

## NON-FORMAL METHODS AND STRATEGIES FOR DEVELOPING SOCIO-EMOTIONAL SKILLS

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**Abstract:** *Socio-emotional development represents an essential dimension of contemporary education, while non-formal education provides valuable contexts for fostering these competencies. This study investigates parents' perceptions regarding the role of non-formal activities in supporting the socio-emotional development of primary school students. The research is based on a quantitative approach and involved the administration of a structured questionnaire to a sample of 53 parents whose children participate in various non-formal educational activities. The results indicate that, according to parents' perceptions, participation in non-formal education is associated with improvements in social interaction, cooperation, emotional expression, and self-confidence. At the same time, the perceived impact varies depending on the type and frequency of activities as well as the child's individual characteristics. Overall, the findings highlight the potential of non-formal education to complement formal learning and to support the holistic development of students.*

**Keywords:** *non-formal education; socio-emotional development; primary school students; emotional intelligence; parental perceptions; social skills.*

### **Introduction**

The development of students' socio-emotional skills represents an essential dimension of contemporary education, and non-formal education provides valuable contexts for cultivating these

competencies. Through flexible and experiential educational approaches—such as play-based learning, cooperation, artistic activities, volunteering, and intergenerational experiences—students can develop emotional intelligence, empathy, self-regulation abilities, and social responsibility. These pedagogical strategies contribute to the formation of well-balanced personalities and support students' active integration into their communities.

Play-based learning and experiential activities represent some of the most effective methods for fostering emotional intelligence. Play creates a natural framework for emotional expression and social interaction, facilitating the development of empathy, communication skills, and emotional regulation strategies. Playful activities such as simulations, role-playing, and interactive exercises allow students to experience social situations within a safe environment, promoting the development of prosocial behaviors and encouraging reflection on their own emotions. In this context, Blândul (2021) highlights the role of play-based learning and non-formal methods in creating educational contexts adapted to students' emotional development and in improving pedagogical practices. Experiential activities complement these approaches through their applied and reflective character, offering opportunities for direct engagement in community projects, thematic excursions, or service-learning activities. Furthermore, the integration of digital technologies in non-formal education facilitates the development of socio-emotional competencies through interactive platforms and social simulations, which allow students to practice emotional skills in controlled virtual environments adapted to their needs (Botnar, 2021).

Cooperative learning and mentoring also play an important role in the development of socio-emotional competencies. This approach involves students in group activities aimed at achieving shared objectives, promoting collaboration, responsibility, and mutual respect. Through continuous interaction and the assumption of different roles within a team, students develop communication skills, empathy, and conflict management abilities. Clichici (2020) emphasizes that cooperative learning stimulates students' active engagement and contributes to strengthening relationships based on trust and solidarity. Group activities such as educational projects, debates, or simulation games support the development of critical thinking and negotiation skills. At the same time, such learning contexts contribute to the development of intercultural competencies, encouraging students to understand and respect cultural diversity. In this regard, Dorobanțu-Dina (2022) highlights that interaction with individuals from diverse cultural

backgrounds contributes to the formation of an open and tolerant identity capable of valuing diversity.

Artistic and creative activities constitute another important area of non-formal education, significantly contributing to students' socio-emotional development. Educational theatre, visual arts, and music provide students with opportunities to express emotions, explore personal identity, and develop empathy. Participation in theatrical activities involves assuming different roles and exploring multiple perspectives, which stimulates understanding of interpersonal relationships and promotes reflective thinking (Bucun & Vasilachi, 2020). By interpreting characters and exploring diverse social situations, students learn to manage emotions and develop emotional flexibility. Similarly, engaging in visual arts allows students to express their inner experiences while developing imagination and self-reflection abilities. Chistol (2019) argues that non-formal education creates favorable contexts for creative exploration and personal expression, thereby supporting the development of emotional self-regulation and resilience. Music, as a universal form of emotional communication, fosters cooperation, emotional sensitivity, and emotional synchronization within group activities (Bucun & Vasilachi, 2020).

Volunteering and community involvement also represent important tools for developing empathy and social responsibility. Through participation in volunteer activities, students have the opportunity to interact directly with diverse social realities and to better understand community needs. Volunteer projects, such as awareness campaigns, charitable activities, or support initiatives for vulnerable individuals, stimulate the development of solidarity and civic engagement. In this regard, Vasilachi (2020) highlights the role of non-formal education in fostering active social awareness and in developing both cognitive and affective empathy. Participation in such activities also contributes to the development of communication skills, teamwork abilities, and emotional resilience. Reflecting on volunteering experiences—through guided discussions or reflective journals—facilitates emotional integration and strengthens the process of personal development.

Another important element supporting socio-emotional development is represented by intergenerational experiences and collaborative learning. Interaction between students and individuals belonging to different generations provides valuable opportunities for learning and for developing empathy. Intergenerational activities, such as traditional craft workshops, oral history projects, or storytelling sessions, facilitate the transmission of cultural values and promote mutual respect. Virva (2021) highlights the role of non-formal educational institutions, such

as Children's Palaces and Clubs, in facilitating these interactions and promoting reciprocal learning between generations. At the same time, collaborative learning involves students' participation in shared tasks that require communication, negotiation, and the assumption of complementary roles, thereby contributing to the development of social and emotional competencies.

In conclusion, non-formal education offers a wide range of pedagogical methods and strategies that support the development of students' socio-emotional skills. By integrating play-based learning, cooperation, artistic activities, volunteering, and intergenerational experiences, the educational process becomes more relevant, interactive, and student-centered. These approaches contribute to the formation of empathetic, responsible individuals capable of effectively managing emotions and social relationships within a complex and constantly evolving society.

The text also outlines the introductory and methodological framework of a study focused on analyzing parents' perceptions regarding the role of non-formal education in supporting students' socio-emotional development. The research topic emerges from the growing interest in educational approaches that complement formal schooling, particularly in the context in which both academic literature and educational practice emphasize the importance of the holistic development of the child. Non-formal education is understood as an alternative yet structured learning environment that encourages autonomy, flexible interaction with others, and emotional expression in contexts that are less rigid than traditional classroom settings. From this perspective, the study aims to highlight parents' opinions regarding the perceived impact of non-formal activities on their children's emotional and social development.

### **Research**

The research adopts a quantitative approach and is based on the administration of a structured questionnaire consisting of 20 closed-ended questions to a sample of 53 parents. This methodological choice aims to capture general trends and identify dominant opinions regarding the relationship between children's participation in non-formal activities and the development of socio-emotional competencies. Through this approach, the study seeks to provide a coherent overview of how parents evaluate the contribution of non-formal education to their children's development.

The investigative framework is organized around several general and specific objectives that guide the design of the questionnaire and the interpretation of the data. The first general objective focuses on identifying and analyzing parents' perceptions of non-formal education

as a favorable environment for socio-emotional development. The study examines the extent to which parents believe that participation in such activities contributes to the development of dimensions such as self-confidence, empathy, emotional self-control, and interpersonal skills. This objective is based on the premise that emotional and social development are closely interconnected.

The second objective aims to determine the frequency and types of non-formal activities in which children participate, based on parents' reports. The analysis considers the diversity of these activities—including artistic, sports, recreational, volunteer-based, or thematic clubs—as well as their place in relation to the regular school schedule. At the same time, this objective includes the evaluation of parents' perceptions regarding the organization and effectiveness of these activities, as well as the role played by teachers or other professionals involved.

The third objective involves identifying potential correlations between participation in non-formal education and the manifestation of certain socio-emotional behaviors observed by parents. Without establishing causal relationships, the research aims to explore whether consistent involvement in non-formal activities is associated with improved cooperation, greater emotional openness, a proactive attitude in social relationships, and tolerance toward differences. Another important objective concerns the degree of parental involvement in their children's extracurricular life, particularly the extent to which parents discuss non-formal activities with their children, are aware of their experiences, and support their participation. This aspect is relevant because the family is considered the primary educational environment and a key factor influencing children's attitudes toward learning and personal development.

Based on these objectives, several working hypotheses were formulated, drawing on both the academic literature and observations from educational practice. The first hypothesis states that parents whose children frequently participate in non-formal activities perceive them as displaying better-developed emotional traits, particularly in terms of emotional expression and regulation. The second hypothesis suggests that participation in cooperative or volunteering activities is associated, in parents' perceptions, with the development of empathy and civic responsibility. A third hypothesis assumes that parents who frequently discuss non-formal activities with their children are more likely to observe positive behavioral changes. Additionally, it is assumed that improvements in children's social behavior are associated by parents with participation in structured non-formal activities that have clearly defined educational objectives. Finally, the last hypothesis

suggests that most parents support the expansion of non-formal education within the school curriculum as a complementary component of formal education and as a means of supporting students' personal and social development.

Overall, the text outlines a well-structured research framework aimed at understanding how parents perceive the contribution of non-formal education to their children's socio-emotional development and at highlighting its relevance in the current educational context.

The sample used in the study consisted of 53 parents, selected based on the criterion that their children were involved in non-formal educational activities. The participants were parents of primary school students, and the selection aimed to ensure a reasonable diversity in terms of gender, age, place of residence, educational level, occupation, and family structure. The presentation of the sample characteristics serves to provide a descriptive profile of the participants, without anticipating interpretations or conclusions regarding the responses they provided.

Regarding gender distribution, of the 53 respondents, 39 were women (73.6%) and 14 were men (26.4%). Such a distribution is commonly observed in educational studies involving parents, as women generally show greater willingness to participate in this type of research. Data were collected through the voluntary completion of the questionnaire, without attempting to achieve gender balance, the primary objective being to capture the perceptions of parents who chose to participate in the study.

From the perspective of age distribution, respondents were grouped into four age categories. Thus, 9 parents (16.9%) were between 25 and 30 years old, 19 parents (35.8%) were between 31 and 35 years old, 18 parents (33.9%) were between 36 and 40 years old, and 7 parents (13.2%) were over 40 years old. This distribution highlights a significant proportion of parents within the 31–40 age group, which typically corresponds to the period when adults are professionally active and have children in the early years of schooling.

With regard to the place of residence, 32 respondents (60.3%) lived in urban areas, while 21 parents (39.7%) were from rural areas. This distribution indicates a relatively balanced representation of the two residential environments, although it does not imply similar conditions in terms of access to educational resources. Including participants from both environments allows for a more comprehensive descriptive overview without conducting comparisons between the two categories at this stage.

The educational level of respondents was reported in the introductory section of the questionnaire. Among the 53 parents, 9 (17%) had

completed secondary education (high school or vocational school), 28 (52.8%) held a bachelor's degree, and 16 parents (30.2%) had completed postgraduate studies, such as master's programs or specialized training courses. This variable highlights the diversity of educational backgrounds within the sample without implying a direct relationship with the type or frequency of children's participation in non-formal activities.

In terms of occupation, participants were employed in a variety of professional fields. Specifically, 12 parents (22.6%) worked in the field of education (teachers or auxiliary staff), 10 parents (18.9%) were employed in technical fields such as engineering, information technology, or construction, and 9 respondents (17%) worked in the medical sector (physicians, nurses, or pharmacists). Additionally, 6 parents (11.3%) were employed in public administration or financial services, 7 respondents (13.2%) worked in the commercial sector (sales, marketing, or logistics), while 9 parents (17%) had other occupations, including self-employed professionals, skilled workers, or agricultural workers. The socio-professional diversity of the sample reflects the variety of family contexts from which the children indirectly involved in the study originate.

Family structure was analyzed based on the number of children in the household. Thus, 31 respondents (58.5%) had one child, 17 parents (32%) had two children, and 5 parents (9.5%) had three or more children. This information contributes to outlining the family context in which children develop, without assuming a direct influence on the perceptions expressed by parents in the questionnaire.

Another criterion considered in describing the sample was the level of parental involvement in children's educational activities. This dimension was examined through a direct question with standardized response options. Twenty-four parents (45.3%) reported frequent involvement in supporting their child's education, such as helping with homework, attending school meetings, or supporting participation in extracurricular activities. Twenty respondents (37.7%) reported occasional involvement, while 9 parents (17%) indicated limited or sporadic involvement. At this stage of the analysis, these data are presented strictly descriptively and are not correlated with other research variables.

Regarding children's participation in non-formal activities, all 53 parents confirmed that their child had been involved in at least one form of non-formal education during the previous 12 months. The activities mentioned covered a wide range of areas, including artistic activities (drawing, painting, theatre), music lessons, sports activities (dance, football, swimming), reading or personal development clubs,

as well as volunteering projects or educational camps. The questionnaire did not impose a strict classification of these activities, allowing respondents the freedom to specify the types of activities in which their children had participated.

Overall, the collected data reveal a sample characterized by demographic and socio-professional diversity. The information presented provides a descriptive overview of the profile of parents participating in the study and establishes a factual framework for the subsequent analysis of the data, without anticipating relationships between the variables under investigation.

Parents' Perceptions of the Contribution of Non-Formal Education to Children's Socio-Emotional Development

Question

1

How often does your child participate in non-formal activities (e.g., clubs, camps, workshops)?

The analysis of the responses provided by the 53 parents participating in the study offers an initial perspective on how non-formal educational activities are integrated into the educational experiences of primary school students. This question aimed to identify the frequency with which children participate in such activities, considering their role in complementing the formal educational process and supporting the development of socio-emotional competencies.

The distribution of responses indicates diversity in terms of children's access to and participation in non-formal activities. The two extremes of the response scale "never" and "daily" were selected by the same number of respondents, namely 11 parents. This distribution suggests the existence of different realities within the sample: on the one hand, a group of children who do not participate in non-formal activities at all, and on the other hand, a group for whom these activities are consistently integrated into their daily routines.

The percentage of 20.7% of parents who reported that their children do not participate in non-formal activities suggests the presence of potential barriers to accessing such educational programs. Factors that may contribute to this situation include the limited availability of activities in certain localities, a demanding school schedule, a lack of interest on the part of the child, or logistical and financial constraints. At this stage of the research, these aspects are mentioned only as possible contextual explanations, without drawing definitive conclusions.

At the opposite end of the spectrum, a similar proportion of parents reported that their children participate in non-formal activities on a daily basis. This situation suggests the consistent integration of such activities into children's daily routines, either through after-school

educational programs or through participation in artistic, sports-related, or personal development courses conducted regularly. Such a level of engagement indicates frequent exposure to diverse educational contexts that may contribute to the development of social, emotional, and relational competencies.

Overall, the results highlight the existence of different patterns of participation in non-formal education among primary school children, reflecting the diversity of family and educational contexts in which they develop.

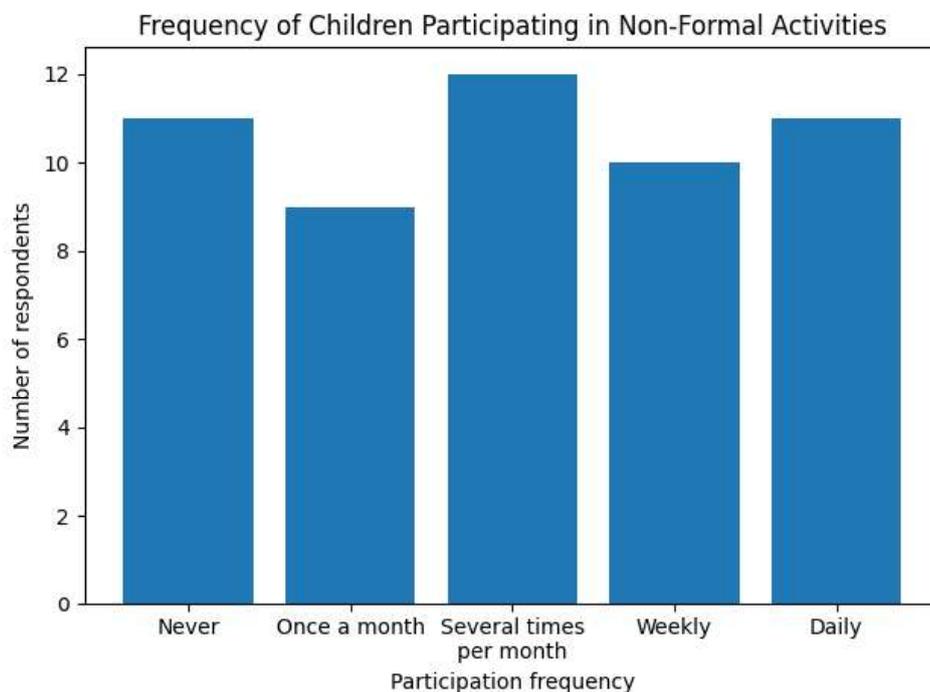


Figure 1. Frequency of Children Participating in Non-Formal Activities  
Between the two extremes of participation frequency in non-formal activities, three intermediate categories can be identified. Thus, 9 parents reported that their children participate in such activities once a month. This category represents 17% of the total respondents and may suggest occasional involvement, possibly dependent on family availability, the existing educational offer, or the organization of the child's schedule. The presence of this category indicates that, for some families, access to non-formal activities is limited or occurs only sporadically.

The largest category is represented by 12 parents (22.6%) who selected the option "several times per month." This choice reflects a relatively consistent form of participation, although without a strictly weekly

frequency. In many cases, such involvement may be associated with participation in thematic workshops, weekend courses, or activities organized periodically within educational centers. The fact that this option was the most frequently selected suggests a tendency to integrate non-formal activities in a manner adapted to the family's schedule and daily routines.

#### Question 2

To what extent do you consider that these activities contribute to the emotional development of your child?

The analysis of responses indicates a relatively balanced distribution of parents' opinions regarding the contribution of non-formal activities to children's emotional development. Thus, 11 respondents (20.7%) considered that these activities do not contribute at all to emotional development, while the same number of parents (20.7%) believed that their impact is very high.

Between these two extremes, several intermediate positions were identified. Ten parents (18.9%) evaluated the contribution of non-formal activities as very limited, 11 respondents (20.7%) considered the impact moderate, while another 10 parents (18.9%) indicated a considerable contribution. This varied distribution suggests the existence of diverse perceptions among parents, possibly influenced by the types of activities in which children participate, the frequency of their involvement, or parents' expectations regarding the outcomes of non-formal education.

Approximately 40% of respondents fall within the category of perceiving a low impact (the options "not at all" and "very little"), which may indicate difficulty in identifying clear emotional changes or a weaker association between the activities carried out and the development of children's affective dimensions. At the same time, 20 parents consider that these activities have a strong impact on emotional development, highlighting the presence of a significant group that recognizes the formative potential of non-formal education.

The intermediate category ("moderate") is among the most frequently selected responses, suggesting that for many parents, non-formal education is perceived primarily as a complementary element of the educational process rather than as a decisive factor in emotional development.

#### Question 3

Do you observe an improvement in your child's interaction with other children after participating in non-formal activities?

The responses provided by parents reflect how they perceive the social impact of children's participation in non-formal activities. A total of 12 parents (22.6%) indicated that they did not observe any improvement

in their child's interaction with other children, while 8 respondents (15.1%) considered that the changes were very limited.

Overall, 20 parents (37.7%) perceived the social impact of non-formal activities as low or nonexistent. On the other hand, 11 parents (20.7%) selected the option "sometimes," suggesting that improvements in social interaction are observed only in certain situations or contexts.

Furthermore, 10 parents (18.9%) responded "generally yes," while 12 respondents (22.6%) considered that the improvement was significant ("yes, very much"). Consequently, 22 parents (41.5%) perceived a clear positive impact of non-formal activities on children's social interaction.

The relatively balanced distribution of responses indicates that the social effects of non-formal education are perceived differently by parents. Moreover, the relatively high frequency of the response "sometimes" suggests a nuanced perception, according to which the development of social interaction skills may depend on factors such as the type of activity, the context in which it takes place, or the individual characteristics of the child.

#### Question 4

Do you consider that non-formal education helps your child express their emotions more easily?

The results reveal a significant diversity of parental perceptions. Eleven respondents (20.7%) selected the option "no, on the contrary," while 8 parents (15.1%) chose the response "not really." Thus, approximately 36% of respondents believe that non-formal activities do not significantly contribute to facilitating emotional expression.

At the same time, 12 parents (22.6%) selected the option "I am not sure," reflecting a certain degree of uncertainty in evaluating this type of effect. Assessing emotional development can be challenging for parents, particularly when changes are subtle or occur over a longer period of time.

On the other hand, 11 respondents (20.7%) considered that non-formal education contributes to emotional expression to some extent, while another 11 parents (20.7%) believed that this impact is clear and evident. Overall, approximately 41% of respondents perceive a positive influence of non-formal activities on the expression of emotions.

The results outline a balanced picture, in which some parents observe positive effects, others express reservations, and a significant segment remains uncertain. This situation suggests that emotional expression is perceived as a complex process, which is difficult to directly associate with participation in non-formal activities in the absence of educational interventions explicitly focused on the affective dimension.

#### Question 5

Do the non-formal activities in which your child participates promote empathy?

The distribution of responses is relatively uniform, reflecting the diversity of parents' perceptions. Thus, 11 respondents (20.7%) believe that non-formal activities do not contribute at all to the development of empathy, while 10 parents (18.9%) consider that this contribution is very limited. Overall, approximately 39.6% of respondents do not perceive a clear influence of these activities on the development of empathy.

A total of 11 parents (20.7%) selected the option "sometimes," suggesting that this dimension is perceived as dependent on the context or on the type of activities carried out.

On the other hand, 10 respondents (18.9%) indicated that empathy is promoted frequently, while 11 parents (20.7%) stated that this occurs consistently. Therefore, an important segment of the sample perceives a connection between non-formal activities and the development of empathy.

Considering the relational nature of empathy, it is possible that this competence is particularly associated with activities involving direct interaction, collaboration, or the assumption of social roles, such as theatrical activities, role-playing games, or volunteer projects.

#### Question 6

How important do you consider non-formal activities for the development of your child's self-confidence?

This question aimed to assess parents' perceptions regarding the relationship between participation in non-formal activities and the development of children's self-confidence. The distribution of responses is relatively balanced across the five proposed options.

Thus, 11 parents (20.7%) consider these activities to be unimportant for the development of self-confidence, while 9 respondents (17%) evaluate them as slightly important. At the same time, 12 parents (22.6%) indicated that their importance is moderate.

A total of 10 respondents (18.9%) consider non-formal activities to be important, while 11 parents (20.7%) perceive them as very important for the development of children's self-confidence.

The results highlight the presence of relatively divided opinions among parents. Approximately 40% of respondents consider non-formal activities to be important or very important for the development of self-confidence, suggesting recognition of the formative potential of these educational contexts. At the same time, a similar proportion of respondents perceive a weaker relationship between participation in non-formal activities and the development of this dimension.

This diversity of opinions may reflect both the variety of activities in which children participate and the different ways in which parents interpret the concept of self-confidence or observe its manifestations in children's behavior.

#### Question 7

Have you noticed better emotional regulation in your child following their involvement in non-formal education?

This question aimed to explore the dimension of emotional self-regulation, considered a key component of children's affective development. The distribution of responses reveals a relatively balanced structure of parental perceptions. Thus, 11 parents (20.7%) indicated that they did not observe any change in the way their child manages emotions, while 9 respondents (17%) reported that the observed changes were very limited.

On the other hand, 12 parents (22.6%) noticed some improvements in emotional regulation, 10 respondents (18.9%) observed visible changes, and 11 parents (20.7%) reported clear improvements. Consequently, approximately 40% of respondents indicate a noticeable or significant improvement in the way their child manages emotions, suggesting a perceived positive development associated with participation in non-formal activities.

At the same time, 20 parents (approximately 38%) did not observe relevant changes or considered the changes insignificant. This polarized distribution suggests that emotional self-regulation may be difficult to observe directly from an adult perspective and often requires attention to subtle behavioral manifestations. The intermediate option—"some improvements"—was the most frequently selected, indicating a moderate and nuanced perception of the impact of these activities.

#### Question 8

Do you believe that these activities contribute to the development of your child's sense of responsibility?

Responsibility represents one of the fundamental social competencies, and this question aimed to identify whether parents associate participation in non-formal activities with the development of responsible behavior. The responses indicate a relatively uniform distribution of perceptions.

Thus, 11 parents (20.7%) answered "no," while 9 respondents (17%) selected the option "rarely." At the same time, 11 parents (20.7%) believe that these activities contribute "sometimes" to the development of responsibility, and another 11 parents (20.7%) selected the option "often." A similar number of respondents (11 – 20.7%) indicated that

these activities “always” contribute to the development of the child’s sense of responsibility.

The nearly symmetrical distribution of responses highlights the existence of divided opinions among parents. Thus, 22 respondents expressed a strongly positive perception (“often” and “always”), while 20 parents considered the impact to be low or absent (“no” and “rarely”). The intermediate category (“sometimes”) reflects the recognition of a possible influence, although not perceived as consistent.

These results may be related to the types of non-formal activities in which children participate, as activities involving task responsibility, rule-following, or group collaboration are more likely to contribute to the development of responsibility than those with a predominantly recreational character.

#### Question 9

To what extent does your child cooperate better with others as a result of participating in non-formal activities?

This question focused on cooperation as an indicator of social competence and the child’s ability to function effectively in group contexts. The distribution of parents’ responses reveals a pattern similar to that observed in the previous questions.

Thus, 11 parents (20.7%) indicated that they did not observe any improvement in cooperation, while 9 respondents (17%) considered the changes to be minor. At the same time, 12 parents (22.6%) believe that improvement occurs only occasionally.

On the other hand, 10 parents (18.9%) stated that participation in non-formal activities contributes considerably to the development of cooperation, while 11 respondents (20.7%) believe that this contribution is very significant. Overall, approximately 40% of parents perceive a moderate or strong positive impact on the child’s ability to cooperate with others, whereas 37.7% do not observe a significant change.

It is possible that parents who reported low participation of their children in non-formal activities may similarly perceive a weaker impact on the development of cooperative skills, as limited exposure to collaborative contexts may reduce opportunities for developing such competencies.

#### Question 10

Has participation in artistic activities (theatre, music, painting) positively influenced your child’s emotional development?

This question aimed to evaluate the impact of a specific category of non-formal activities—artistic activities—on children’s emotional

development. Parents' responses indicate a relatively balanced distribution between positive and negative perceptions.

Thus, 11 parents (20.7%) indicated that artistic activities had no impact on their child's emotional development, while 9 respondents (17%) considered that their influence was very limited. At the same time, 12 parents (22.6%) believed that the impact was moderate.

On the other hand, 10 parents (18.9%) evaluated the influence of artistic activities as significant, while 11 respondents (20.7%) considered the impact to be very high. Therefore, 21 parents (39.6%) believe that these activities have had a considerable influence on their child's emotional development.

These results may be explained both by the diversity of children's educational experiences and by the ways in which parents observe and interpret their children's emotional expressions. In the case of artistic activities, the effects may be more subtle and more difficult to evaluate compared with other types of competencies.

#### Question 11

To what extent do you consider volunteer activities useful for the social development of your child?

The analysis of responses highlights a balanced distribution of parental perceptions regarding the usefulness of volunteer activities in children's social development. Thus, 11 respondents (20.7%) consider these activities to be useless, while 9 parents (17%) evaluate them as slightly useful.

At the same time, 12 respondents (22.6%) consider volunteer activities to be moderately useful for social development, while 10 parents (18.9%) evaluate them as useful. Another 11 respondents (20.7%) consider them to be very useful.

This relatively uniform distribution suggests the existence of diverse perceptions among parents, without a clearly dominant opinion emerging. Approximately 37.7% of respondents consider that volunteering has little or no usefulness, which may indicate a weak association between this type of activity and the child's educational process or a limited experience with such activities.

On the other hand, 39.6% of parents evaluate volunteering as useful or very useful for social development, reflecting recognition of the role these activities play in the development of character, civic responsibility, and social interaction skills. This positive perception may be influenced by children's concrete experiences in community projects, support activities, or initiatives involving social engagement.

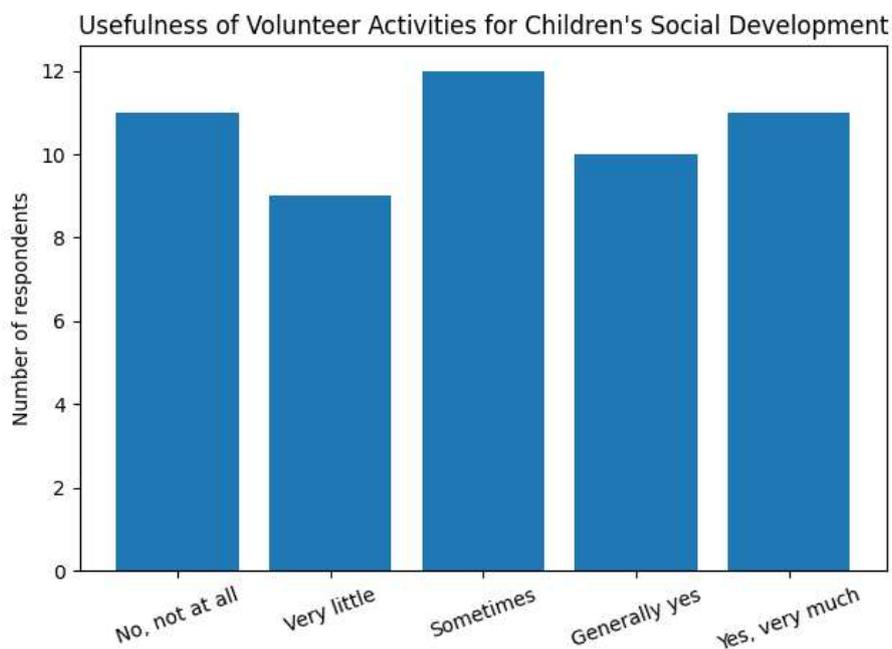


Figure 3. Usefulness of Volunteer Activities for Children's Social Development

The most frequently selected response, “moderately useful” (22.6%), reflects a balanced parental perception according to which volunteer activities are recognized as having educational value and formative potential, without necessarily being considered an essential component of a child's social development in all cases. Such an evaluation may be associated either with the child's occasional participation in these activities or with the fact that their effects are perceived more indirectly and are more difficult to assess compared with other competencies.

#### Question 12

Have you observed an increase in tolerance toward other children following participation in such activities?

The distribution of responses also indicates a relatively balanced structure of parental perceptions. Thus, 10 parents (18.9%) stated that they had not observed any increase in tolerance, while another 10 respondents (18.9%) considered that the observed changes were very limited. Twelve parents (22.6%) selected the option “sometimes,” 10 respondents (18.9%) indicated the response “generally yes,” and 11 parents (20.7%) chose the option “clearly yes.” This distribution suggests that parents' opinions are relatively evenly distributed across negative, moderate, and positive evaluations, without any single perspective clearly prevailing.

Approximately 40% of respondents stated that they had not observed changes or had noticed only very weak indications of increased tolerance toward other children. Such a perception may be explained by the fact that not all non-formal activities are explicitly oriented toward cooperation, dialogue, or interaction with diversity. Moreover, tolerance represents a subtle social competence that is difficult to observe directly, and its manifestations may vary depending on the interaction context and the child's individual characteristics. It is also possible that some parents do not have sufficient concrete situations to accurately evaluate this dimension, particularly when they are not direct observers of their child's interactions outside the family environment.

On the other hand, 21 parents (39.6%) expressed a positive perception, selecting the options "generally yes" and "clearly yes." These respondents appear to have identified signs of greater openness toward others, a more empathetic attitude, fewer conflicts, and better integration within peer groups. Such transformations may be associated with non-formal activities that encourage cooperation, role-taking, teamwork, or participation in community initiatives. The option "sometimes," selected by 12 parents (22.6%), reflects an intermediate position, indicating recognition of certain improvements without considering them sufficiently consistent or evident to formulate a definitive evaluation.

#### Question 13

Do you believe that non-formal education helps your child better understand their own emotions?

Responses to this question also reveal a relatively balanced distribution among negative, moderate, and positive perceptions. Thus, 11 parents (20.7%) believe that non-formal education does not contribute at all to a better understanding of one's own emotions, while 9 respondents (17%) consider that the support provided in this regard is limited. In contrast, 10 parents (18.9%) evaluated the effect as fairly significant, and 11 respondents (20.7%) considered it to be very significant. The intermediate option, "to some extent," was selected by 12 respondents (22.6%).

This distribution suggests that understanding one's own emotions represents a sensitive and difficult dimension to evaluate from an external perspective. The nearly uniform distribution of responses may reflect both diverse educational experiences and the absence of behavioural indicators that are easily identifiable by parents. Moreover, it is possible that certain non-formal activities did not explicitly include components focused on emotional reflection, which may reduce the visibility of potential effects in this direction.

#### Question 14

To what extent do you believe that non-formal activities stimulate your child's autonomy?

Autonomy represents an important dimension of personal development, and parents' responses indicate a balanced distribution of perceptions. Thus, 11 respondents (20.7%) believe that non-formal activities do not stimulate children's autonomy at all, while 10 parents (18.9%) consider that this contribution is limited. In contrast, 10 respondents (18.9%) believe that the impact is significant, and 11 parents (20.7%) evaluate it as very significant. The option "moderate" was selected by 11 respondents (20.7%).

This distribution suggests that perceptions of autonomy largely depend on the specific nature of the activities in which the child participates, the child's individual characteristics, and parents' expectations. Activities involving personal initiative, the completion of practical tasks, decision-making, or the assumption of concrete responsibilities are more likely to be associated with the development of autonomy. However, not all children consistently benefit from such educational contexts.

#### Question 15

How often do you discuss with your child the non-formal activities in which they participate?

This question provides relevant information regarding the degree of parental involvement in reflecting on and supporting children's non-formal educational experiences. Thus, 11 parents (20.7%) reported that they never discuss these activities with their child, while 9 respondents (17%) indicated that such conversations occur rarely. At the opposite end, 10 parents (18.9%) stated that they frequently discuss non-formal activities with their child, and 11 respondents (20.7%) indicated that they do so very often. The most frequently selected option was "sometimes," chosen by 12 parents (22.6%).

The results suggest that for a significant portion of the sample, discussions about non-formal activities occur occasionally or infrequently. This situation may also influence parents' ability to accurately assess the real impact of these experiences on their child's development. Consistent communication between parent and child may represent an important factor in recognizing progress, supporting reflection on lived experiences, and reinforcing their educational impact.

#### Question 16

Do you observe an improvement in your child's decision-making ability following involvement in these activities?

Decision-making ability represents an indicator of autonomy and functional maturation in children. The distribution of responses again highlights a relatively balanced pattern. Thus, 11 parents (20.7%) believe that there is no improvement, while 9 respondents (17%) consider that the observed progress is limited. At the same time, 12 parents (22.6%) indicated that such changes occur only sometimes, 10 respondents (18.9%) believe that improvement is generally noticeable, and 11 parents (20.7%) consider it to be clear and significant.

The results show that almost 40% of parents perceive a clear strengthening of their child's decision-making ability, while a similar proportion does not confirm the existence of such changes. This variation may be explained by the specific nature of the non-formal activities in which children were involved. Activities involving choice, planning, problem-solving, or assuming responsibility for the consequences of decisions are more likely to contribute to the development of this competence than activities that are predominantly passive or recreational.

#### Question 17

How valuable do you consider the support of teachers in promoting non-formal education?

Parents' perceptions regarding the role of teachers in supporting non-formal education are relevant for understanding the relationship between school and family in promoting this type of learning. Thus, 11 parents (20.7%) considered teachers' support to be not valuable at all, 9 respondents (17%) evaluated it as slightly valuable, while 11 parents (20.7%) selected each of the following options: "moderately valuable," "valuable," and "very valuable."

This symmetrical distribution suggests the existence of clearly divided opinions among respondents. Approximately 40% of parents consider teachers' support to be valuable or very valuable, which may reflect teachers' involvement in extracurricular projects, encouragement of children's participation, or support for complementary educational initiatives. At the same time, a similar proportion of respondents who perceive this support as limited or nonexistent may indicate communication gaps between school and family or limited teacher involvement in promoting non-formal education in certain contexts.

#### Question 18

Do non-formal activities contribute to the reduction of aggressive behaviors?

This question addresses an important aspect of emotional balance and social adaptation. A total of 11 parents (20.7%) believe that non-formal activities do not contribute at all to reducing aggressive behavior, while 9 respondents (17%) consider that the influence is very limited. At the

same time, 12 parents (22.6%) selected the option “sometimes,” 10 respondents (18.9%) perceived a considerable impact, and 11 parents (20.7%) evaluated the influence as very strong.

The results indicate a relatively balanced distribution between parents who recognize positive effects and those who do not observe significant changes. This perception may depend both on the child’s behavior prior to participation in non-formal activities and on the nature of the activities carried out. Activities that emphasize cooperation, emotional self-regulation, and the development of empathy may have more visible effects on reducing aggressiveness than activities that are individual or lack relational components.

#### Question 19

Does your child’s participation in non-formal activities provide opportunities to make new friends?

The formation of friendships represents a central aspect of socialization during childhood. Parents’ responses also indicate a balanced distribution in this case. Thus, 11 respondents (20.7%) stated that these activities never provide opportunities for forming new friendships, while 10 parents (18.9%) selected the option “rarely.” At the same time, 11 respondents (20.7%) considered that this occurs sometimes, 10 parents (18.9%) indicated the option “usually,” and 11 parents (20.7%) stated that such opportunities always arise.

The results suggest that non-formal activities are perceived as having real potential to facilitate social connections, although the effectiveness of this process appears to depend on the frequency of participation, the duration of activities, and their specific nature.

#### Question 20

Do you agree with the integration of more non-formal activities into the school program?

This question aimed to identify parents’ attitudes toward the possible expansion of non-formal activities within the school curriculum. The distribution of responses also indicates a relatively balanced structure. Thus, 11 parents (20.7%) stated that they do not agree with such integration, while 9 respondents (17%) indicated that they are rather opposed to it. The neutral option was selected by 12 parents (22.6%), while 21 respondents (39.6%) declared that they agree or strongly agree with integrating a greater number of non-formal activities into the school program.

### Results

The results show that, although an important segment of parents expresses reservations or neutrality, a significant proportion supports the expansion of this type of activity. This openness may reflect

recognition of the value of non-formal education in children's holistic development, as well as the need to develop more flexible educational models that better respond to students' real needs.

### **Examples of Changes Observed by Parents in Children's Socio-Emotional Behaviors**

The analysis of the responses collected through the questionnaire administered to the 53 parents highlights a series of observations regarding possible changes in children's socio-emotional behaviors following participation in non-formal activities. Without transforming these observations into causal conclusions or absolute generalizations, they allow the identification of certain developmental tendencies perceived by the respondents.

A first aspect noted by parents refers to a greater openness of children toward social interaction, particularly in contexts involving interaction with peers or friendship groups. Collaborative extracurricular activities, such as workshops, team projects, or role-playing activities, were associated with an increased initiative in communication and a greater willingness to engage socially. In this context, some parents observed a stronger tendency among children to express their opinions freely, yet respectfully, and to adapt more easily to collective situations.

Within the sphere of social interaction, several respondents also noticed an improvement in children's ability to cooperate, work in teams, and negotiate roles or responsibilities within shared activities. These developments appear to be particularly associated with participation in collaborative educational projects, such as those organized within school clubs or thematic camps. In such contexts, children seem to have learned to manage frustrations generated by differences of opinion more effectively and to value the contributions of other group members.

The responses also suggest that participation in non-formal activities may support the development of emotional self-regulation, especially in the case of children who previously experienced difficulties in controlling impulses or expressing emotional states appropriately. Some parents reported a reduction in episodes of anger, a greater capacity for self-calming, and an increased tendency to verbalize emotions rather than express them through maladaptive behaviors. However, these transformations were not observed uniformly, suggesting that perceived effects may vary depending on the child's personality, the type of activities involved, and the consistency of participation.

With regard to empathy and prosocial behaviors, a significant number of parents observed an increased concern among children for the emotional states of others, as well as a more tolerant attitude toward peers with different opinions, behaviors, or personal characteristics. These changes were frequently associated with participation in volunteer activities or educational projects focused on social themes, in which children were exposed to the diversity of human experiences. Such contexts appear to have fostered the consolidation of values such as mutual respect, acceptance of differences, and compassion.

Several parents also mentioned changes related to the assumption of responsibilities and the child's capacity for decision-making. They observed greater autonomy in organizing time, choosing activities, or completing everyday tasks. Due to its flexible nature and its emphasis on active participation, non-formal education can create contexts in which children are encouraged to initiate actions, make decisions, and assume the consequences of their choices, thereby contributing to the development of reflective thinking and a sense of self-efficacy.

Another aspect highlighted by respondents concerns an increase in self-confidence, particularly following participation in artistic, sports, or personal development activities. This development was reflected in behaviors such as assuming leadership roles within groups, expressing opinions more clearly, and showing willingness to participate in public activities such as performances, competitions, or exhibitions. Parents associated these manifestations both with the positive feedback received from activity coordinators and with children's experiences of success in achieving personal goals.

Alongside these positive aspects, some parents expressed reservations or indicated the absence of clearly observable changes in children's socio-emotional behaviors. These observations were expressed either in terms of stagnation or through cautious assessments suggesting improvements that are difficult to define precisely. Such responses may reflect either limited parental contact with their children's non-formal activities or the difficulty of systematically observing behavioral developments. In some cases, parents mentioned that the nature of the activities in which children participated did not favor the clear expression of socio-emotional dimensions, particularly when those activities were predominantly recreational and were not accompanied by reflection or educational guidance.

### **Conclusions**

The research aimed to investigate the role of non-formal education in supporting the socio-emotional development of primary school students, drawing both on theoretical perspectives from the specialized

literature and on empirical data obtained through the administration of a questionnaire to a sample of 53 parents. The analysis of the results allows the formulation of relevant conclusions regarding parental perceptions, the areas in which non-formal education is considered beneficial, and the conditions that influence the effectiveness of this type of educational intervention.

The collected data indicate that, from the parents' perspective, the most visible changes associated with children's participation in non-formal activities occur in the areas of social interaction, cooperation, and the development of self-confidence. A significant number of respondents reported that children demonstrate a greater ability to interact with others, communicate more freely within groups, participate in collective activities, and assume roles or responsibilities within the projects in which they are involved. These manifestations may be considered indicators of favorable socio-emotional development and improved adaptation to the demands of group life.

At the same time, parents' responses suggest that non-formal education can contribute to the development of emotional intelligence, particularly by encouraging the appropriate expression of emotions and supporting affective self-regulation. Parents who observed improvements in children's ability to identify, express, or manage emotions describe an educational context that offers opportunities for reflection, interaction, and experiential learning. In this respect, non-formal activities appear to complement formal education by valuing formative dimensions that are not always sufficiently developed within the traditional curriculum.

Empathy and tolerance also emerge as dimensions supported by participation in non-formal activities, even though the results do not indicate a categorical predominance. The fact that a significant proportion of parents noticed a more open attitude toward others, greater acceptance of differences, and increased sensitivity to the needs of others indicates the considerable potential of non-formal education in fostering prosocial values. This aspect is particularly relevant in contemporary educational and social contexts characterized by diversity, where relational competencies and the capacity for harmonious coexistence are increasingly important.

The results of the research also reveal that autonomy, decision-making ability, and the assumption of responsibilities are areas in which parents have identified gradual but meaningful progress. Participation in activities that involve initiative, organization, choice, and reflection upon one's actions appears to support the development of essential life skills. When children are actively engaged in flexible and stimulating educational contexts, they can strengthen their capacity to act

independently, make decisions, and assume responsibility for the consequences of their choices.

Another relevant finding concerns communication between parents and children regarding non-formal activities. The fact that a significant proportion of parents report frequently discussing these experiences with their children indicates a considerable level of parental involvement. This openness to dialogue may play an important role in reinforcing the educational effects of non-formal activities, as it facilitates children's reflection on their experiences and contributes to integrating them into their personal development process.

Overall, the results support the hypothesis that non-formal education can significantly contribute to the development of children's socio-emotional skills. However, this contribution is neither uniform nor independent of other factors. The effects perceived by parents appear to be influenced by the frequency of participation, the quality and relevance of the activities, the nature of the educational intervention, and the family and social context in which the child develops. Therefore, mere participation in non-formal activities does not automatically guarantee consistent formative effects; it is necessary for these activities to be well structured, age-appropriate, and accompanied by processes of reflection and feedback.

Parents' perceptions regarding the role of teachers in supporting non-formal education also reveal a mixed situation. Although a significant proportion of respondents consider teachers' support to be valuable, a comparable percentage does not perceive sufficient teacher involvement in promoting or supporting non-formal activities. This finding suggests the need to strengthen the relationship between school, family, and non-formal educational environments, so that students can benefit from a coherent and integrated educational framework.

The results also indicate the possibility of an indirect contribution of non-formal education to the reduction of aggressive behaviors, even though this dimension was not perceived uniformly by respondents. Observations reported by a significant group of parents suggest that activities based on cooperation, empathy, self-regulation, and shared rules may create favorable contexts for reducing negative behavioral manifestations and strengthening emotional balance.

In conclusion, non-formal education emerges as a valuable component of children's holistic development, extending beyond the status of a simple recreational alternative to formal education. It provides authentic contexts for expression, reflection, cooperation, and experimentation that can support the development of competencies essential for personal and social life. Although it does not replace

formal education, non-formal education complements its functions and contributes to broadening children's formative horizons.

In this respect, it is necessary to strengthen collaboration between schools, families, and the actors involved in providing non-formal education. At the same time, educational policies should support the development of high-quality, accessible, and relevant non-formal programs, as well as the adequate training of the personnel involved in their implementation. Only through an integrated approach centered on the real needs of the child can an educational model be developed that equally values the cognitive, emotional, relational, and social dimensions of human development.

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