Impact of Socio-Emotional Competencies on School Coexistence in Rural Educational Institutions of the Municipality of Guaca, Colombia

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Abstract

Keywords: Socio-emotional competencies; School coexistence; Emotional education; Rural education; Adolescence.

This article reports the findings of a research study aimed at analyzing the influence of socio-emotional competencies on school coexistence among sixth-grade students in the rural educational context of Guaca, Santander, Colombia. The research was conducted using a qualitative approach, through a flexible, non-experimental field design of a cross-sectional nature, grounded in a pragmatic perspective that enabled the analysis of the experiences, perceptions, and everyday practices of the participating students. Data collection employed structured interviews, non-participant observation, and content analysis, which made it possible to conduct the analysis through methodological triangulation. The results revealed initial difficulties in emotional regulation, autonomous conflict resolution, social inclusion, and assertive communication, which foster interpersonal conflicts and affect the school climate. However, competencies such as empathy, cooperation, and interpersonal skills were identified as promoting more respectful, supportive, and constructive interactions. It is concluded that socio-emotional competencies play a decisive role in the school climate and contribute to the construction of an environment conducive to the holistic development of students; therefore, the relevance of integrating socio-emotional education into institutional policies is confirmed.

INTRODUCTION

The development of socio-emotional competencies occupies a central position in 21st-century education, serving as an indispensable component in the holistic formation of students and the construction of more inclusive, safe, and harmonious learning environments. These competencies, defined as the ability to identify, understand, and

regulate one's own emotions, as well as to recognize and respond empathically to the emotions of others, enhance the quality of interpersonal relationships, school climate, and peaceful conflict resolution (Levin & Segev, 2023). Socio-emotional education is thus configured not as a complementary element, but as an essential pillar for achieving quality education.

Socio-emotional competencies are associated with a decrease in problematic behaviors, a significant improvement in school coexistence, and greater student engagement with educational processes (Conner et al., 2022). These findings reinforce the necessity of integrating emotional and social development into pedagogical practices, recognizing school coexistence as a dynamic relational process built through daily interactions and the adequate management of emotions within the school context (Cruz-Picón & Hernández, 2024).

Consequently, difficulties in school coexistence are linked to deficiencies in students' socio-emotional competencies and a lack of training in emotional self-regulation, assertive communication, and responsible decision-making, skills that are necessary for interacting with others and facing challenging situations (Retto-López et al., 2024). Thus, a need arises for classroom-based training in these skills to promote holistic education and a more harmonious and respectful learning environment (Sanmartín & Tapia, 2023).

In the Colombian context, the Ministry of National Education has highlighted the importance of promoting programs aimed at strengthening socio-emotional skills, recognizing that school coexistence is a determining factor in student retention, psychological well-being, and the prevention of risk behaviors (Ministerio de Educación Nacional de Colombia, 2022). However, various national studies indicate that problems regarding school coexistence are related to limitations in students' socio-emotional development, particularly in institutions located in rural contexts or conditions of social vulnerability (Flores-Suárez & Herrera-Beltrán, 2021).

According to Olivares et al. (2021), the absence of structured and sustained socio-emotional education programs affects the persistence of interpersonal conflicts, difficulties in emotional self-regulation, and poor appropriation of coexistence norms. Added to this are the specific challenges of rural contexts, where socioeconomic conditions, limited teacher training opportunities, and weak institutional coordination hinder the effective implementation of pedagogical strategies oriented toward socio-emotional development.

From a regulatory standpoint, Colombia possesses a legal framework that supports the promotion of school coexistence and the holistic development of students. Notable among these are Law 1620 of 2013, which established the National System of School Coexistence and guides training for the exercise of human rights, sexual education, and the prevention of school violence (Law 1620, 2013), as well as Law 2503 of 2025, which establishes the Socio-emotional Education Chair (Cátedra de Educación Emocional) across all educational institutions in the country (Law 2503, 2025).

Nevertheless, a persistent gap remains between legal and institutional frameworks and their concrete application in daily pedagogical practices, limiting the real impact of these policies on school life. This situation underscores the need to analyze how such regulations are understood, appropriated, and implemented across different educational contexts (Sangacha-Aroca et al., 2025).

In this scenario, lower secondary education students, particularly those in transitional grades such as the sixth grade, face academic and personal transitions that demand pedagogical support focused on developing socio-emotional competencies to strengthen school coexistence (Naspiran de la Cruz, 2025). The municipality of Guaca, in the department of Santander, constitutes a relevant context for analyzing this issue, given

that its school population is characterized by limited socioeconomic conditions and the need to consolidate spaces for peaceful, participatory, and collaborative interaction.

The purpose of this study is to analyze the impact of socio-emotional competencies on the improvement of school coexistence, based on student perceptions, behavioral observation, and the analysis of legal and institutional frameworks guiding socio-emotional education. This research acquires theoretical relevance by deepening the understanding of socio-emotional processes that influence school coexistence, while simultaneously contributing to the strengthening of pedagogical strategies aimed at improving school climate and the holistic formation of students (Palacios & Ramírez, 2024).

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The research adopted the socio-critical paradigm and was conducted under a qualitative approach, utilizing a flexible, non-experimental, and cross-sectional field design. This design facilitated an understanding of students' daily experiences, perceptions, and practices regarding socio-emotional competencies and school coexistence within a rural educational context (Arias-Gonzáles & Covinos, 2021).

The population comprised lower secondary education students from the three rural educational institutions in the municipality of Guaca, Santander. A purposive sample was selected, consisting of sixth-grade students aged 11 to 15; these participants were chosen due to their academic transition status and the relevance of this developmental stage for socio-emotional growth.

The categories of analysis were established based on the theoretical framework and research objectives, including: school coexistence, socio-emotional competencies, legal and institutional frameworks, socio-emotional education strategies, and institutional improvement needs in rural settings. For data collection, structured interviews, non-participant observation, and documentary content analysis were employed. These techniques allowed for the gathering of information from diverse sources and perspectives.

Data processing was conducted through coding and categorization supported by ATLAS.ti software. The interpretation and analysis of the data were performed through methodological triangulation, which enabled the identification of patterns, similarities, and differences among the findings, thereby strengthening the validity and consistency of the study (Medina et al., 2023).

RESULTS

The results of this research study establish that socio-emotional competencies are significantly related to the school coexistence of students within the rural educational context. The findings revealed differentiated perceptions reflecting a duality in the school climate, emotional management, interpersonal skills, and the capacity for mediation and conflict resolution—aspects that directly influenced social interaction dynamics. The primary results are described below, organized according to the categories of analysis.

Perceptions of School Coexistence

**Figure 1** *Semantic network of the emerging category: Perception of school coexistence*

Source: Author's own elaboration (2025)

Both positive and negative perceptions of school coexistence were identified, associated with institutional aspects such as the quality of education and respectful treatment by teachers. Furthermore, students valued an academic atmosphere characterized by camaraderie and physical spaces—such as green areas and sports courts—which contribute to collaborative work and mutual support practices. These experiences fostered more harmonious interpersonal relationships and a positive appraisal of the school environment (Molina-Montes et al., 2023).

Conversely, recurring experiences of conflict were reported, linked to misunderstandings, the use of profanity, or specific cases of social exclusion in the classroom. These situations generate impulsive reactions and difficulties in emotional management. Such instances negatively influenced the perception of the school environment and generally required intervention by teachers and coordinators, consequently escalating into disciplinary processes (Ministerio de Salud y Protección Social, 2023).

Students' Socio-emotional Competencies

Figure 2 *Semantic network of the emerging category: Students' socio-emotional competencies*
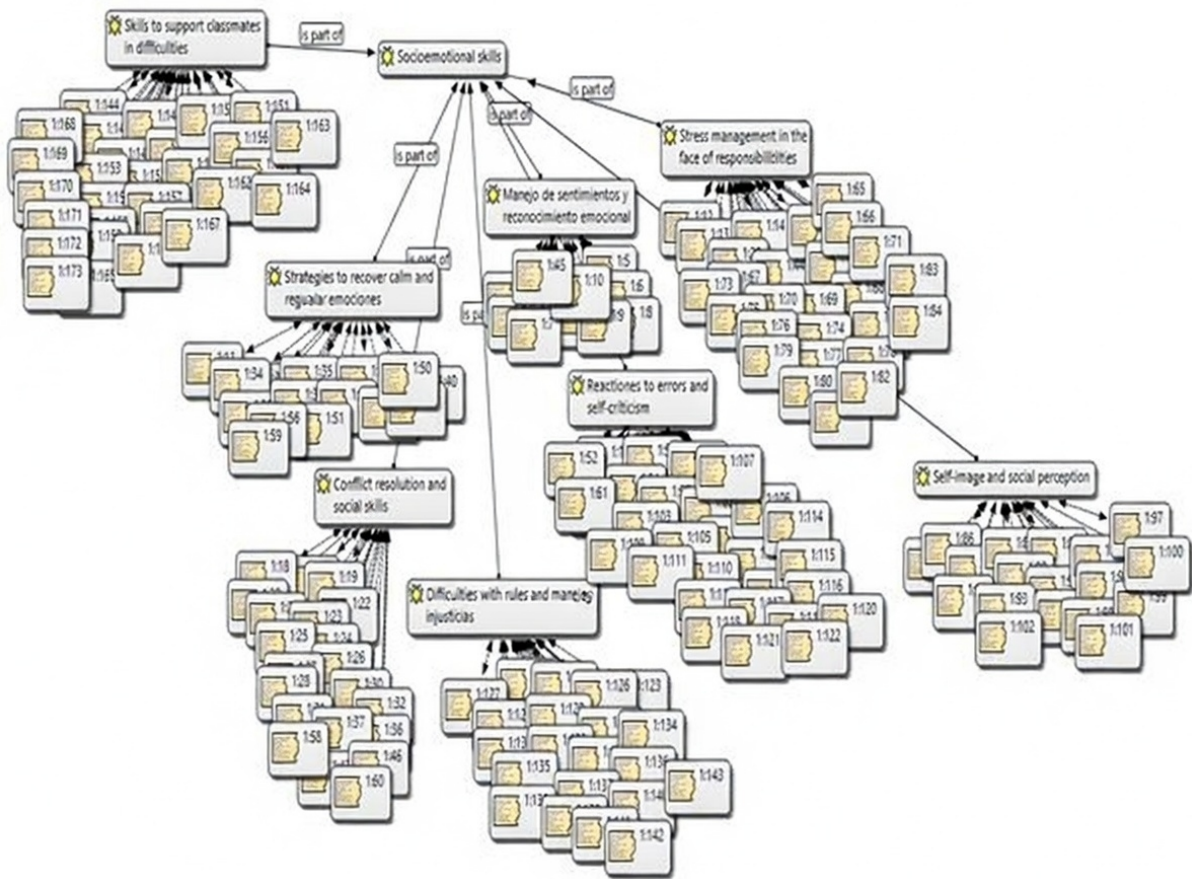
Source: Author's own elaboration (2025)

Regarding socio-emotional competencies, the results identified skills necessary for recognizing and regulating emotions, as well as strategies for regaining composure, such as breathing and counting exercises, essential for preventing conflict and maintaining healthy peer relationships (Jiménez-Muñoz et al., 2025). Some participants described negative sentiments regarding stress management in the face of academic responsibilities and their reactions to failure. Additionally, a negative response to authority and dissatisfaction with institutional norms were observed.

Students perceive themselves as both providers and recipients of peer support during difficult moments and academic activities. They exhibit empathy toward excluded peers and in situations of verbal or physical abuse; however, they expressed uncertainty regarding how to solve these problems beyond informing a teacher. This reflects an intention to mitigate and prevent conflict, alongside an initial level of empathy and solidarity (Bagea et al., 2023).

Evidence suggests a concern regarding peer perception, which may be defined as low self-esteem (Rodríguez Pérez et al., 2021). There is a notable level of frustration and sadness linked to the fear of failing tasks or making mistakes, as well as feelings of apathy or discouragement. These negative emotions, tied to self-imposed high standards and a sense of belonging, suggest a need for training in stress management and emotional coping to foster a more positive school experience (Schoon, 2021).

Difficulties were also evident in impulse control, the appropriate expression of emotions, and frustration tolerance. These limitations manifested as disruptive behaviors and frequent conflicts, affecting the dynamics of school coexistence. Although most students prefer avoidance as a strategy to prevent escalation or choose to seek a teacher's help, this reveals a deficit in emotional regulation and conflict resolution techniques (D'Amico & Geraci, 2023).

Contribution of Socio-emotional Competencies to School Coexistence

Figure 3 *Semantic network: Contribution of socio-emotional competencies to school coexistence*
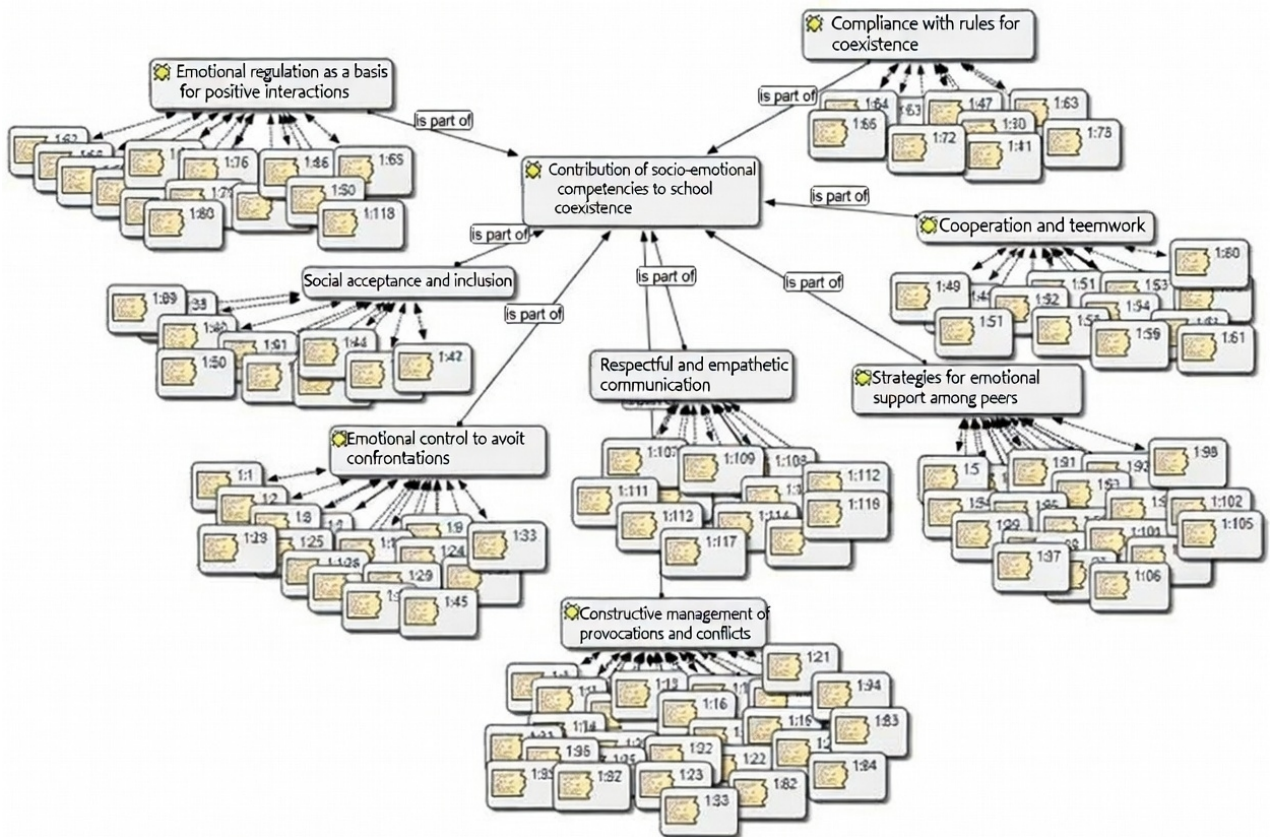
Source: Author's own elaboration (2025)

Analysis of socio-emotional competencies and their influence on school coexistence shows that these skills shape social dynamics and the general institutional climate. Specifically, they contribute to the proper management of provocations, the quality of responses to conflict, the implementation of peer emotional support strategies, and the strengthening of positive interactions through emotional regulation (Labrador et al., 2023).

Furthermore, these competencies influence cooperation, teamwork, respectful communication, empathy, social inclusion, and adherence to norms for healthy and productive coexistence. The findings indicated that socio-emotional competencies contribute significantly to school coexistence. Participants noted that adequate emotional management and assertive communication facilitated peaceful conflict resolution (Gao, 2024). Likewise, students with higher socio-emotional skills participate more constructively in school life; conversely, a lack of these competencies was associated with confrontation and exclusion.

Consequently, it is concluded that socio-emotional competencies significantly enhance school coexistence by facilitating emotional recognition, promoting peaceful resolution, and strengthening assertive communication and collaborative work. These skills do not merely prevent conflict; they build a respectful school environment essential for holistic student development and educational quality (Nicolau et al., 2024).

Legal and Institutional Frameworks for Socio-emotional Education Implementation

National and institutional legal frameworks related to school coexistence and socio-emotional education were identified, including Law 2383 of June 19, 2024; Law 2491 of July 23, 2025; and Law 1620 of 2013. These guidelines are integrated into the Institutional Educational Projects (PEI) and the School Coexistence Manuals, which regulate institutional life (Ministerio de Educación, 2020).

The analysis identified core aspects of socio-emotional education as part of holistic development, emphasizing that education must transcend the cognitive domain to integrate emotional, social, and behavioral competencies. Developing emotional awareness, self-regulation, empathy, and social skills is critical for coexistence (Klimenko et al., 2025).

However, results showed that these aspects were not always addressed systematically or articulately within pedagogical processes, often appearing as isolated exercises. Nevertheless, evidence demonstrates that the capacity to manage emotions and resolve conflicts produces positive changes in school coexistence, contributes to the prevention of risk behaviors, and enhances the overall school experience, impacting students at the academic, personal, familial, and community levels (Sanmartín-Ureña & Tapia Peralta, 2023).

Lines of Intervention and Implementation Stages in Socio-emotional Education

Figure 4 *Semantic network: Lines of intervention in socio-emotional education*
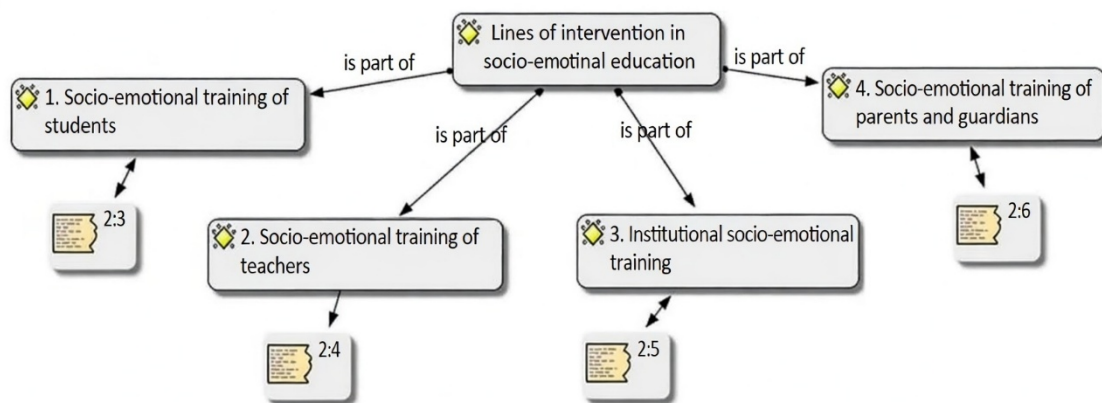
Source: Author's own elaboration (2025)

Lines of intervention in socio-emotional training have focused on preventive actions, psychosocial support, and emotional literacy for students, teachers, parents, and guardians. As argued by Domínguez-Alonso et al. (2022), the effective development of these skills is not the sole responsibility of students, as it depends on the articulated action of various stakeholders within the educational community. Furthermore, according to Hashemi et al. (2022), socio-emotional training is a continuous and, ideally, cross-curricular process that must be sustained throughout childhood and adolescence to achieve significant longitudinal results.

Regarding the implementation stages, it is essential to establish a diagnostic phase, followed by a design phase aligned with pedagogical guidelines and institutional policies. This is succeeded by an implementation stage that addresses the educational community as a whole, concluding with a monitoring stage to evaluate the program's impact (Ortiz-Mallegas & López, 2021).

Socio-emotional training programs must incorporate legal regulations and institutional policies concerning principles such as inclusion and a rights-based approach, as framed within the Institutional Educational Project (PEI). This ensures coherence with the

institution's mission and vision while extending coverage to all territories, including both urban and rural settings (Richardson & Langford, 2022).

Competencies for Development, Strategies, and Actions

Figure 5 *Competencies to be developed*
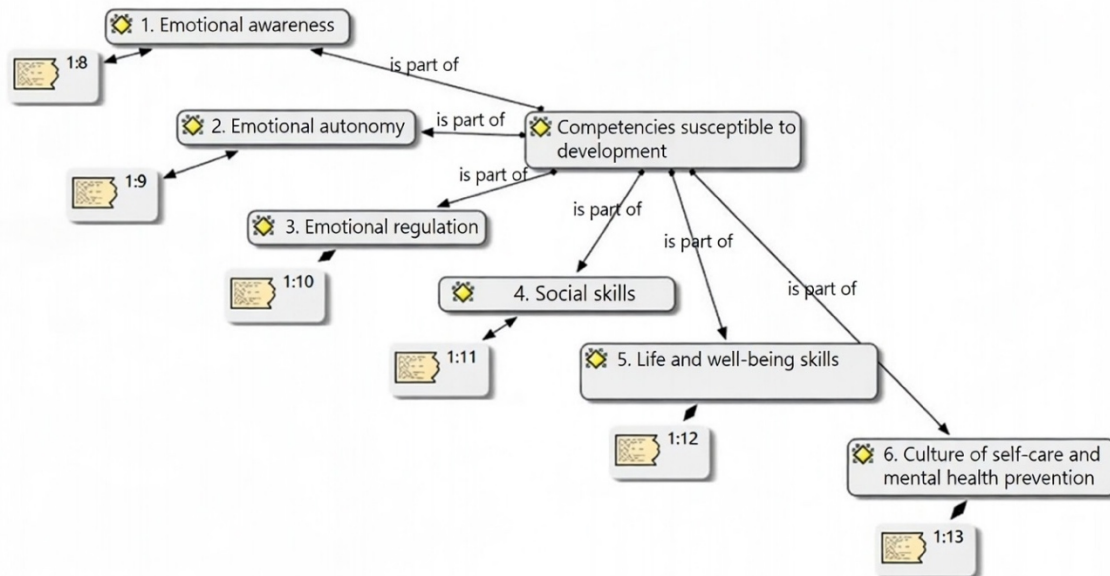
Source: Author's own elaboration (2025)

The findings identified priority competencies for development, including emotional awareness, autonomy, emotional regulation, social skills, life skills, and a culture of self-care and mental health prevention. Analysis suggests that these competencies directly influence interpersonal relationships and the quality of school coexistence, fostering the individual's holistic well-being and social adaptation (Deniz & Özgen, 2021).

In terms of strategies and actions, the implementation of institutional training spaces for the entire educational community is deemed necessary. These should focus on transversality (integration across subjects) and be directed at all educational levels with age-appropriate content. To achieve this, inclusive policies and strategies must be in place, alongside respective psychosocial care pathways, to promote student well-being in a holistic and sustainable manner (Collie & Ryan, 2025).

Needs for Improvement in School Coexistence

The findings revealed specific areas requiring improvement in school coexistence, based on students' perceptions of the educational environment and their lived experiences. A primary necessity is the strengthening of conflict management and prevention, particularly regarding the use of inappropriate language that often escalates into verbal and physical abuse. Consequently, it is essential to integrate these elements into training and prevention programs. There is also a recorded need for the socialization and revision of school regulations concerning the use of physical spaces and standards of conduct (Vásquez et al., 2025).

Furthermore, promoting a culture of inclusion is imperative, as it was identified as one of the core challenges expressed by participants. Given that the mental and physical health of every student is a priority (Franco & Gómez, 2021), the school must fulfill its mission of providing a safe environment for the learning and holistic development of adolescents.

Students' Training Needs in Socio-emotional Competencies

Regarding training requirements, the study addressed student difficulties in emotional regulation, social interaction, the enhancement of educational inclusion processes, and the promotion of institutional norms as tools for coexistence rather than instruments of repression. This shift aims to foster a sense of responsibility and institutional belonging (Sierra, 2025).

To address these needs, a Project-Based Learning (PBL) proposal is established. This framework aims to respond to training gaps through student leadership and active participation, promoting skills such as self-regulation, peaceful conflict resolution, the formation of a positive self-image, and the development of self-critical thinking. Additionally, the proposal focuses on managing stress and academic anxiety while fostering the practice of assertiveness, empathy, and mutual support (Engracia-Magallon et al., 2024).

DISCUSSION

Socio-emotional competencies contribute to the strengthening of school coexistence by fostering skills such as empathy, assertive communication, emotional self-regulation, and peaceful conflict resolution. These abilities enhance interpersonal relationships and improve the overall school climate. A primary aspect found in students' narratives is the ability to relate to others, as it facilitates cooperation, teamwork, and mutual support during challenging situations (Domínguez-Alonso et al., 2022).

Furthermore, from the students' perspective, the importance of maintaining positive peer relationships and the fundamental need to belong to a group, to be respected and valued, is underscored. As Rivera-Arrieta (2025) indicates, the school emerges as a critical setting for the strengthening of competencies and personal validation, particularly in rural contexts where socialization opportunities are concentrated within the educational environment. This finding suggests that relational skills not only influence the quality of interactions but also contribute to the recognition of the "other" and a sense of belonging within the peer group.

Consequently, another factor to consider is the social environment, which serves as emotional support; thus, fellowship and respectful treatment are key to constructing friendships and bolstering self-esteem (Linder et al., 2022). Regarding challenges in school coexistence and conflict management, instances of fighting, mistreatment, or verbal and physical aggression are evident, alongside situations of social exclusion. This generates significant concern, as each incident affects the emotional and mental health of those involved. Such situations must be addressed by the institution through both individual and group interventions aimed at preventing risk factors and promoting positive treatment (Echeverry et al., 2024).

The incorporation of strategies aimed at strengthening socio-emotional competencies in educational institutions must respond to the cultural and social particularities of the territory. Moreover, it should promote the participation of various stakeholders within the educational community to contribute to holistic development and the construction of more inclusive and secure school environments (Zych & Ortega-Ruiz, 2021).

This study allowed for an understanding of students' perceptions regarding school coexistence, where they acknowledge the necessity of dialogue, respect, and mutual aid, despite expressing difficulties in applying these values when faced with provocation. Therefore, the discrepancy between recognizing what is correct and putting it into practice suggests a need to implement active pedagogical strategies that favor socio-emotional learning through experience, reflection, and social interaction, especially in rural contexts where the school plays a central role in student formation (Leal-Leal et al., 2023).

Regarding assertive communication, it was established that students struggle to manage their emotions and express disagreements peacefully, frequently resorting to aggressive verbal expressions or silence as a conflict avoidance mechanism. Additionally, offensive and coarse language has become normalized within their common lexicon. This situation limits the peaceful resolution of disagreements and encourages the accumulation of tension among peers. From this perspective, the results align with Flórez and Prado (2021), who argue that deficiencies in communication skills negatively impact school coexistence.

Similarly, the role of the teacher as a mediator and promoter of values is highlighted. Students report perceiving the school as a safe space where the teacher is a respected figure who fosters an environment conducive to personal growth and meaningful learning. This is consistent with Retto-López et al. (2024), who propose the teacher-student relationship as a key factor in the holistic development and learning of students.

Consequently, teacher training remains indispensable, following Lara-Valle (2023), who establishes that the teacher is a fundamental part of mediation and training processes for quality education. Furthermore, the importance of the physical environment and learning spaces on students' emotional well-being is emphasized; aspects such as the rural landscape, contact with animals, and open spaces create an environment favorable to learning and act as a protective factor for school coexistence (Lozano-Fernández et al., 2022).

In this context, inclusion does not merely refer to access or retention within the educational system; rather, it is constructed through daily interactions and the dynamics of coexistence generated in the school environment. Thus, skills such as empathy, respect for diversity, and assertive communication emerge to promote inclusive practices within the classroom. The findings show that students who successfully recognize the emotions and perspectives of their peers demonstrate a greater willingness to accept differences and participate in cooperative dynamics, contributing to a reduction in social isolation. These results align with the framework provided by Moreno-Tallón & Muntaner-Guasp (2025), noting that inclusion is necessary to consolidate an equitable community and quality education.

Likewise, cooperation and collaborative work are identified as key skills for building inclusive school environments. Student narratives reveal that activities promoting joint participation facilitate the integration of peers with different learning paces, communication styles, or personal characteristics. Within this framework, cooperation fosters a sense of belonging and strengthens group cohesion—aspects that are particularly relevant in rural contexts where the school serves as a central hub for socialization (Mestizo, 2024).

Finally, emotional self-regulation and peaceful conflict resolution constitute essential skills for school inclusion. The results indicate that difficulties in managing emotions such as anger or frustration often lead to impulsive reactions that harm coexistence and generate exclusionary dynamics. Conversely, when students possess the tools to manage their emotions and engage in dialogue regarding disagreements, more equitable and respectful relationships are fostered, positively impacting inclusion within the group (Moreno-Tallón & Muntaner-Guasp, 2025).

CONCLUSIONS

The study concludes that socio-emotional competencies constitute a determinant factor in improving school coexistence within rural educational contexts. Strengthening skills such as self-regulation, empathy, and conflict resolution can influence the reduction of

aggressive behaviors and the construction of respectful relationships among students, thereby promoting inclusion and environments of well-being within the classroom.

Findings revealed specific training needs and systemic issues affecting students at both individual and group levels that require precise and continuous attention. This necessitates institutional policies for the prevention of risk situations, as well as the reinforcement of strategies aimed at regaining composure and emotional regulation, while simultaneously fostering cooperation and teamwork.

It is recommended that educational institutions systematically integrate socio-emotional education programs to enhance the holistic development of adolescents and foster school environments based on respect, equity, and collaboration. These findings demonstrate that socio-emotional training is an effective strategy for addressing the challenges of education in territories with vulnerable socioeconomic conditions, while concurrently promoting essential life skills.

CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the development or disclosure of the research results.

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