mediation strategies, formative follow-up mechanisms, and sustained devices for family-school articulation. Future studies could extend the analysis to other districts of Paraguay, incorporate direct classroom observation, and conduct longitudinal research to examine the evolution of practices and of children's competencies.

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7. Author Declaration

The author declares that this manuscript is original, has not been published previously, and is not under consideration for publication elsewhere. The author declares no conflict of interest.

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