5th Global Conference on Innovations in Education
12 - 14 November 2026
Nottingham, UK

Emotional Literacy

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Abstract

The holistic development of children's wellbeing, relationships, behaviour, communication, and learning outcomes is increasingly thought to depend on emotional literacy. This article examines how children learn to recognise, understand, express, and regulate emotions in the contexts of family, culture, play, and education from birth to eight years. Based on Bowlby, Ainsworth, Erikson, Piaget, Vygotsky, and Bronfenbrenner, the text views emotional development as a socially constructed and relational process shaped by attachment, language, cognition, and environmental experiences. This article covers infancy and early childhood emotional development milestones, including self-awareness, empathy, emotional regulation, and expression. Emotional vocabulary, recognition, resilience, empathy, and self-regulation are essential to emotional literacy, as are secure relationships, emotionally responsive adults, and supportive learning environments. To help children understand and communicate emotions, play, storytelling, creativity, and emotional coaching are emphasised. Educators, practitioners, and families receive evidence-based strategies, classroom activities, observational assessment methods, and co-regulation and behaviour support methods. Emotional literacy is examined in challenging contexts like multilingualism, neurodiversity, trauma, adverse childhood experiences, speech and language delay, and cultural differences in emotional expression. The EYFS, wellbeing frameworks, safeguarding, school readiness, and executive functioning are discussed throughout. Practitioner wellbeing, reflective practice, family partnerships, and emotional literacy interventions and programs like SEAL, PATHS, nurture approaches, and trauma-informed practice are also discussed in this article. Critically discussed are rising emotional and behavioural needs, screen time, curriculum pressures, and the COVID-19 pandemic. The article uses case studies and real-life examples to show how emotionally responsive practice can make students emotionally secure, resilient, empathetic, and confident. This article emotional literacy as a core life skill and a key component of effective early years pedagogy. It supports emotionally literate environments where children, families, and practitioners build healthy relationships, emotional resilience, and lifelong wellbeing.

Keywords: Emotional Literacy, Early Childhood Education, Emotional Development, Self-Regulation, Social and Emotional Learning (SEL), Attachment Theory, Emotional Wellbeing, Emotional Regulation, Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS), Play-Based Learning