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SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL LEARNING AS A FACTOR IN CREATING A SAFE AND SUPPORTIVE EDUCATIONAL ENVIRONMENT IN PRIMARY SCHOOL

Abstract. The article provides a thorough analysis of the problem. The essence of the concepts of "social-emotional learning", "safe educational environment", "supportive educational environment" is revealed. The role of social-emotional learning in creating a safe and supportive educational environment in primary school is determined.

It was found that the integration of socio-emotional learning into the educational process meets the requirements of the New Ukrainian School, promotes the formation of self-regulation, empathy, cooperation skills and responsible decision-making, significantly increases the academic performance of students, reduces the level of conflict and improves psychological well-being.

The results of scientific and theoretical analysis and practical examples of effective strategies for developing socio-emotional competencies of primary school students are presented: "emotional minutes", morning meetings, positive discipline, partnership interaction with parents, digital tools of emotional support. It is noted that the introduction of elements of socio-emotional learning in primary school contributes to the harmonious combination of pedagogical, psychological and social factors, ensuring the formation of a holistic personality adapted to modern challenges.

The purpose of the study is to theoretically substantiate and determine the role of social-emotional learning as a key factor in creating a safe and supportive educational environment in elementary school.

Research methods - analysis and synthesis method, systemic method, generalization method. It was concluded that the systematic implementation of socio-emotional learning increases the psychological resilience of primary school students, improves the quality of interaction in the educational environment, and provides conditions for their successful academic and social adaptation in the face of modern challenges.

Ключові слова: socio-emotional learning, socio-emotional skills, principles of socio-emotional learning (self-awareness, self-regulation, social awareness, interaction skills, responsible decision-making), educational environment, safe educational environment, supportive educational environment, primary school students.

СОЦІАЛЬНО-ЕМОЦІЙНЕ НАВЧАННЯ ЯК ЧИННИК СТВОРЕННЯ БЕЗПЕЧНОГО ТА ПІДТРИМУВАЛЬНОГО ОСВІТНЬОГО СЕРЕДОВИЩА В ПОЧАТКОВІЙ ШКОЛІ

Анотація. У статті здійснено ґрунтовний аналіз означеної проблеми. Розкрито сутність понять «соціально-емоційне навчання», «безпечне освітнє середовище», «підтримувальне освітнє середовище». Визначено роль соціально-емоційного навчання у створенні безпечного та підтримувального освітнього середовища у початковій школі.

З'ясовано, що інтеграція соціально-емоційного навчання у освітній процес відповідає вимогам Нової української школи, сприяє формуванню саморегуляції, емпатії, навичок співпраці й відповідального прийняття рішень, суттєво підвищує академічні результати здобувачів освіти, знижує рівень конфліктності та сприяє покращенню психологічного благополуччя.

Представлено результати науково-теоретичного аналізу та практичні приклади ефективних стратегій створення безпечного та підтримувального освітнього середовища в початковій школі, а також розвитку соціально-емоційних компетентностей здобувачів початкової освіти: «емоційні хвилинки», ранкові зустрічі, позитивна дисципліна, партнерська взаємодія з батьками, цифрові інструменти емоційної підтримки. Відзначено, що впровадження елементів соціально-емоційного навчання у початковій школі сприяє гармонійному поєднанню педагогічних, психологічних та соціальних чинників, забезпечуючи формування цілісної, адаптованої до сучасних викликів особистості.

Мета дослідження – теоретично обґрунтувати та визначити роль соціально-емоційного навчання як ключового чинника створення безпечного й підтримувального освітнього середовища в початковій школі.

Методи дослідження – метод аналізу й синтезу, системний метод, метод узагальнення.

Зроблено висновки, що системне впровадження соціально-емоційного навчання підвищує психологічну стійкість здобувачів початкової освіти, покращує якість взаємодії в освітньому середовищі та забезпечує умови для їхньої успішної академічної й соціальної адаптації в умовах сучасних викликів.

Keywords: соціально-емоційне навчання, соціально-емоційні навички, принципи соціально-емоційного навчання (самоусвідомлення, саморегуляція, соціальна обізнаність, навички взаємодії, відповідальне прийняття рішень), освітнє середовище, безпечне освітнє середовище, підтримувальне освітнє середовище, здобувачі початкової освіти.

INTRODUCTION

The problem formulation. The realities of the modern world, the rapid transformation of Ukrainian society, and the struggle of Ukrainians for Freedom and Independence in the Russian-Ukrainian war, which has been ongoing on the territory of Ukraine for the fourth year, as well as learning amid air-raid alerts, necessitate awareness of the importance of developing social and emotional skills of the individual, also known as life skills (Tsiuniak, O. P., Dovbenko, S. Yu., 2022, pp. 66–69). The consequences of war—particularly stressful situations, uncertainty, experiences of loss, and changes in the familiar educational environment—create barriers to learning and social interaction for all participants in the educational process.

In this context, social and emotional learning (SEL) acquires particular significance, as it is aimed at developing skills of self-regulation, empathy, effective communication, and constructive conflict resolution. Therefore, there is a need for scientific and theoretical substantiation of social and emotional learning as a key factor in creating a safe and supportive educational environment in primary school, in which learners feel protected, are able to trust adults and peers in interaction, and have opportunities for holistic development of their social and emotional competencies, contributing to successful academic and social adaptation.

Analysis of recent research and publications. The issue of developing social and emotional skills has been discussed by foreign scholars (D. Goleman, A. Duckworth, L. Darling-Hammond, R. Davidson, C. Dweck, A. J. Lee, K. Kasel, M. Kohlberg, M. Rosenberg, C. Steiner-Adair, and others). The problematics of social and emotional learning has become one of the most popular worldwide as a response to changes in labor market requirements and the social demand for the importance of developing social and emotional skills for education and life success. Daniel Goleman, the author of Emotional Intelligence and one of the leading popularizers of the concept of emotional intelligence, studied how emotional literacy affects success and relationships and emphasized the importance of developing emotional skills in educational institutions. Karen Kessel, Executive Director of the organization engaged in research and implementation of social and emotional learning in schools CASEL (Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning) actively promotes SEL, develops standards, and provides practical resources for teachers and administrators. Richard Davidson is a neuroscientist who studies the relationship between emotions, the brain, and learning, as well as how the emotional environment affects brain development in children and adults. Linda Darling-Hammond is an educational researcher who focuses on integrating social and emotional practices into the educational process and studies how teacher preparation in the field of SEL contributes to creating a supportive school environment.

The prospects and possibilities of implementing social and emotional learning in the New Ukrainian School have been addressed in the works of T. Vodolazka, L. Hrynevych, O. Hloba, T. Drozhzhyna, O. Matviienko, and M. Khymych. N. Duzhyk examines the basic concepts of social and emotional learning and its main objectives. The impact of social and emotional learning on the modern educational process in higher education institutions of Ukraine is studied by V. Panchenko.

AIM AND TASKS RESEARCH

The purpose of the study is to theoretically substantiate and determine the role of social and emotional learning as a key factor in creating a safe and supportive educational environment in primary school.

RESEARCH METHODS

Research methods include analysis and synthesis, the systemic method, and the method of generalization.

RESULTS OF THE RESEARCH

Creating a safe and supportive educational environment in primary school is one of the key objectives of modern Ukrainian education. The Law of Ukraine "On Education" (2017) defines the safety of the educational environment as one of the main requirements for organizing the educational process, emphasizing the need to ensure psychological

comfort and prevent violence, discrimination, and any forms of humiliation of learners' dignity (Law of Ukraine "On Education", Article 1).

The Concept of the "New Ukrainian School" (2016) emphasizes the importance of developing emotional intelligence, cooperation skills, self-regulation, and non-violent communication as components of forming key competencies of learners (Concept of the "New Ukrainian School", 2016). The State Standard of Primary Education (2018) contains a requirement for the purposeful development of social and emotional skills as a basis for effective interaction and successful adaptation of pupils within the group (State Standard of Primary Education).

However, the experience of organizing the educational process in primary school indicates the presence of a number of problems that complicate the creation of a safe and supportive educational environment. These include an insufficient level of development of social and emotional skills among primary school learners, manifested in difficulties with self-regulation, constructive conflict resolution, and establishing positive interaction with peers. In addition, there is a need to establish effective interaction between school and family, since the consistency of educational influences and shared responsibility of adults ensure the sustainability of a child's social and emotional development and contribute to the formation of a supportive educational environment.

It should be noted that the psychological consequences of war for children are no less threatening than the physical ones. Children who experience military conflict are significantly more likely to face anxiety disorders, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder (Sliusarevskyi, 2022). Studies by H. Rozlutska (2023) and O. Yatsyna (2022) confirm that war-related psychotraumas have a significant negative impact on pupils' mental health: the duration of the conflict correlates with the intensity of psychological symptoms such as irritability, apathy, and loss of interest in learning activities.

In this context, social and emotional learning becomes especially relevant and is viewed as a comprehensive pedagogical technology aimed at developing the ability to recognize and regulate one's own emotions, build positive relationships, make responsible decisions, and interact constructively with others.

The concept of social and emotional learning entered educational discourse relatively recently but has quickly gained relevance in international practice. Within the CASEL framework (Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning), the key components of social and emotional competence are self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making (CASEL, 2025). The development of these competencies underlies most SEL programs and determines their effectiveness in creating a safe, supportive, and learning-conducive educational environment. A number of international studies (CASEL, OECD) confirm that social and emotional learning significantly improves academic outcomes, reduces conflict levels, and contributes to improved psychological well-being.

In contemporary scientific and pedagogical sources, social and emotional learning is considered an innovative approach aimed at developing so-called "soft skills" among learners, including effective communication, empathy, emotional self-management, understanding others' feelings, teamwork, as well as creative and critical thinking.

T. Vodolazka notes that social and emotional learning is a process of forming knowledge, skills, and value orientations that ensure effective recognition and regulation of emotions, establishment of positive interpersonal relationships, and responsible decision-making in interaction with the social environment (Vodolazka, T., 2024, pp. 68–71). N. Duzhyk understands social and emotional learning as an approach to education focused on developing learners' skills that influence self-awareness, communication abilities, emotion regulation, empathy, and decision-making (Duzhyk, N., 2020, pp. 186–192).

Under the conditions of implementing the New Ukrainian School reform, general secondary education institutions are beginning to systematically integrate elements of social and emotional learning into everyday practice, which corresponds to the competency-based approach and societal demand for educating individuals capable of cooperation, tolerance, and self-regulation. We believe that such integration contributes to the formation of a safe and supportive educational environment, which is especially important in modern socio-psychological conditions, particularly in wartime.

Based on the theoretical analysis of the outlined problem, we identify a number of innovative strategies for creating a safe and supportive educational environment in primary school, the implementation of which demonstrates their effectiveness and practical significance.

In our opinion, an important strategy is the integration of social and emotional learning into the content of all subjects and educational areas. The practical experience of primary school teacher Liubov Hrytsyshyn of the Knyahynytskyi Lyceum of the Rohatyn City Council convincingly demonstrates the effectiveness of this approach. For example, Liubov Bohdanivna offers primary school learners "emotional minutes" before reading a text, during which pupils identify their emotional state using a "feelings scale." In language and literature lessons, while discussing literary works, she poses questions that encourage younger pupils to identify and analyze the emotions of characters: "What did the character feel? Why? How would you act in their place?" This promotes the development of empathy and reflection.

In the teacher's practical activities, the implementation of the mathematics educational area is often combined with the development of social skills: pair work involves role distribution, mutual support, and joint problem-solving. After completing the task, Liubov Bohdanivna initiates discussion during which pupils analyze how they interacted in

pairs, what helped them understand each other, which cooperation strategies were most effective, and express their feelings about the collaborative process. Obviously, this contributes to the development of reflective skills, empathy, and the ability to resolve conflicts constructively.

Equally important is the strategy of implementing positive discipline instead of authoritarian approaches, which increases the level of trust between the teacher and learners. L. Hrytsyshyn implements this strategy through jointly formulating classroom rules with pupils, concluding "cooperation agreements," and conducting constructive individual conversations that help primary school learners understand the consequences of their actions and develop responsibility and mutual support skills.

In our conviction, modeling a benevolent psychological atmosphere is a key strategy for creating a safe and supportive educational environment in primary school. In the practice of L. Hrytsyshyn, this strategy is realized through morning meetings during which pupils have the opportunity to share their mood, discuss positive events, express support for one another, and establish friendly contact at the beginning of the school day. The teacher uses exercises for identifying emotions ("Mood Colors," "My Emotional Tree," etc.) and short interaction circles that create an atmosphere of safety, trust, and support.

In light of the outlined problem, partnership interaction with parents is essential. L. Hrytsyshyn actively involves parents in joint projects ("Kindness Week," "Together for Emotional Well-being," "Marathon of Good Deeds," "Warmth of Family Hearts," "Partnership for the Child"), conducts consultations and informational meetings on the development of emotional literacy of primary school pupils. Experience shows that pupils whose parents actively participate in joint activities adapt more quickly to changes in the educational process, more easily establish positive relationships with peers and teachers, regulate their emotions and behavior more effectively, and demonstrate higher motivation for learning.

It is also worth noting that the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine initiated the online course "How to Cope with Changes in Life: Social and Emotional Learning through Play" with the aim of supporting children and adults in the new conditions of wartime reality (MES of Ukraine, 2023b). The use of interactive and digital teaching methods makes it possible to continue social and emotional learning even during temporary interruptions of face-to-face education, ensuring continuity in the development of emotional resilience and social interaction skills among learners. Such methods include online platforms for games and exercises aimed at developing emotional intelligence (ClassDojo, Mood Meter, Seesaw), interactive surveys and quizzes (Kahoot!, Quizizz), video conferencing for group discussions and reflection (Zoom, Google Meet), as well as digital simulators and simulations that model social situations and teach constructive conflict resolution.

Thus, the analysis of scientific literature and the practical experience of primary school teacher L. Hrytsyshyn of the Knyahynytskyi Lyceum of the Rohatyn City Council indicate that creating a safe and supportive educational environment in primary school requires a comprehensive approach. The implementation of social and emotional learning, modeling a benevolent psychological atmosphere, active partnership with parents, and the organization of a physically safe space form conditions for the development of emotional literacy, responsibility, cooperation skills, and self-regulation among primary school learners.

CONCLUSIONS AND PROSPECTS OF FURTHER RESEARCH

Thus, based on the above, we can conclude that social and emotional learning is a key factor in creating a safe and supportive educational environment in primary school. The formation of social and emotional competencies of primary school learners—skills of self-regulation, empathy, responsible interaction, and constructive conflict resolution—contributes to a positive classroom microclimate, psychological stability, and motivation for learning.

We believe that effective implementation of social and emotional learning is possible under the following pedagogical conditions: systematic and consistent implementation; integration of SEL into various school subjects; teacher preparation for the implementation of SEL programs; and the use of active teaching methods focused on developing emotional and social competencies of learners.

The conducted analysis does not exhaust all aspects of the researched problem. We see prospects for further research in a deeper study of the effectiveness of various models of social and emotional learning in primary school and their impact on the psychological safety of all participants in the educational process.

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