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Voices of mothers and fathers to ensure well-being and emotional education in childhood

Voces de madres y padres para asegurar el bienestar y educación emocional en la niñez

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Abstract

The article presents research results on the impact that parental skills have on the emotional development of boys and girls in La Araucanía, Chile. The methodology of the study was qualitative, the design used was phenomenological, four mothers and fathers participated. The main results show that mothers and fathers carry out actions that affect the emotional management, assessment and security of the child, through their parental skills, overcoming barriers that hinder the development of positive parenting practices. The main conclusions allow us to maintain that mothers and fathers carry out actions that contribute to the emotional development of their children based on a generational change, to contribute to the comprehensive development of boys and girls.

Keywords: *Emotional development, parenting competencies, parenting styles.*

Resumen

El artículo expone resultados de investigación sobre la incidencia que tienen las competencias parentales en el desarrollo emocional de niños y niñas en La Araucanía, Chile. La metodología del estudio fue cualitativa, el diseño utilizado fue fenomenológico, participaron cuatro madres y cuatro padres. Los principales resultados dan cuenta que madres y padres realizan acciones que inciden en la gestión emocional, valoración y seguridad del niño/a, por medio de sus competencias parentales, sobreponiéndose a barreras que obstaculicen el desarrollo de prácticas de parentalidad positiva. Las principales conclusiones nos permiten sostener que madres y padres realizan acciones que contribuyen al desarrollo emocional de sus hijos/as a partir de un cambio generacional, para aportar en el desarrollo íntegro en los niños y niñas.

Palabras clave: *Desarrollo emocional, competencias parentales, crianza del niño.*

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Introduction

The family plays a key role in the formative process of boys and girls (Chinga-Villegas & Plua, 2023). This is reflected through different parenting practices and systems of transmitting family knowledge and wisdom to younger generations according to their own sociocultural frameworks (Franco-Marín et al., 2022). From birth, individuals begin to be shaped both within the family environment and through schooling in aspects such as the ability to express affection, tolerance, social relationships, economic factors, time availability, values, culture, and religion, among others (Barreno et al., 2024). The family serves as the first school and space of primary socialization where children are nurtured, being the main agents in fostering a positive attachment and guiding their children's learning so that they can develop fully within society from a well-being perspective (Madueño et al., 2020; Rivera & Guzmán, 2024).

In this regard, the learning that takes place within the family environment is essential for the socio-affective and sociocultural development of children, as it involves educating them in:

1. Developing respect for themselves and others within society according to their own epistemic frameworks (Arias-Ortega & Del Pino, 2024);
2. The constant pursuit of well-being by providing a safe and trusting space that fosters their integral development (Debs et al., 2023); and
3. Offering spaces of emotional support that help children develop skills and abilities to express themselves and interact efficiently and effectively within society (Sun et al., 2024).

This entails those children acquire the abilities and skills necessary to assume social roles, exercise impulse control, and practice values consistent with their sociocultural context, all in pursuit of the common good and social development (Barudy & Dantagnan, 2010). Indeed, this underscores the importance of children having a positive parental relationship, which implies that parents must develop practical competencies to care for, protect, and educate their children, ensuring their social well-being (Hikmatovma, 2024; Mohzana & Murcahyanto, 2023).

This article presents research findings that, through the voices of mothers and fathers, highlight the influence of parental competencies on the emotional development of children in La Araucanía, Chile.

Positive Parenting

Positive parenting refers to the behaviors of mothers and fathers aimed at fostering the full development and well-being of their children (Prime et al., 2023). This means that parents must be able to empower, recognize, and guide their children in their upbringing so that, in the future, they become individuals capable of living in harmony with both the surrounding world and the people who inhabit it (Council of Europe, 2006; Rivera & Martínez, 2023). Likewise, the positive parenting approach includes the setting of limits for children without the use of violence (Council of Europe, 2006). Thus, positive parenting is essential for the proper functioning of families and for the healthy development of childhood (National Service for the Prevention and Rehabilitation of Drug and Alcohol Use, n.d. [SENDA]). In this regard, SENDA identifies five principles to promote positive parenting (Table 1).

Table 1. Principles of Positive Parenting.

Principle	Definition
Respect	Involves understanding that children experience the world differently from adults and therefore have the right to have their opinions and emotions validated. In this way, they learn that they must treat others with the same respect.
Attachment	Promotes the development of relationships based on security and trust between parents and children, supported by emotional warmth and quality interactions.
Positive Discipline	Establishes limits and rules that are consistent and coherent, explaining to children and adolescents the importance of following them without resorting to physical or emotional harm.
Parental Proactivity	Encourages continuous learning about parenting and an active understanding of children's development in order to adapt to their needs.
Empathetic Leadership	Assumes that adults play a guiding role in the lives of the children under their care. Thus, they are responsible for being attentive to children's emotions and opinions so that they feel understood and heard.

Source: Author's elaboration based on SENDA (n.d.).

According to table 1, it can be observed that the development of parenting competencies is of vital importance to ensure the well-being and emotional

development of children, which in turn allows for an education based on positive parenting. This involves not only knowing how and when to set limits for children, but also knowing how to listen to them, trying to understand how they see the world and how they feel about the experiences it brings. Furthermore, it means working together with them to help them find the place they will want to occupy in society once they become adults. In this way, the concept of positive parenting seeks, as far as possible, to prevent social, emotional, and behavioral harm to children by promoting the acquisition of skills, knowledge, and above all, confidence on the part of parents, thereby ensuring children's well-being within their family, community, and social environments (Sanders et al., 2014; Juffer et al., 2023). The Positive Parenting Program promotes the development of mothers and fathers across five levels of increasing intervention.

The first level provides relevant information about parenting skills and competencies. The second level offers guidance to parents of children with mild behavioral problems, typically over one or two sessions. In the third level, parents begin to receive training in parenting skills for raising children with moderate behavioral issues, a process that generally lasts four sessions. The fourth level involves an eight- to ten-session training program, which includes workshops aimed at strengthening parents' self-confidence, along with other parenting skills to respond appropriately to children with more severe behavioral problems. Finally, the fifth level focuses on intervention in families where, due to particular circumstances, parents are not fulfilling their roles optimally (De Graaf et al., 2008; Bodenmann et al., 2008).

The above suggests that parenting competencies are learned and updated throughout one's life history, based on environmental elements that influence and shape parental experience and behavior (Gómez & Muñoz, 2015). In this sense, positive parenting is closely related to parenting competencies, the latter aiming to accompany, protect, and promote positive development that guarantees the well-being of children (Gómez & Muñoz, 2015). Thus, child-rearing involves a set of skills that define healthy parenting, involving elements of the parents' own personal

history, where past experiences influence the construction of the caregiver's subjectivity. From this perspective, four dimensions can be identified to delineate the scope of action in parenting practice (Gómez & Muñoz, 2015).

First, the relational dimension refers to the set of knowledge, attitudes, and everyday parenting practices aimed at fostering a secure attachment style—namely, a relationship in which children perceive their parents as accessible and available, even when physically absent. Second, the formative dimension seeks to strengthen the early development, learning, and socialization of children through parenting practices. Third, the protective dimension involves the knowledge, attitudes, and practices related to the adequate care and protection of children, safeguarding human developmental needs and guaranteeing their rights and physical, emotional, and sexual integrity. Finally, the reflective dimension of parenting encompasses the set of competencies that allow parents to analyze the influences and trajectories of their own parenting, valuing current development and assessing the child's growth process, with the goal of learning about themselves and enriching the other dimensions through this reflection (Gómez & Muñoz, 2015).

Parenting Styles

Parenting styles are defined as “the set of caregiving actions directed toward children, based on cultural patterns, personal beliefs, acquired knowledge, and the actual possibilities available to caregivers” (Rodrigo et al., 2006, p. 204). Within this construct, there are three dimensions that connect thought, action, and culture (Infante & Martínez, 2016).

In this regard, Izzedin and Pachajoa (2009) propose that parenting can be divided into three processes. First, child-rearing guidelines are the actions parents follow in their children's behavior, which vary according to each culture. Second, parenting practices are actions aimed at guiding children toward proper development within the family context, where parents play the role of educators—putting into practice the methods with which they themselves were raised. Third, beliefs about parenting refer to how parents think they should raise their children,

influencing their actions and decisions. Thus, each family develops these characteristics differently, using strategies to guide their children's behavior, which results in a specific parenting style determined by the relationship between parents and children (Izzedin & Pachajoa, 2009; Vasiou et al., 2023).

Therefore, parenting styles represent the way in which parents interact with and fulfill their role toward their children in daily life—both in everyday situations and in those requiring conflict resolution (Torío et al., 2008; Yaffe, 2023). In this context, Baumrind (1966) identified three parenting styles, which describe the ways parents raise and relate to their children. Later, Maccoby and Martin (1983) introduced a fourth style, expanding Baumrind's model. In 1995, Robinson et al. provided an internal structure for each parenting style (Table 2).

Table 2. Parenting Styles.

Parenting Style	Description	Internal Structure
Permissive	Provide emotional support and affection; however, they demand little responsibility, allowing children to regulate their own activities.	Characterized by a lack of guidance and overconfidence, often overlooking inappropriate behavior.
Authoritative (Democratic)	Share the reasoning behind decisions or rules, enforce their own perspectives, yet acknowledge the child's individual interests and unique ways of thinking.	Closely related to the quality of the relationship, inductive reasoning, and democratic participation.
Authoritarian	Establish rules that allow parents/caregivers to model, control, and evaluate children's behavior, valuing obedience as a virtue.	Associated with hostility and both physical and verbal punishment, non-reasoning strategies, and a directive, punitive relationship.
Neglectful	Display low emotional responsiveness and provide little to no rules or guidance.	Represents behavior aimed at minimizing the effort and time required for parenting.

Source: Adapted from Baumrind (1966), Maccoby and Martin (1983), Robinson et al. (1995).

Methodology

This qualitative methodology allowed for an in-depth understanding of the parental competences of fathers and mothers within their particular contexts, based on their experiences and subjectivities (Hernández et al., 2014). The scope of the study is exploratory,

characterized by the fact that it addresses a phenomenon with limited prior empirical research, thus aiming to examine its features in detail and depth (Ramos-Galarza, 2020).

The participants were four mothers and four fathers currently residing in the Araucanía region. They were selected through non-probabilistic sampling (Lopezosa, 2020), using intentional selection based on the following inclusion criteria:

1. Being the father or mother of a child aged between 5 and 12 years, which enables an understanding of how parenting practices influence children's emotional development;
2. Residing in the Araucanía region, which is characterized by having the lowest levels of multidimensional poverty in the country and comparatively lower educational attainment rates; and
3. Declaring voluntary participation in the study.
4. Participants who did not meet these inclusion criteria were excluded.

The data collection instrument was a semi-structured interview, which, according to Lopezosa (2020), is flexible and allows for greater participation. Its dynamic nature enables interviewers to adapt and interpret responses in depth. The interview addressed the following topics: parents' perceptions of their parenting practices and the development of parental competences; the relationship between parental competences and their children's emotional development; and the parenting styles they employ. The data analysis technique used was grounded theory through open and axial coding. According to Baptista et al. (2014), grounded theory is defined as a qualitative research method that constructs new theories from emerging results, which are analyzed and categorized once the data are obtained (Vives & Hamui, 2021).

The data analysis process was carried out using open coding, which operationally involved three main phases:

1. Initial phase: each data fragment (testimony) was carefully examined and assigned a unique code reflecting its content and/or meaning regarding

parental competences and their relationship to children's development and well-being;

2. Development of the code list emerging from open coding, collecting data fragments that share a common idea, thereby facilitating the subsequent grouping of these codes by thematic relationship to begin axial coding;
3. Intermediate phase: reorganizing the codes into broader categories. During this process, relationships among the different codes were identified, and they were grouped into themes sharing a common meaning;
4. Clarifying the connections among different elements of the data and establishing a more organized structure (Bonilla & López, 2016); and
5. Final phase: organizing the codes into categories, followed by a deeper analysis to identify the underlying meanings within these categories and how they relate to the object of study.

The entire process was carried out using the software ATLAS.ti, a specialized tool for the organization and analysis of qualitative data, which facilitates the management of codes and categories.

The ethical safeguards of the study adhered to those established by the American Psychological Association (APA, 2010), which protect participants' integrity to promote honesty and commitment, thereby fostering trust among individuals who chose to participate. This was ensured through the use of informed consent, which detailed the study's objectives, clarified that participation was anonymous and confidential, and included a commitment to return the study results to participants. Finally, the study was approved by the Psychology Program Council of the researchers' home institution.

Results

The findings of the study address the main research objective, which seeks to *"examine the impact of parental competences on the emotional development of boys and girls in La Araucanía, Chile, based on the perspectives of mothers and fathers."*

The analysis of participants' testimonies made it possible to identify five subcategories and their

corresponding codes, which explain—through the meanings expressed by parents—how the parental competences they employ in raising their children have contributed to children's emotional development.

The central category, Emotional Development, and its subcategories are presented in figure 1.

The first subcategory, called *Child Safety*, is defined as the way of fostering well-being and confidence in the child so that they can function and feel secure in life. This category appears 68 times in participants' testimonies, representing 24% of the total occurrences of the central category, and is composed of three codes (Table 3).

Table 3. Codes of the Subcategory *Child Safety*

Code	Occurrences	Percentage
Being Present	30	10.6%
Parental Care	19	6.7%
Parental Protection	19	6.7%
Total	68	24%

The first code is called *Being Present*, understood as the way in which fathers and mothers accompany and support their sons and daughters in different contexts. Regarding being present, it can be observed that when parents are actively involved in their children's lives, this enables the development of skills that allow boys and girls to function safely and confidently within society. In this regard, one testimony states:

"We have a routine every night; even if it's just five minutes before he goes to sleep, I lie down with him so he can have a good rest. Those moments are very meaningful to us because it's a time to show love. We cuddle, we spoil each other a bit — that moment is sacred." (EM1 [5:17])

From this testimony, it can be inferred that despite having a tiring day and many responsibilities, parents devote time to their children so that they feel accompanied, while also allowing boys and girls to perceive their parents as accessible and available.

The second code is called *Parental Care*, understood as the way of promoting an adequate physical, emotional, social, and intellectual development of children during their early years. Regarding parental care, it can be seen that through the responsibilities

parents assume, they help their sons and daughters feel confident that there is concern and commitment toward their well-being. In this regard, one testimony states:

“Physically, I’m very attentive to his personal and oral hygiene, we go to the dentist, and I also take care of his sleep habits. Emotionally as well — there was a time we went to a psychologist because of a family issue; we went to therapy. I’m

always committed to my son’s development, to ensuring that he is a happy child and won’t face difficulties in the future.” (EM1 [5:6])

From this testimony, it can be inferred that parents take the necessary precautions to ensure the integrity and well-being of their children, both in terms of physical and mental health.



Figure 1. Emotional development

The third code is called *Parental Protection*, understood as the actions and practices carried out by parents to safeguard their children's physical, emotional, and sexual integrity. Regarding parental protection, it can be observed that through the actions parents take, boys and girls are able to feel safe in different contexts and know how to face them. In this regard, one testimony states:

"We talk about different situations that might happen — for example, an accident at school, what she should do, not talking to strangers, not accepting things from them. Anticipating situations that could occur, so she can be cautious." (EM3 [7:8])

It can be seen that parents take certain precautions in order to anticipate possible situations, so that boys and girls feel capable of acting if an unexpected event occurs. This, in turn, fosters greater autonomy from an early age.

The second subcategory, called *Child Valuation*, is defined as the way in which fathers and mothers carry out actions that help their sons and daughters feel appreciated, heard, and recognized. This category appears 88 times in participants' testimonies, representing 30.9% of the total occurrences of the central category, and is composed of three codes (Table 4).

Table 4. Codes of the subcategory *Child Valuation*

Code	Occurrences	Percentage
Child Recognition	40	14.1%
Parental Communication	24	8.4%
Quality Time	24	8.4%
Total	88	30.9%

The first code is called *Child Recognition*, understood as the way in which fathers and mothers acknowledge their children's interests, abilities, aptitudes, emotions, and personalities as important and valid. Regarding child recognition, it can be observed that this contributes to developing a sense of self-worth in sons and daughters, strengthening their ability to relate to others, understand, and build healthy social relationships, as well as to develop coping skills in the face of adversity. In this regard, one testimony states:

"(...) children are subjects of rights, so it's important to always take them into account; they are people with full rights, and that must be respected, encouraged, and taught from an early age." (EH2 [2:1])

Another testimony adds:

"I always ask what's going on; if he doesn't want to tell me, I don't insist. I wait a while and ask again, but eventually, he will tell me—maybe once he's calmed down or no longer sees it as important. Then I try to give feedback on what happened, which may have been troubling him." (EH3 [3:26])

From these testimonies, it can be inferred that parents acknowledge their children's individual differences so that they feel that their interests, personal space, limits, and emotions are important and deserve to be respected.

The second code is called *Parental Communication*, understood as the way in which fathers and mothers communicate with their children about their concerns, questions, and experiences. Regarding parental communication, it can be seen that parents' actions toward their children foster mutual expression of experiences, promoting the transmission of knowledge, norms, emotions, and attitudes. One testimony illustrates this:

"(...) whenever something happens, we talk to them; we make them see what happened. We first ask questions, and then, based on what they tell us—in a context of trust—we advise them on how they should act." (EH1 [1:25])

From this testimony, it can be inferred that parents create space and show availability to listen, understand, and guide their children's attitudes and behaviors in relation to their experiences.

The third code is called *Quality Time*, understood as the way in which fathers and mothers dedicate time to their children, giving them full attention by listening, sharing personal interests, and/or engaging in joint activities to strengthen their bond. Regarding quality time, it can be observed that the time parents devote to their children is valuable for both, as it supports

optimal development in boys and girls, demonstrates genuine interest, and fosters feelings of importance. One testimony explains:

“(…) I think that when we spend time together—no matter what we’re doing—but time just the two of us, when I listen to her, when I don’t pick up the phone, when there’s no TV or other distractions—she really values that; she connects with me a lot.” (EM2 [6:15])

From this testimony, it can be inferred that quality time represents a space in which parents give attention and show interest in what their children express, creating opportunities to build an emotional bond between them.

The third subcategory, called *Emotional Management*, is defined as the ability of fathers and mothers to provide their children with tools to manage their emotions in different situations. This subcategory appears 44 times in participants’ testimonies, representing 15.6% of the total occurrences of the central category (Table 5).

Table 5. Codes of the subcategory *emotional management*

Code	Occurrences	Percentage
Parental Education	20	7%
Parental Empathy	10	3.5%
Parental Guidance	8	3%
Parental Containment	6	2.1%
Total	44	15.6%

The first code is called *Parental Education*, understood as the way in which fathers and mothers provide their children with tools that allow them to function in society. Regarding parental education, it can be observed that there are various ways in which parents offer such tools. One testimony explains:

“(…) I try to encourage and motivate his own intellectual development—that is, everything related to art, music, drawing—trying to promote those kinds of practices. It’s an important part of developing better social skills.” (EH4 [4:4])

From this testimony, it can be inferred that parents choose to provide specific tools for their children, depending on what they consider necessary for them

to develop and integrate successfully into society in the future.

The second code is called *Parental Empathy*, understood as the way in which fathers and mothers understand their children’s behavior at different stages of life. Regarding parental empathy, it can be seen that the way parents interpret certain situations that trigger their children’s reactions shapes the beliefs and emotions children form about themselves—something that must be acknowledged and addressed. A testimony illustrates this:

“(…) I try not to be too demanding because she’s already self-demanding. When she doesn’t do well, instead of scolding her for her poor performance, I try to explain that it doesn’t matter, that next time she’ll do better. She’s very demanding with herself, so if I demanded even more, school would become even more stressful.” (EM3 [7:20])

From this testimony, it can be inferred that parental empathy allows fathers and mothers to establish a closer relationship with their children by understanding and accepting that, in certain situations, they will have their own beliefs and emotions. This mutual understanding helps foster greater involvement and connection between both sides.

The third code is called *Parental Guidance*, understood as the instruction that parents provide to their children throughout different stages of life. Regarding parental guidance, it can be observed that giving children options about how to face certain situations is an important element of upbringing, as it allows them to develop autonomy and problem-solving skills. In this regard, one testimony states:

“(…) so I tell him, you have to learn to accept that other people are not going to think like you, and they are not going to be like you. (...) you have to learn to get along with everyone, because one must share with people they dislike, and that will happen now at school, at work, when you go to university—it will happen at all stages of your life (...)” (EM3 [7:14]).

From this testimony, it can be inferred that parental guidance seeks to help children accept the situations they will face later in life. Parents therefore try to advise their children so that they feel prepared when facing different circumstances in the future.

The fourth code is called *Parental Containment*, understood as the way in which parents provide assistance to their children when they go through emotionally complex situations. Regarding parental support, it can be seen that the emotional containment provided by parents is an essential component of child-rearing, as it helps children understand that their emotions are valid and that there are ways to manage them. One testimony explains:

“First comes containment. If he’s overwhelmed and crying uncontrollably, that’s the first thing I do. I hold him, hug him, take him aside, and first let him calm down. Then, after he’s calm, I ask: What happened? What do you feel about this that’s troubling you? I try to guide him, comfort him, and find a possible solution” (EM1 [5:26]).

From this testimony, it can be inferred that parental support involves accompanying and motivating children in different situations, helping them overcome new challenges or objectives according to their developmental stage.

The fourth subcategory is called *Development of Parental Practices*, defined as the actions carried out by parents to implement positive parenting in the upbringing of their children. This subcategory appears 54 times in participants’ testimonies, representing 19.3% of the total occurrences in the central category (Table 6).

Table 6. Codes of the subcategory Development of Parental Practices.

Code	Recurrence	Percentage
Parental Reflection	36	13%
Parental Learning	6	2.1%
Parental Guidance-Seeking	6	2.1%
Generational Change	6	2.1%
Total	54	19.3%

The first code is called *Parental Reflection*, understood as the way in which parents analyze their past and present behavior in order to learn and improve in the future. Regarding parental reflection, it can be seen that it allows parents to understand their parenting style and evaluate the development of their parenting practices based on their own experiences, envisioning alternative ways to improve. One testimony notes:

“At first, I was very anxious about being a good dad. But I think it all comes down to understanding oneself, knowing what you want, what hurt you as a child, and what you wouldn’t want your daughter to experience. And trying to move forward little by little with her without passing on too much. Because I have insecurities, and I don’t want my daughter to reflect those insecurities that I showed when she was little (...)” (EH3 [3:4]).

From this testimony, it can be inferred that parental reflection enables parents to revisit their parenting journey and, from that, form positive or negative assessments of their experiences as parents and as children themselves, promoting learning within parenting practices.

The second code is called *Parental Learning*, understood as changes in parenting practices that result from a reflective process. Regarding parental learning, it can be observed that it involves developing new strategies in parenting practices that adapt to the needs of their children. As one testimony explains:

“(...) you’re always discovering new things. As they grow, they demand different things; you have to adapt, try to find the most reasonable and logical way to do things so it doesn’t negatively affect the other person. Because sometimes we impose things, but those impositions aren’t done properly, so we must look for better ways, understand, and move forward little by little. Because, as they say, there’s no manual for being a parent—everyone goes at their own pace” (EH3 [3:47]).

From this testimony, it can be inferred that parental learning allows parents to analyze their behavior and undergo a process of transformation in their parenting practices and/or child-rearing styles.

The third code is called *Parental Guidance-Seeking*, understood as the way parents seek help from professionals or other available resources to improve their parenting role. Regarding guidance-seeking, it can be seen that parents seek professional or informational assistance autonomously to ensure their children's well-being. One testimony states:

"I need to have the tools to help him; I need those competencies. How can I improve? By researching, reading, learning more about what could happen (...)" (EM1 [5:42]). Another testimony adds:

"If I had to change, I think I'd seek guidance from someone who could advise me—a professional I could talk to about the situation I'm not adapting to. How can I do it? Try to find ways to improve" (EH2 [2:45]).

From both testimonies, it can be inferred that parents acknowledge the value of specialized knowledge in transforming their parenting practices, considering it a significant element in their learning processes.

The fourth code is called *Generational Change*, understood as the way parents avoid repeating the parenting patterns they experienced from their own caregivers. Regarding generational change, it can be seen that parents take precautions to prevent repeating generational patterns. One testimony indicates:

"(...) when I was a child, they demanded a lot from me—to the point that when I did things well, there was no reward, and when I did things wrong, it was the opposite. I don't demand too much because he's six years old; what he needs most is to play and live" (EH3 [3:38]).

From this testimony, it can be inferred that generational change allows parents to offer a different type of upbringing from the one they had, aiming to ensure their children's overall well-being throughout the stages of their lives.

The fifth subcategory is called *Barriers to the Development of Parenting*, defined as the difficulties faced by parents in fulfilling their parenting role. This subcategory appears 29 times in participants' testimonies, representing 10.2% of the total in the central category (Table 7).

Table 7. Barriers to the Development of Parenting

Concept	Recurrence	Percentage
Time Limitation	20	7%
Parental Inequality	5	1.8%
Adolescent Complexity	4	1.4%
Total	29	10.2%

The first code is called *Time Limitation*, understood as the difficulties parents face in being present with their children due to time constraints. Regarding time limitation, it can be observed that work schedules are perceived as a barrier to spending time with their children. One testimony mentions:

"Nowadays, because of work, there's just no time. I wish we could be more with the kids, have more moments together as parents and children" (EH1 [1:5]). Another adds:

"I'd like to have more time so that he could spend more time with me than with his nanny, but well, that's life—work, the house, the bills, everything" (EM2 [6:44]).

From both testimonies, it can be inferred that perceptions of daily responsibilities and demands contribute to time limitations and become an obstacle for parents to spend meaningful time with their children, making it harder to build close relationships through shared interaction.

The second code is called *Parental Inequality*, understood as the unequal distribution of roles, responsibilities, or tasks between mothers and fathers. Regarding parental inequality, it can be seen that lack of equity may lead to discrepancies in parenting practices or the delegation of certain responsibilities—often to the mother. One testimony illustrates this:

"What happens is that my daughter lives with two different parenting styles because she goes to her father's on some

weekends, and he allows her to do many things. When she comes back, she's always changed, and in the end, all my work and effort to raise her well during the time she's with me come to nothing" (EM2 [6:35]).

From this testimony, it can be inferred that when the distribution of roles is not equitable and agreed upon, it may cause tension, inconsistency, or lack of coherence in parenting practices, resulting in confusion and negative impacts on the child.

The third code is called *Adolescent Complexity*, understood as the uncertainty parents experience as their children approach adolescence. Regarding adolescent complexity, it can be observed that parents see this stage as one requiring adaptation to new emotional and developmental needs. One testimony reflects:

"When she enters adolescence, I think something will come up regarding her mom. So I think I'll have to support her so she doesn't get depressed, question herself too much, or blame herself. Because it will happen—it's part of adolescence; it's all pain (...)" (EH3 [3:16]).

From this testimony, it can be inferred that parents perceive adolescence as a challenging stage since they may lose aspects of their relationship with their children as they grow older, while also having to adapt to the new attitudes and emotions that come with that period.

In summary, this set of subcategories and their corresponding codes provides an integrated understanding of how children's emotional development can be affected in both the short and long term, particularly when parents do not develop the necessary parenting competencies to ensure a child-rearing approach based on positive parenting, where the child's well-being is considered an essential condition.

Discussion

The results of the study show that even though parents may not be *theoretically* familiar with the

concept of parental competencies—understood as the capacity to accompany, protect, and educate their children while promoting healthy development and ensuring their well-being (Barudy & Dantagnan, 2010; Yaffe, 2023)—they nonetheless engage in educational actions based on common sense that promote and contribute to the emotional well-being of their sons and daughters. These actions aim to foster optimal emotional development. Thus, the research findings suggest that the development of parental competencies is crucial for ensuring children's well-being and for helping shape emotionally strong adults who contribute to the development of society from a perspective of collective well-being.

In this sense, mothers and fathers, despite the limited time available due to the complexities of daily life, strive to implement actions such as daily companionship, quality time, and the care and protection of their children's needs and concerns during the moments they can dedicate to them—often while managing the burdens of everyday life. These aspects can, in some cases, negatively affect the parents' own mental and physical health, as the overload ends up impacting their well-being. Nevertheless, they assume these responsibilities as an act of *love* intended to ensure a happy childhood for their children. In this regard, Barudy and Dantagnan (2010) argue that when a father or mother provides competent parenting based on affection, support, and adequate care, they enable their children to face different situations in daily life. From this perspective, developing parental competencies equips children with the necessary tools to cope effectively and independently with various situations (Vasiou et al., 2024). This finding aligns with Bello et al. (2020), who maintain that parental competencies contribute to children's socio-emotional well-being, fostering healthy social relationships, harmonious coexistence, and successful adaptation across family, community, and social contexts.

In the same vein, the parents' testimonies reveal a predominance of a democratic parenting style, characterized by the way parents recognize their children's interests and make decisions and establish rules jointly with them. Participants report preferring to engage in conversations that lead to consensus

between parents and children through active listening, respect for their opinions and emotions, and validation of their interests—thus fostering positive relationships. This aligns with Fuentes et al. (2022), who note that when children receive greater support and acceptance from their parents—without strict or authoritarian attitudes—they feel more understood and develop higher levels of empathy toward others. From this perspective, a democratic parenting style encourages children to develop life skills that make them feel capable and self-confident (Debs et al., 2023). Similarly, Fuentes-Vilugrón et al. (2022) and Barreno et al. (2024) argue that parents with a democratic parenting style tend to raise children with stronger socio-emotional development, supporting later stages of growth through greater self-control and autonomy.

From another perspective, participants' testimonies reveal certain barriers that hinder the parental practices they wish to exercise with their children, including: (1) lack of time for childcare; (2) unequal distribution of parental roles; and (3) concerns about the challenges their children will face in upcoming developmental stages. Thus, it becomes evident that social factors such as time constraints represent a significant barrier for parents, who are forced to reduce the amount of quality time spent with their children, having to strike a balance between meeting their children's needs and fulfilling other responsibilities. This is consistent with Barudy and Dantagnan's (2010) observation that parents "must, therefore, have not only the necessary resources and capacities, but also structural flexibility to adapt their responses to the evolving developmental needs of children" (p. 62).

Consequently, the results of this research provide insight into the participants' experiences with parental competencies and how these influence children's emotional development. Likewise, it was possible to identify the specific parental competencies that foster emotional development. The findings show that parents practice forms of upbringing that promote the healthy development of their children, even in the absence of formal knowledge about parental competencies. It was also observed that parents have modified their parenting practices compared to those

they themselves experienced as children, now promoting integral well-being through dialogue, emotional support, and dedication to their sons and daughters.

Thus, regarding the parenting styles that parents use to support their children's emotional development, the participants show a preference for positive actions that ensure their children's overall well-being, incorporating rules and decisions through shared reasoning—placing them within a democratic parenting style. This is evidenced in the support, emotional validation, and recognition of their children's opinions, as well as in the establishment of consistent limits and respect without physical or emotional harm. From this standpoint, participants' voices suggest several avenues for developing parental competencies:

1. Raising employer awareness about the need for flexible working hours for parents, as time availability is essential to remain present in children's developmental processes and to foster self-reflection on parenting practices.
2. Creating training workshops for parents in different settings to help them develop skills such as cognitive flexibility and emotional regulation, enabling them to adapt more effectively to their children's particular needs according to their developmental stage and psychological state.
3. Encouraging shared experiences in formal and informal educational spaces to promote reflective processes that integrate learning about parenthood.

Combined with professional support, these initiatives can foster skills such as empathy, active listening, recognition of interests, emotional containment, respect, and leadership—all essential for practicing positive parenting.

In conclusion, we argue that parents perceive five key elements in their parenting practices:

1. Providing their children with tools to manage emotions;
2. Building trust so that children feel safe in life;
3. Helping children feel valued;

4. Engaging in reflective processes about their own parenting practices and their goals;
5. Overcoming barriers that hinder the development of parenting practices.

Likewise, it is evident that parents engage in child-rearing practices that promote their children's healthy development despite lacking theoretical knowledge about parental competencies. Moreover, parents have adapted their approaches compared to those they experienced in their own upbringing, fostering integral well-being through communication, emotional support, and commitment to their children.

We maintain that studying parental competencies can, in the medium term, inform educational policies and initiatives within schools that contribute to preparing parents by highlighting the urgency of promoting emotional development among new generations of children and youth. This should begin at home but be articulated with the school environment, where parents and the educational community can form strategic partnerships to rethink the education of future generations from a social and ethical commitment aimed at building a society that achieves collective well-being. Additionally, such findings could support public policies aimed at reducing working hours so that parents can sustain positive bonds with their children through increased time availability for shared activities.

Author contributions

All authors participated equally and fully in the conceptualization, data consultation, formal analysis, writing, methodology, validation, drafting, revision, and editing of the manuscript.

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