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. RESEARCH ARTICLE

Parental Emotional Literacy as a Protective Factor Against Anxiety and Depression in Foundation Phase Children: An Integrative Conceptual Framework

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ABSTRACT

Anxiety and depression during the foundation phase of childhood (ages 5–8) present developmental concerns that may affect children's emotional well-being, social relationships, and educational experiences. This study aims to develop an integrative conceptual framework explaining how parental emotional literacy may function as a protective factor against anxiety and depression in foundation phase children. Using a conceptual approach, the study synthesizes theoretical and empirical literature through the integration of attachment theory, social learning theory, and developmental psychopathology. The conceptual synthesis identifies four interconnected dimensions of parental emotional literacy: emotional awareness, emotional understanding, emotional expression, and emotional regulation. These dimensions are theoretically linked to four mechanisms of influence: neurobiological development, parent–child co-regulation, emotional socialization, and cognitive development. The proposed framework further identifies attachment security, emotional competence, social competence, and cognitive resilience as protective pathways potentially associated with reduced vulnerability to anxiety and depression. The synthesis highlights how emotionally responsive parenting, supportive communication, emotional modeling, and guided regulation may contribute to children's psychological well-being and adaptive development. The study concludes that parental emotional literacy provides a theoretically grounded foundation for developing preventive approaches within families, early childhood education, and school-based parental support programs. However, the proposed relationships require further empirical validation through longitudinal and intervention-based research.

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ABSTRAK

Kecemasan dan depresi pada masa awal kanak-kanak (usia 5–8 tahun) menghadirkan masalah perkembangan yang dapat memengaruhi kesejahteraan emosional, hubungan sosial, dan pengalaman pendidikan anak. Studi ini bertujuan untuk mengembangkan kerangka konseptual integratif yang menjelaskan bagaimana literasi emosional orang tua dapat berfungsi sebagai faktor pelindung terhadap kecemasan dan depresi pada anak di usia tersebut. Dengan menggunakan pendekatan konseptual, studi ini menyintesis literatur teoretis dan empiris melalui penggabungan teori kelekatan (*attachment theory*), teori pembelajaran sosial, dan psikopatologi perkembangan. Sintesis konseptual ini mengidentifikasi empat dimensi literasi emosional orang tua yang saling berkaitan: kesadaran emosional, pemahaman emosional, ekspresi emosional, dan regulasi emosional. Keempat dimensi ini secara teoretis dihubungkan dengan empat mekanisme pengaruh: perkembangan neurobiologis, regulasi bersama (*co-regulation*) antara orang tua dan anak, sosialisasi emosional, serta perkembangan kognitif. Kerangka yang diusulkan juga mengidentifikasi keamanan kelekatan, kompetensi emosional, kompetensi sosial, dan resiliensi kognitif sebagai jalur perlindungan yang berpotensi mengurangi kerentanan terhadap kecemasan dan depresi. Sintesis ini menyoroti bagaimana pola asuh yang responsif secara emosional, komunikasi yang mendukung, pemodelan emosional, dan regulasi terbimbing dapat berkontribusi terhadap kesejahteraan psikologis serta perkembangan adaptif anak. Studi ini menyimpulkan bahwa literasi emosional orang tua menyediakan landasan teoretis yang kuat untuk mengembangkan pendekatan preventif dalam lingkup keluarga, pendidikan anak usia dini, dan program dukungan orang tua di sekolah. Namun, hubungan yang diusulkan ini memerlukan validasi empiris lebih lanjut melalui penelitian longitudinal maupun penelitian berbasis intervensi.

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Keywords: Parental Emotional Literacy; Foundation Phase Children; Anxiety and Depression; Emotional Socialization; Conceptual Framework.

1. INTRODUCTION

Mental health and emotional well-being in early childhood have become significant concerns in educational and developmental research, particularly because early emotional experiences may influence children's subsequent social relationships, learning participation, and psychological adjustment. The foundation phase, encompassing approximately five to eight years of age in the present conceptual framework, represents an important developmental period during which children progressively acquire emotional awareness, communication skills, self-regulation, and adaptive coping capacities. Research concerning emotional competence, childhood psychological adjustment, and educational participation has highlighted the interconnected nature of emotional development and children's experiences within family and school environments (Denham et al., 2020; Lunkenheimer et al., 2020; Price & Kiel, 2022). Furthermore, investigations into childhood mental health and family circumstances indicate that emotional development cannot be separated from broader socioeconomic, relational, and environmental conditions (Grüning Parache et al., 2024; Bozicevic et al., 2023). Recent studies have also emphasized the significance of parenting practices, emotional responsiveness, and supportive educational relationships in understanding children's developmental experiences (Morris et al., 2022; Gebre et al., 2025; Havighurst et al., 2025). Nevertheless, evidence concerning broad childhood populations should not automatically be interpreted as age-specific evidence for foundation-phase children. This developmental distinction is important because emotional difficulties may be expressed differently across ages and contexts. Consequently, examining

parental emotional literacy within the foundation phase offers a relevant educational perspective for understanding potential protective processes associated with children's emotional well-being.

Despite increasing scholarly attention to early emotional development, identifying and responding appropriately to anxiety, depressive symptoms, and emotional difficulties among young children remains a substantial challenge. During the foundation phase, emotional distress may be expressed through behavioural changes, withdrawal, irritability, difficulties in interpersonal interaction, or physical complaints, making its interpretation dependent on developmental characteristics and contextual information. Importantly, these manifestations do not necessarily indicate clinically diagnosed anxiety or depressive disorders. Research concerning parental emotion regulation and child anxiety illustrates the complexity of interactions between parental characteristics, child emotional responses, and developmental adjustment (Price & Kiel, 2022; Lunkenheimer et al., 2020). Similarly, studies addressing family structure, socioeconomic conditions, and parenting environments suggest that childhood emotional difficulties are embedded within multiple interconnected influences rather than attributable to a single parental characteristic (Grüning Parache et al., 2024; Bozicevic et al., 2023). Further challenges concern variations in family emotional communication, cultural expectations, available educational support, and children's developmental needs (Cañas et al., 2022; Morris et al., 2022). Although parental emotional competence may contribute to supportive interactions, it should not be treated as the exclusive determinant of children's psychological outcomes. Therefore, the central problem addressed in this paper concerns how parental emotional literacy can be conceptually understood as one potential protective influence while acknowledging developmental variability, contextual conditions, and the distinction between emotional difficulties and clinically established mental health disorders.

Previous research related to parental emotional literacy, emotional socialization, and children's psychological adjustment has developed through several complementary scholarly directions. Research concerning parental emotion regulation and childhood anxiety was conducted by Price and Kiel (2022), whose longitudinal investigation examined relationships among maternal and child emotion regulation, maternal emotion socialization, and child anxiety; however, its specific relational focus does not provide a comprehensive multidimensional parental emotional literacy framework. Lunkenheimer et al. (2020) investigated dynamic parent–child emotional socialization processes, contributing a relational perspective without directly establishing the protective pathways proposed in this paper. Morris et al. (2022) examined emotion socialization across childhood and adolescence, offering broad developmental explanations that require further specification for children aged five to eight. Denham et al. (2020) addressed emotional competence and social competence in preschool development, but their emphasis does not independently explain the complete relationship between parental capacities and internalizing outcomes. Nimphy et al. (2023) synthesized evidence concerning parent-to-offspring fear transmission through modelling, although fear transmission represents a narrower construct than the four dimensions of parental emotional literacy. Havighurst et al. (2025) discussed the theoretical foundations and implementation of the Tuning in to Kids program, providing intervention-related insights without validating the integrative framework developed here. Together, these investigations establish important foundations while demonstrating the need to connect their distinct emphases within a carefully bounded conceptual model.

The scientific contribution of the present paper lies in developing an integrative conceptual explanation of parental emotional literacy as a potential protective factor against anxiety and depression in foundation-phase children. Existing scholarship has examined parental emotion socialization, dyadic emotional interactions, parenting interventions, emotional competence, and developmental vulnerability through different analytical perspectives (Denham et al., 2020; Lunkenheimer et al., 2020; Price & Kiel, 2022; Morris et al., 2022). Nevertheless, these contributions do not, individually, constitute the particular

theoretical organization advanced in the present manuscript. Rather than introducing parental emotional literacy as an entirely new construct, this study reorganizes established emotional capacities into four interconnected dimensions: emotional awareness, emotional understanding, emotional expression, and emotional regulation. These dimensions are then conceptually connected to neurobiological processes, parent–child co-regulation, emotional socialization, and cognitive development, followed by proposed protective pathways involving attachment security, emotional competence, social competence, and cognitive resilience. Research addressing responsive caregiving, emotional socialization, neurodevelopment, and parenting interventions provides relevant theoretical and empirical foundations for considering these relationships (Luby et al., 2020; Morris et al., 2022; Santana-Ferrándiz et al., 2025; Havighurst et al., 2025). The resulting novelty is therefore an explicit multilevel conceptual mapping of parental emotional capacities, candidate mechanisms, intermediate protective pathways, and possible developmental outcomes. Importantly, this contribution remains theoretical and does not establish that the proposed relationships are causal or that the framework has demonstrated preventive effectiveness.

Although contemporary research offers substantial insights into children's emotional development and parenting practices, several conceptual and evidentiary gaps remain relevant to the present inquiry. First, investigations of specific relationships, such as maternal emotional regulation and child anxiety, do not necessarily explain how multiple parental emotional capacities operate together within a broader developmental framework (Price & Kiel, 2022; Lunkenheimer et al., 2020). Second, research on emotional competence and emotional socialization provides valuable developmental knowledge but does not independently establish the complete sequence linking parental emotional literacy dimensions, potential mechanisms, protective pathways, and reduced vulnerability to internalizing symptoms (Denham et al., 2020; Morris et al., 2022). Third, studies addressing parenting interventions and emotional responsiveness offer practical insights without demonstrating that the precise framework proposed here has been empirically validated (Havighurst et al., 2025; Santana-Ferrándiz et al., 2025). Fourth, research involving different age groups and family contexts raises questions about the direct applicability of findings to children aged five to eight (Bozicevic et al., 2023; Grüning Parache et al., 2024). The resulting research gap is not an asserted absence of scholarship on parenting and emotional development, but the need for a clearly articulated conceptual integration that distinguishes established associations from hypothetical mechanisms, identifies contextual limitations, and specifies relationships requiring future investigation. Addressing this gap can strengthen the theoretical coherence of research connecting parental emotional literacy with developmental protection.

The theoretical foundation of this study integrates attachment theory, social learning theory, and developmental psychopathology as complementary perspectives for understanding parental emotional literacy and children's psychological adjustment. Attachment theory, .ly developed by Bowlby (1969), explains the developmental significance of responsive caregiving and relational security, while recent scholarship has continued examining parental sensitivity and socioemotional development within attachment-related relationships (Price & Kiel, 2022; Santana-Ferrándiz et al., 2025). Social learning theory, developed by Bandura (1977), provides an explanation of how children may acquire emotional responses and coping practices through observation, modelling, reinforcement, and guided interaction. Contemporary research concerning dynamic parent–child processes and emotion socialization reinforces the importance of these interpersonal learning mechanisms (Lunkenheimer et al., 2020; Morris et al., 2022). Developmental psychopathology, meanwhile, emphasizes changing developmental pathways and the interaction of risk and protective conditions across individual, relational, and environmental contexts (Barry et al., 2023; Grüning Parache et al., 2024). These perspectives perform different but interconnected explanatory functions: attachment theory addresses relational security, social learning theory explains the acquisition of emotional practices, and developmental psychopathology contextualizes developmental

vulnerability and protection. Their integration allows parental emotional literacy to be examined through relationships, learning processes, and developmental conditions rather than through a single explanatory mechanism. Accordingly, the framework provides a theoretically grounded structure for formulating possible pathways without assuming that their causal sequence has already been established.

Within this theoretical integration, parental emotional literacy is conceptualized through emotional awareness, emotional understanding, emotional expression, and emotional regulation in parent–child relationships. Emotional awareness concerns parents' recognition of their own emotions and their children's emotional experiences, whereas emotional understanding concerns the interpretation of emotional causes, functions, and developmental meanings. Emotional expression refers to supportive verbal and nonverbal communication, while emotional regulation concerns parents' capacity to manage their emotional responses during interpersonal challenges. Research addressing parenting and emotion socialization provides a conceptual basis for understanding these interrelated capacities (Lunkenheimer et al., 2020; Morris et al., 2022; Havighurst et al., 2025). In the proposed framework, these dimensions may contribute to developmental processes through four mechanisms: neurobiological processes associated with responsive caregiving, parent–child co-regulation, emotional socialization, and cognitive development. These mechanisms are subsequently linked to four proposed protective pathways: attachment security, emotional competence, social competence, and cognitive resilience. Studies examining neurodevelopment, parental sensitivity, emotional competence, and parenting interventions provide relevant support for considering aspects of these connections (Luby et al., 2020; Denham et al., 2020; Santana-Ferrándiz et al., 2025; Havighurst et al., 2025). However, the four-dimensional organization and its proposed relationships should be understood as a conceptual synthesis rather than a newly validated measurement instrument or an empirically confirmed developmental model. Such distinctions are essential for maintaining conceptual precision and avoiding unsupported causal interpretations.

The importance of the present inquiry extends beyond describing parental emotional competence because it considers how family emotional practices may inform educational support during a formative period of children's development. Studies concerning emotional competence and parenting interventions have highlighted potential connections between supportive emotional interactions, developmental adjustment, and children's participation in social environments (Denham et al., 2020; Havighurst et al., 2025; Morris et al., 2022). At the same time, research examining teacher socioemotional competence emphasizes the relevance of emotional support within educational settings, although teacher-focused findings cannot be treated as direct evidence for parental emotional literacy outcomes (Gebre et al., 2025; Lunkenheimer et al., 2020). The study is particularly relevant because its framework connects parental emotional capacities with developmental processes that may have implications for parent education, parent–teacher collaboration, and early childhood support programs. Furthermore, evidence concerning differences in caregiving practices, family circumstances, and socioeconomic conditions indicates that emotionally supportive practices require sensitivity to children's developmental and cultural contexts (Bozicevic et al., 2023; Grüning Parache et al., 2024; Cañas et al., 2022). Consequently, the proposed model has potential value as an organizing framework for identifying educational support priorities, rather than as a clinically validated prevention program. Its distinctive contribution is to articulate how relational, social-learning, cognitive, and developmental considerations can inform future investigation of parental emotional literacy and children's emotional well-being.

Based on the preceding theoretical discussion, previous research, and identified conceptual gaps, this study aims to develop an integrative conceptual framework explaining how parental emotional literacy may function as a protective factor against anxiety and depression in foundation-phase children aged approximately five to eight years. More specifically, the study seeks to synthesize attachment theory, social

learning theory, and developmental psychopathology; organize parental emotional literacy into four interrelated dimensions; examine potential neurobiological, co-regulatory, emotional-socialization, and cognitive mechanisms; and identify proposed pathways involving attachment security, emotional competence, social competence, and cognitive resilience. These objectives are informed by research concerning emotional competence, parent–child interactions, parenting practices, and developmental adjustment (Denham et al., 2020; Lunkenheimer et al., 2020; Morris et al., 2022; Price & Kiel, 2022). The study also seeks to clarify how developmental variability, family circumstances, cultural context, and educational environments may condition the interpretation and application of these proposed relationships (Bozicevic et al., 2023; Grüning Parache et al., 2024; Havighurst et al., 2025). Methodologically, the paper employs a non-systematic narrative conceptual synthesis of theoretical and selected empirical literature already incorporated into the manuscript; it does not collect new participant data or experimentally evaluate intervention effectiveness. Ultimately, the study seeks to provide a theoretically coherent basis for future empirical investigation and contextually responsive educational approaches while maintaining a clear distinction between existing evidence, conceptual propositions, and outcomes requiring further validation.

2. RESEARCH METHODS

The present study adopts a conceptual research approach to examine parental emotional literacy as a potential protective factor against anxiety and depression among foundation-phase children aged approximately five to eight years. The methodological orientation is grounded in the integration of attachment theory, social learning theory, and developmental psychopathology, supported by relevant theoretical and empirical literature. The study focuses on four dimensions of parental emotional literacy—emotional awareness, emotional understanding, emotional expression, and emotional regulation—and examines their proposed relationships with neurobiological processes, parent–child co-regulation, emotional socialization, cognitive development, and protective developmental pathways. The approach draws upon existing research concerning parent–child emotional interactions, emotion socialization, developmental adjustment, and culturally responsive parenting (Lunkenheimer et al., 2020; Morris et al., 2022; Price & Kiel, 2022; Bozicevic et al., 2023). Methodologically, the study employs a non-systematic narrative conceptual synthesis based on secondary scholarly sources without primary data collection, experimental implementation, or psychometric testing. Consequently, the proposed framework represents a theoretically derived conceptual product rather than an empirically validated intervention or measurement instrument.

2.1. Research Design

This study adopts an integrative conceptual design supported by a non-systematic narrative synthesis of theoretical and empirical literature. The design organizes existing knowledge into a framework connecting four parental emotional literacy dimensions—emotional awareness, emotional understanding, emotional expression, and emotional regulation—with candidate developmental mechanisms and protective pathways. Attachment theory provides the relational foundation, social learning theory explains emotional modelling and learning, and developmental psychopathology contextualizes differences in vulnerability and protective conditions. Contemporary scholarship on emotional competence, parent–child interactions, and parenting interventions provides the supporting literature for this conceptual integration (Denham et

al., 2020; Morris et al., 2022; Havighurst et al., 2025). The research design emphasizes theoretical interpretation and conceptual integration rather than systematic evidence retrieval, experimental investigation, or statistical hypothesis testing. Accordingly, the conceptual framework is developed through the examination and integration of existing scholarly knowledge, providing a foundation for identifying relevant documentary materials and interpreting their theoretical contributions.

2.2. Data Collection Framework

The documentary materials examined in this study comprise theoretical writings, empirical research articles, scholarly reviews, and intervention-related publications relevant to parental emotional literacy and children's psychological development. These documentary sources address parental emotional literacy, emotional socialization, attachment relationships, emotion regulation, cognitive development, and childhood psychological adjustment. Relevant literature includes research on parent–child emotional processes, maternal and child emotion regulation, fear modelling, family circumstances, and parental support programs (Lunkenheimer et al., 2020; Price & Kiel, 2022; Nimphy et al., 2023; Grüning Parache et al., 2024). The study therefore relies on secondary documentary evidence rather than questionnaires, interviews, observations, or clinical assessments involving newly recruited participants. The evidence-gathering approach is characterized as a non-systematic narrative examination of selected scholarly publications rather than a systematic literature review involving predefined search strategies, database screening, or quantitative evidence-selection procedures. The collected documentary materials provide the conceptual basis for examining relationships among parental emotional capacities, developmental mechanisms, protective pathways, and potential psychological outcomes.

2.3 Analytical Framework and Types of Analysis

The analytical orientation involves interpreting the relationships among parental emotional literacy, developmental mechanisms, protective pathways, and proposed child outcomes. Existing literature is considered across three theoretical perspectives to distinguish relational processes, learned emotional practices, and developmental risk–protection dynamics. The conceptual analysis focuses on connections among parental emotional awareness, understanding, expression, regulation, co-regulation, emotional socialization, cognitive development, and attachment security. These relationships are informed by previous investigations of emotional competence, parenting practices, and child emotional development (Denham et al., 2020; Lunkenheimer et al., 2020; Morris et al., 2022). The analysis does not calculate statistical effects or claim causal confirmation. Instead, it organizes the research questions around theoretical integration, proposed relationships, and potential educational implications. To clarify the relationship between the research questions and analytical orientation, Table 1 presents the conceptual questions and corresponding types of analysis. These questions are aligned with the research objectives and theoretical framework to guide the interpretation and integration of relevant scholarly evidence.

Table 1. Research Questions and Types of Analysis

Research Question	Research Question	Types of Analysis
RQ1	How can parental emotional literacy be conceptually understood through emotional awareness, understanding, expression, and regulation in foundation-phase children's development?	Conceptual definition and thematic synthesis of parental emotional literacy dimensions
RQ2	How can attachment theory, social learning theory, and developmental psychopathology explain the proposed relationships between parental emotional literacy, developmental mechanisms, and protective pathways?	Integrative theoretical analysis and conceptual relationship mapping

RQ3	What potential implications does the proposed parental emotional literacy framework offer for understanding emotional well-being and informing preventive educational support for foundation-phase children?	Critical interpretive synthesis and implications analysis

Source: Conceptual synthesis based on the research objectives and theoretical framework, informed by Denham et al. (2020), Lunkenheimer et al. (2020), Morris et al. (2022), and Price and Kiel (2022)

Table 1 connects each conceptual question with an appropriate form of analysis. RQ1 addresses the definition and organization of parental emotional literacy; RQ2 examines the integration of the three explanatory theories; and RQ3 considers the implications of the framework for early childhood education and emotional support. These analyses provide conceptual interpretations rather than empirically measured relationships. By making the analytical focus explicit, the table strengthens the methodological coherence between the research objectives, literature synthesis, and proposed theoretical contribution (Denham et al., 2020; Morris et al., 2022; Havighurst et al., 2025). This analytical organization also clarifies the function of documentary materials as the principal sources of evidence supporting conceptual development.

2.4 Research Instruments

The study does not employ questionnaires, interview protocols, psychological tests, or classroom observation schedules because its methodological orientation is based on conceptual analysis of existing scholarly literature. The principal analytical materials comprise theoretical and empirical publications addressing parental emotional literacy, emotional socialization, and developmental mechanisms. For analytical purposes, four parental emotional literacy dimensions are used as conceptual indicators: emotional awareness, emotional understanding, emotional expression, and emotional regulation. Emotional cue recognition, emotion interpretation, supportive communication, and parental emotional regulation serve as illustrative sub-indicators for interpreting the conceptual characteristics of emotionally responsive parenting. These categories are grounded in the study's conceptual definitions and relevant research on emotional competence and emotion socialization (Denham et al., 2020; Morris et al., 2022; Havighurst et al., 2025). The conceptual indicators are not presented as psychometrically validated measurement items or standardized assessment instruments. Instead, they provide an analytical structure for organizing theoretical relationships and identifying potential dimensions requiring empirical examination in subsequent investigations.

2.5 Validity and Reliability

The credibility of the conceptual framework depends on the accuracy of the cited literature, clarity of construct definitions, coherence of theoretical relationships, and transparency concerning the limitations of the evidence. Theoretical consistency is considered through comparisons between the proposed parental emotional literacy dimensions and established discussions of emotional competence, parent–child interaction, and developmental adjustment (Denham et al., 2020; Lunkenheimer et al., 2020; Price & Kiel, 2022). The framework is evaluated conceptually through the correspondence between its theoretical foundations, proposed mechanisms, and anticipated developmental pathways. Nevertheless, the study does not include empirical validation procedures such as expert-validation scoring, inter-rater reliability testing, Cronbach's alpha estimation, test–retest assessment, or statistical model verification. Accordingly, validity is considered in terms of conceptual coherence and theoretical relevance rather than psychometric or statistical confirmation. Further expert assessment and empirical investigation are required to determine the framework's measurement properties, explanatory adequacy, and applicability across developmental and cultural contexts.

2.6 Research Subjects and Location

The developmental population of interest comprises foundation-phase children aged approximately five to eight years and the parents or caregivers whose emotional practices may contribute to children's development. The study is conceptually situated within early childhood education and developmental psychology, with particular attention to parent–child emotional interactions and children's psychological well-being. The authors are affiliated with the University of Pretoria, South Africa; however, the conceptual research design does not involve fieldwork at a designated educational institution or community research site. No participants were recruited, and the study does not employ population sampling, sample-size determination, or direct participant assessment. Instead, the proposed framework addresses an intended developmental population through the interpretation of existing theoretical and empirical literature. This orientation acknowledges the importance of cultural and socioeconomic differences in understanding parenting practices, developmental conditions, and potential protective influences on children's emotional well-being (Bozicevic et al., 2023; Grüning Parache et al., 2024). The resulting framework therefore provides a conceptual foundation for future context-specific empirical investigations rather than findings derived from an observed research sample.

2.7 Data Analysis Techniques

The study's analytical technique is conceptual synthesis, involving the interpretation and organization of relationships discussed in selected theoretical and empirical literature. The synthesis is organized around three interpretive operations: identifying relevant concepts, comparing explanations across theoretical perspectives, and mapping proposed relationships into an integrated framework. Concept identification focuses on the four dimensions of parental emotional literacy and their relevance to emotionally responsive parenting. Theoretical comparison examines the complementary explanatory contributions of attachment theory, social learning theory, and developmental psychopathology. Conceptual relationship mapping subsequently connects parental emotional capacities with neurobiological processes, parent–child co-regulation, emotional socialization, cognitive development, intermediate protective pathways, and potential psychological outcomes. Studies of parent–child emotional processes, emotional socialization, and developmental adjustment provide the supporting literature for these conceptual connections (Lunkenheimer et al., 2020; Morris et al., 2022; Price & Kiel, 2022). These analytical operations provide an interpretive structure rather than a statistical analysis procedure, and the proposed relationships are treated as theoretical propositions requiring future empirical evaluation. The resulting synthesis establishes a conceptual organization for explaining how parental emotional literacy may contribute to children's emotional well-being within different developmental and contextual conditions.

2.8 Data Collection Techniques

Documentary literature examination serves as the evidence-gathering technique underlying this conceptual study. The documentary synthesis integrates scholarly publications addressing attachment theory, emotional modelling, developmental psychopathology, parental emotional competence, and prevention-oriented educational support. These materials are interpreted according to their relevance to the proposed dimensions, mechanisms, and developmental pathways (Denham et al., 2020; Luby et al., 2020; Morris et al., 2022; Havighurst et al., 2025). The examination emphasizes the conceptual relevance and explanatory contributions of selected publications rather than systematic database retrieval, formal eligibility screening, or quantitative source-quality assessment. Accordingly, the documentary evidence is used to support theoretical integration and conceptual interpretation without claiming systematic review procedures or

comprehensive coverage of all available research. Figure 1 illustrates the organization of the conceptual synthesis, showing how the three theoretical perspectives inform four parental emotional capacities and their proposed relationships with developmental mechanisms, protective pathways, and potential psychological outcomes. The framework represents hypothesized conceptual relationships rather than empirically confirmed causal pathways.

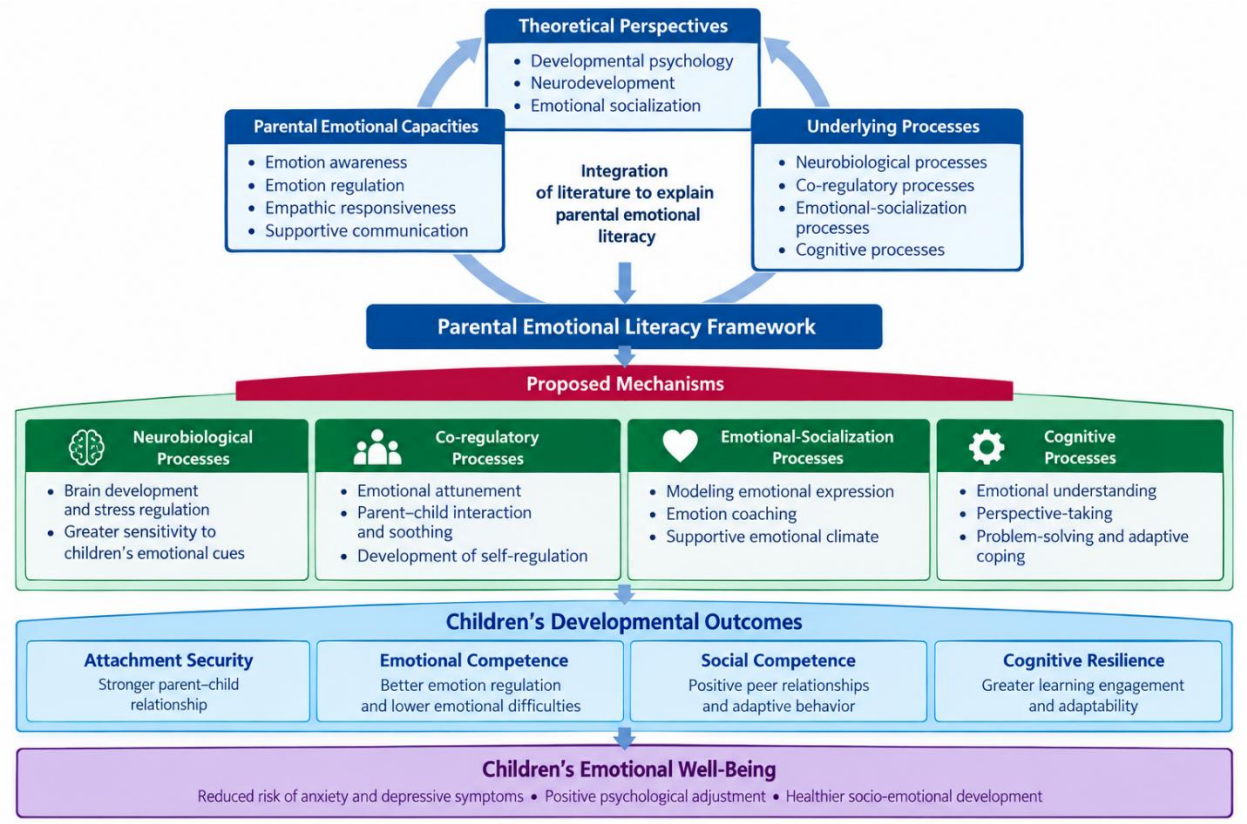


Figure 1. Conceptual Synthesis Process for Developing the Parental Emotional Literacy Framework

Conceptual synthesis developed from attachment theory, social learning theory, and developmental psychopathology, informed by Denham et al. (2020), Luby et al. (2020), Morris et al. (2022), and Price and Kiel (2022). The proposed relationships are theoretical and have not been empirically validated.

Figure 1 illustrates the conceptual synthesis of attachment theory, social learning theory, and developmental psychopathology in explaining parental emotional literacy. The framework integrates four parental capacities—emotional awareness, understanding, expression, and regulation—with proposed neurobiological, co-regulatory, emotional-socialization, and cognitive mechanisms. These mechanisms are theoretically linked to attachment security, emotional competence, social competence, and cognitive resilience, potentially contributing to children's emotional well-being (Luby et al., 2020; Lunkenheimer et al., 2020; Morris et al., 2022). These relationships remain conceptual and require empirical validation.

2.9 Ethical Considerations and Methodological Limitations

This study employs a non-systematic narrative conceptual synthesis of previously published literature without direct participant involvement, primary data collection, or experimental intervention. Consequently, participant recruitment and informed consent were not applicable to the research design. Ethical considerations emphasize child protection, developmental sensitivity, cultural diversity, and the

distinction between emotional difficulties and clinically diagnosed mental health disorders. Parental emotional literacy is conceptualized as a potential protective factor rather than the sole determinant of children's psychological well-being (Bozicevic et al., 2023; Grüning Parache et al., 2024; Havighurst et al., 2025). Methodological limitations include the absence of a systematic literature-search protocol, psychometric validation, statistical testing, and empirical assessment of the proposed relationships. Additionally, variations in participants' ages, geographical contexts, and developmental characteristics across the cited studies limit generalizability to foundation-phase children. Future research should employ culturally responsive longitudinal, observational, and intervention-based designs to examine the proposed developmental mechanisms, protective pathways, and potential prevention outcomes (Price & Kiel, 2022; Havighurst et al., 2025). Thus, the framework provides a theoretical foundation for subsequent empirical validation rather than evidence of established clinical or preventive effectiveness.

3. RESULTS

3.1 Identified Dimensions of Parental Emotional Literacy

The conceptual synthesis identifies four interconnected dimensions of parental emotional literacy: emotional awareness, emotional understanding, emotional expression, and emotional regulation. These dimensions describe distinct but complementary capacities involved in emotionally responsive parent–child interactions. Emotional awareness concerns recognizing personal emotional experiences and identifying children's emotional cues, whereas emotional understanding involves interpreting emotional triggers, meanings, and developmental characteristics. Emotional expression refers to communicating emotional experiences through appropriate verbal and nonverbal responses, while emotional regulation concerns managing parental reactions during emotionally challenging interactions. The synthesis indicates that the four dimensions perform different functions within emotionally responsive caregiving but cannot be understood as entirely independent processes. Emotional recognition provides information for interpretation, understanding informs communication, and regulation supports the consistency of parental responses. Research concerning dynamic parent–child emotional socialization and emotion-focused parenting provides a theoretical basis for examining these capacities together (Lunkenheimer et al., 2020; Morris et al., 2022; Havighurst et al., 2025). The principal finding is a four-dimensional conceptual organization of parental emotional literacy, rather than a statistically validated measurement structure. Table 2 presents the identified dimensions, their conceptual functions, and their relevance to parental emotional interactions.

Table 2. Identified Dimensions and Conceptual Characteristics of Parental Emotional Literacy

Dimension	Conceptual characteristic	Parenting-related process	Conceptual indicator	Supporting literature
Emotional Awareness	Recognition of parental and child emotions	Identification of emotional cues	Awareness of emotional changes and expressions	Lunkenheimer et al. (2020); Morris et al. (2022)
Emotional Understanding	Interpretation of emotional causes and meanings	Understanding emotional needs and developmental differences	Interpretation of emotional triggers and responses	Morris et al. (2022); Havighurst et al. (2025)
Emotional Expression	Communication of emotional experiences	Verbal and nonverbal emotional communication	Supportive expression and emotional responsiveness	Lunkenheimer et al. (2020); Havighurst et al. (2025)

Emotional Regulation	Management of emotional reactions	Regulation of parental responses during interaction	Emotional self-management and response consistency	Price & Kiel (2022); Havighurst et al. (2025)

Source: Conceptual synthesis informed by Lunkenheimer et al. (2020), Morris et al. (2022), Price and Kiel (2022), and Havighurst et al. (2025).

Table 2 demonstrates that parental emotional literacy encompasses recognition, interpretation, communication, and regulation rather than a single parenting behavior. The conceptual differentiation is important because similar outward parental responses may reflect different underlying emotional capacities. For example, recognizing a child's distress does not necessarily indicate that the caregiver understands its developmental meaning, while communicating concern does not automatically demonstrate effective emotional regulation. The synthesis identifies a functional relationship among these dimensions without establishing a fixed sequence or statistically measured dependency. Lunkenheimer et al. (2020) provide relevant evidence concerning the dynamic organization of parent–child emotional interactions, whereas Price and Kiel (2022) examine more specific longitudinal relationships among maternal emotion regulation, emotion socialization, and child anxiety. These studies address different components of the proposed construct and therefore cannot be interpreted as independent validations of the complete four-dimensional framework. Havighurst et al. (2025) further describe the theoretical importance of parental emotional competence within emotion-focused parenting programs, although evidence concerning an established intervention does not establish the effectiveness of the framework developed in this study. Accordingly, the synthesis identifies conceptual convergence across the four dimensions while distinguishing this convergence from empirical confirmation. This finding establishes the parental capacities examined in the following analysis of theoretical foundations and developmental relationships.

3.2. Theoretical Relationships Underlying Parental Emotional Literacy

The theoretical synthesis identifies attachment theory, social learning theory, and developmental psychopathology as three complementary explanatory perspectives underlying parental emotional literacy. Attachment theory contributes an understanding of relational security, caregiver sensitivity, and emotionally responsive interactions. Social learning theory explains how children may acquire emotional behaviors through observation, modelling, reinforcement, and guided participation. Developmental psychopathology provides a broader explanation of developmental vulnerability, protective conditions, and the interaction between individual characteristics and environmental influences. The findings indicate that these theoretical perspectives address different levels of the same developmental problem rather than offering interchangeable explanations. Attachment theory emphasizes the relational conditions associated with emotional security; social learning theory concerns processes through which emotional responses may be learned; and developmental psychopathology examines how risk and protective influences may operate across developmental contexts. Contemporary research on parental emotional socialization, childhood adjustment, and family circumstances supports the relevance of these theoretical relationships (Lunkenheimer et al., 2020; Morris et al., 2022; Barry et al., 2023; Grüning Parache et al., 2024). Figure 2 illustrates how the three theoretical perspectives contribute to the conceptual integration of parental emotional literacy.

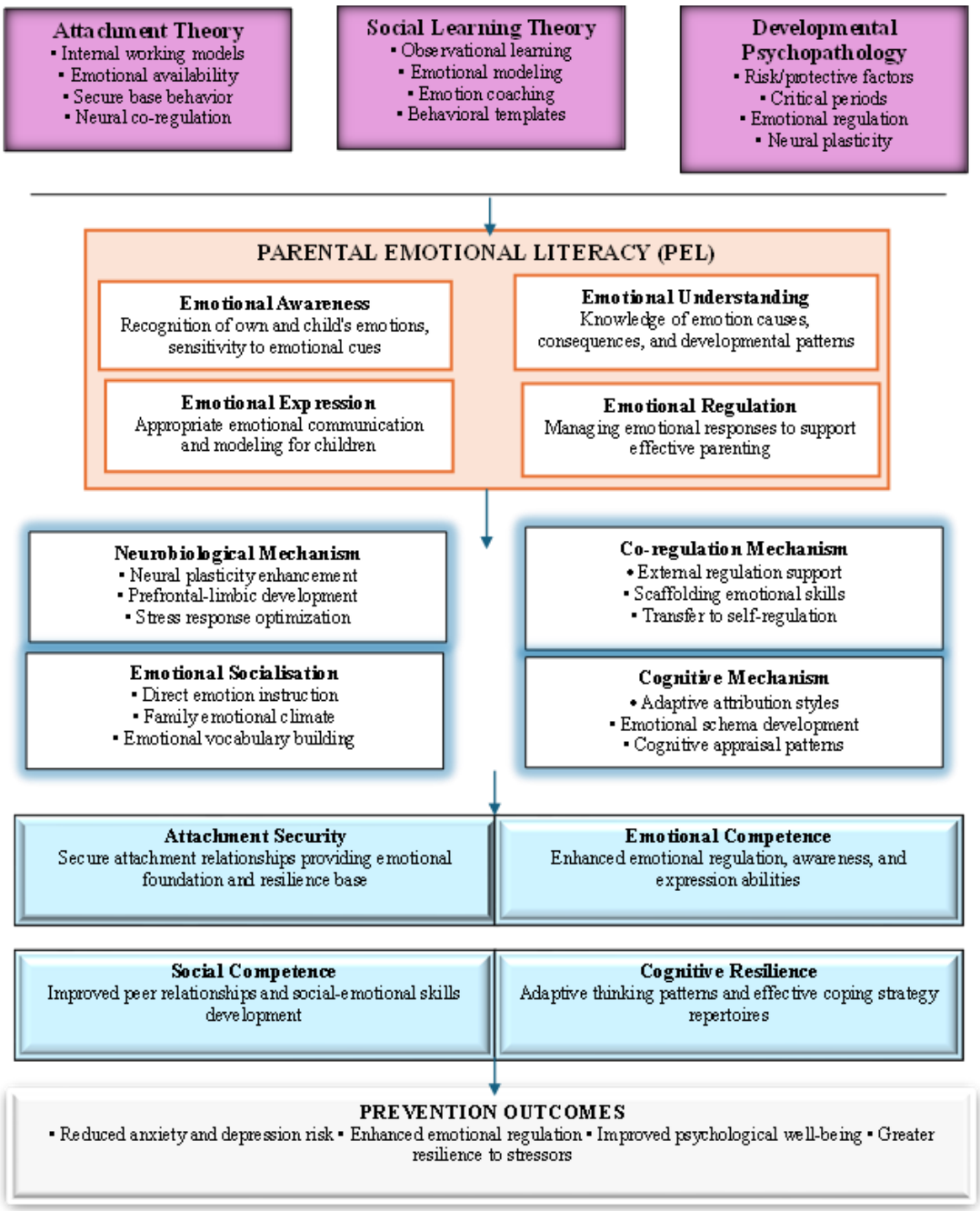


Figure 2. Integration of Theoretical Perspectives Underlying Parental Emotional Literacy

Source: Conceptual synthesis based on attachment theory, social learning theory, and developmental psychopathology, informed by Lunkenheimer et al. (2020), Morris et al. (2022), Barry et al. (2023), and Grüning Parache et al. (2024).

Figure 2 demonstrates the complementary explanatory contributions of the three theoretical perspectives to the organization of parental emotional literacy. Their integration provides a conceptual explanation of how emotionally responsive caregiving may involve relational security, learned emotional practices, and developmentally conditioned responses. The relationship represented in the diagram does not indicate that the theories were experimentally compared or that their relative contributions were statistically estimated. Instead, the synthesis identifies distinct areas of theoretical relevance. Findings concerning dynamic parent–

child emotional socialization provide support for the relational and learning-oriented components of the framework, while research addressing family circumstances and developmental vulnerability highlights the importance of contextual interpretation. The synthesis also identifies limitations in transferring findings between developmental populations. Evidence obtained from preschool children, adolescents, or broader child samples may inform theoretical relationships but does not automatically establish their applicability to foundation-phase children aged approximately five to eight years. Furthermore, relational security cannot independently explain every emotional learning process, and emotional modelling alone does not account for broader developmental vulnerabilities. The central finding is therefore an integrated theoretical explanation in which the three perspectives contribute different but interconnected interpretations of parental emotional literacy. This theoretical organization provides the foundation for identifying the developmental mechanisms examined in the subsequent subsection.

3.3. Proposed Mechanisms Connecting Parental Emotional Capacities and Child Development

The synthesis identifies four proposed mechanisms connecting parental emotional literacy with children's emotional development: neurobiological processes, parent–child co-regulation, emotional socialization, and cognitive processes. These mechanisms represent distinct explanatory pathways through which parental emotional capacities may be associated with children's developmental adjustment. Neurobiological processes concern the potential relationships between responsive caregiving, stress-related functioning, and developing neural systems. Parent–child co-regulation refers to interpersonal processes through which caregivers support children's emotional responses during interaction. Emotional socialization involves parental modelling, communication about emotions, and responses to children's emotional experiences. Cognitive processes concern the development of emotional interpretations, coping-related beliefs, and adaptive responses to challenging situations. The literature provides different forms of support for these mechanisms. Luby et al. (2020) contribute a neurodevelopmental perspective, whereas Lunkenheimer et al. (2020) examine dynamic parent–child interactions. Morris et al. (2022) provide a broader account of emotion socialization, while Price and Kiel (2022) examine longitudinal relationships involving parental and child emotional regulation. These studies do not directly test the four mechanisms as a unified explanatory system. The synthesis therefore identifies a theoretically plausible mechanism structure whose individual pathways require further empirical examination. Table 3 presents the four mechanisms and distinguishes their conceptual functions from the evidence available to support their inclusion.

Table 3. Proposed Developmental Mechanisms and Their Evidentiary Boundaries

Proposed mechanism	Conceptual process	Relationship to parental emotional literacy	Relevant evidence	Evidentiary boundary
Neurobiological Processes	Stress-related and neurodevelopmental functioning	Potential relevance of emotionally responsive caregiving to developmental functioning	Luby et al. (2020)	No direct neural measurement of parental emotional literacy in this study
Parent–Child Co-regulation	Interpersonal support during emotional experiences	Emotional regulation and supportive parental responses	Lunkenheimer et al. (2020); Price & Kiel (2022)	The complete proposed mechanism was not tested
Emotional Socialization	Emotional modelling, communication, and guidance	Awareness, understanding, expression, and regulation	Morris et al. (2022); Havighurst et al. (2025)	Evidence on specific processes does not validate the complete framework
Cognitive Processes	Emotional interpretation and coping-related cognition	Emotional understanding and regulation	Price & Kiel (2022); Morris et al. (2022)	Cognitive mediation has not been established for the proposed framework

Source: Conceptual synthesis informed by Luby et al. (2020), Lunkenheimer et al. (2020), Price and Kiel (2022), Morris et al. (2022), and Havighurst et al. (2025).

Table 3 distinguishes the four mechanisms according to their explanatory functions and evidentiary limitations. The synthesis indicates that neurobiological explanations concern a different level of analysis from interpersonal co-regulation, although these processes may be developmentally interconnected. Co-regulation emphasizes immediate emotional exchanges between caregivers and children, whereas emotional socialization describes broader patterns through which children encounter emotional expressions, explanations, and behavioral responses. Cognitive processes concern the interpretation of emotional experiences and the development of coping-related understanding. The evidence indicates that these processes are relevant to parent–child emotional development, but the reviewed studies differ in populations, research designs, and outcome measures. Consequently, the relationships cannot be combined into a single measured developmental effect. In particular, neurodevelopmental research cannot establish that parental emotional literacy directly changes specific neural structures without appropriate measurements. Similarly, longitudinal associations between emotion regulation and child anxiety do not independently demonstrate that co-regulation mediates all proposed developmental outcomes. The synthesis therefore identifies four candidate mechanisms rather than four empirically verified causal pathways. Their inclusion provides an explanatory structure for examining how parental emotional capacities may relate to developmental protection. The next subsection extends this analysis by identifying the proposed intermediate protective pathways and distinguishing them from potential psychological outcomes.

3.4. Proposed Protective Pathways and Psychological Outcomes

The synthesis identifies four proposed protective pathways through which parental emotional literacy may contribute to children's developmental adjustment: attachment security, emotional competence, social competence, and cognitive resilience. Attachment security concerns the development of supportive relational expectations and emotional safety within caregiver–child relationships. Emotional competence encompasses children's developing abilities to recognize, express, understand, and regulate emotions. Social competence involves interpersonal communication, cooperation, and participation in relationships with peers and others. Cognitive resilience concerns adaptive interpretation, problem-solving, and coping-related responses to developmental challenges. These four pathways are conceptually associated with four potential psychological outcomes: reduced vulnerability to anxiety and depressive symptoms, stronger emotional regulation, improved psychological well-being, and greater resilience to stressors. Research on emotional competence and social development supports the relevance of these constructs, while studies of parental emotion regulation and child anxiety provide evidence concerning more specific relationships (Denham et al., 2020; Price & Kiel, 2022; Morris et al., 2022). Nevertheless, the reviewed evidence does not establish that the proposed pathways operate as empirically confirmed mediators between parental emotional literacy and children's mental health. Figure 3 presents the conceptual sequence connecting parental capacities, developmental mechanisms, protective pathways, and potential psychological outcomes.

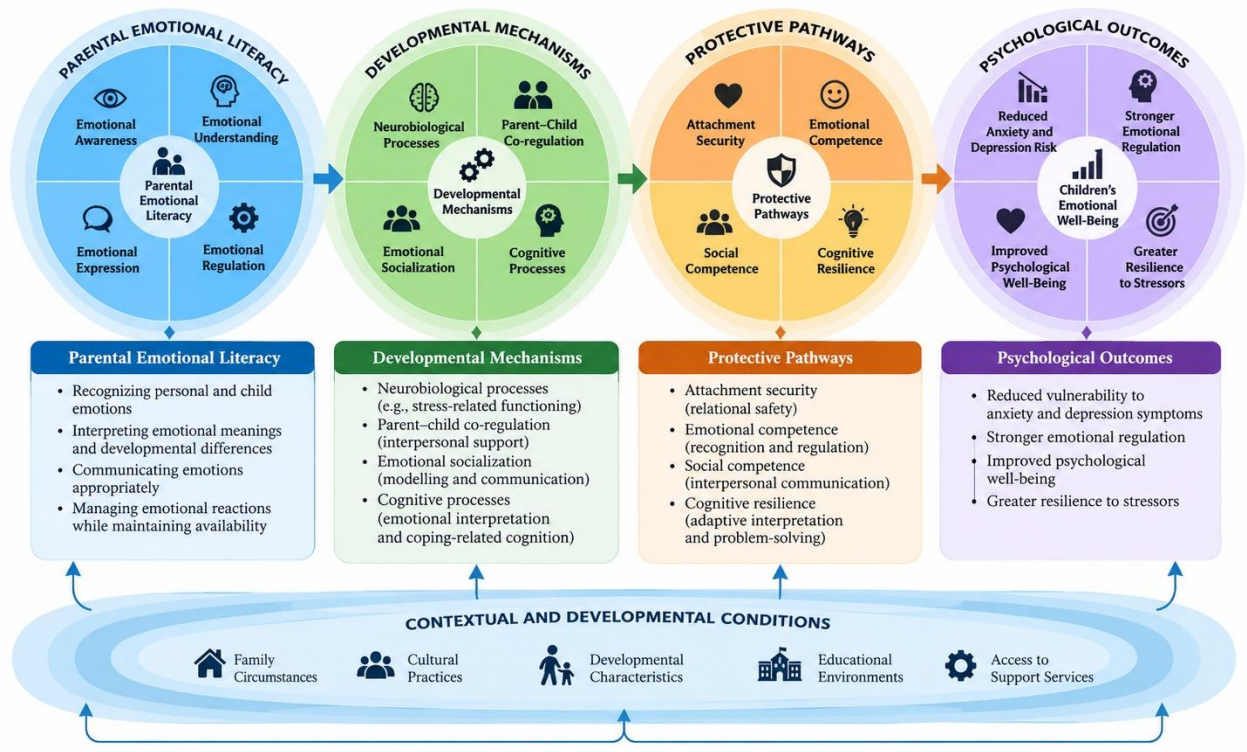


Figure 3. Proposed Developmental Pathways Linking Parental Emotional Literacy to Children's Emotional Well-Being

Source: Conceptual synthesis informed by Denham et al. (2020), Luby et al. (2020), Lunkenheimer et al. (2020), Price and Kiel (2022), and Morris et al. (2022). All directional relationships represent theoretical propositions requiring empirical validation.

Figure 3 illustrates five interconnected conceptual layers, beginning with parental emotional capacities and progressing through proposed mechanisms, intermediate protective pathways, and potential psychological outcomes. The diagram distinguishes developmental competencies from mental health outcomes, preventing the interpretation of improved emotional or social competence as equivalent to clinically verified reductions in anxiety or depression. For example, emotional competence concerns children's capacity to recognize and regulate emotional experiences, whereas anxiety and depression involve distinct psychological constructs requiring appropriate assessment. The literature provides support for investigating relationships among parenting practices, emotional competence, social development, and child anxiety, but the available evidence does not establish that all proposed pathways operate simultaneously or with equivalent explanatory strength. Price and Kiel (2022) offer longitudinal evidence concerning particular emotional regulation and anxiety relationships, while Denham et al. (2020) and Morris et al. (2022) inform the developmental interpretation of emotional and social competence. These contributions are complementary but do not constitute a complete test of the proposed framework. Accordingly, the principal finding is an integrated pathway structure that separates candidate mechanisms, intermediate developmental constructs, and potential psychological outcomes. The sequence identifies specific relationships for future investigation without claiming that preventive effectiveness has been demonstrated.

3.5. Evidence Patterns, Research Comparisons, and Identified Limitations

The synthesis identifies several recurring patterns across the literature concerning parental emotional regulation, emotional socialization, child development, and psychological adjustment. The reviewed publications address related constructs through different research approaches, including investigations of parent–child emotional interactions, longitudinal relationships, developmental processes, family

circumstances, and parenting interventions. Lunkenheimer et al. (2020) examine the dynamic organization of parent–child emotional socialization, whereas Price and Kiel (2022) investigate longitudinal relationships among maternal and child emotion regulation, maternal emotion socialization, and child anxiety. Morris et al. (2022) provide broader developmental explanations of emotional socialization, while Havighurst et al. (2025) examine the theoretical foundations and implementation conditions of an established emotion-focused parenting program. Other publications contribute perspectives concerning emotional competence, neurodevelopment, parental fear modelling, and cultural differences in caregiving. These studies collectively establish the relevance of parental emotional processes but differ in theoretical emphasis, participant characteristics, and measured outcomes. Their findings therefore cannot be treated as equivalent evidence for a single integrated intervention effect. To clarify the contribution and limitations of the evidence, Table 4 maps the principal studies to the conceptual relationships examined in this research.

Table 4. Comparative Evidence Mapping of Studies Relevant to Parental Emotional Literacy

Study	Research focus	Contribution to the conceptual synthesis	Limitation in relation to the proposed framework
Lunkenheimer et al. (2020)	Dynamic parent–child emotional socialization	Supports consideration of interpersonal emotional processes	Does not validate all four parental emotional literacy dimensions as one construct
Denham et al. (2020)	Emotional and social competence in preschool development	Informs the conceptual distinction between emotional and social competence	Developmental population and outcomes do not cover the complete framework
Luby et al. (2020)	Early adversity and neurodevelopment	Provides neurodevelopmental context	Does not directly measure the proposed parental emotional literacy mechanism
Price & Kiel (2022)	Maternal and child emotion regulation, emotion socialization, and anxiety	Supports investigation of specific longitudinal relationships	Does not test the complete multilevel framework
Morris et al. (2022)	Emotion socialization across developmental periods	Provides broader theoretical support for emotional socialization	Findings cannot automatically be restricted to children aged five to eight
Nimphy et al. (2023)	Parent-to-offspring fear transmission through modelling	Informs the social learning component	Fear modelling represents a narrower process than parental emotional literacy
Bozicevic et al. (2023)	Cross-cultural caregiving	Supports consideration of contextual variation	Does not establish locally observed outcomes for the proposed framework
Grüning Parache et al. (2024)	Family structure, socioeconomic conditions, and mental health	Identifies contextual influences on psychological adjustment	Does not establish a causal effect of parental emotional literacy
Havighurst et al. (2025)	Emotion-focused parenting intervention theory and implementation	Supports the practical relevance of emotion socialization	Effectiveness of an existing intervention does not validate this framework

Source: Comparative synthesis of the cited theoretical and empirical literature.

Table 4 demonstrates that the evidence supporting the conceptual framework is distributed across several research traditions rather than concentrated in studies examining parental emotional literacy as a unified construct. This distinction is important because findings concerning individual emotional processes cannot automatically establish relationships among all components of a multidimensional framework. The reviewed studies differ in developmental populations, research designs, conceptual definitions, and psychological outcomes, limiting direct comparability. Neurodevelopmental findings, for example, address biological processes that cannot be interpreted as direct measurements of parental emotional literacy. Similarly, evidence concerning established parenting programs demonstrates the relevance of emotion-focused approaches without establishing the effectiveness of the particular framework proposed in this study. The synthesis also identifies an evidentiary limitation concerning numerical claims of prevention effectiveness. No pooled effect estimate, statistical mediation analysis, or directly measured intervention

outcome is established through the present conceptual synthesis. Therefore, quantitative claims cannot be assigned to the proposed framework on the basis of associations reported in studies examining different constructs or populations. The central finding is a literature-supported conceptual evidence map that identifies areas of theoretical convergence alongside important differences in evidentiary scope. These distinctions clarify which proposed relationships are supported by relevant research and which require direct investigation among foundation-phase children.

3.6. Contextual, Cultural, and Developmental Conditions Influencing the Framework

The synthesis identifies several contextual conditions relevant to interpreting parental emotional literacy and children's psychological development. These include family socioeconomic circumstances, cultural caregiving practices, parental emotional well-being, developmental characteristics, and access to educational or psychological support. Research concerning family circumstances and cross-cultural caregiving indicates that emotional development occurs within interconnected relational and environmental contexts rather than being determined exclusively by individual parenting characteristics (Bozicevic et al., 2023; Grüning Parache et al., 2024). The reviewed literature also indicates that emotional expression, parental responsiveness, and expectations concerning children's emotional behavior may differ across family and cultural settings. These variations are especially relevant to foundation-phase children aged approximately five to eight years because developmental capacities for emotional recognition, communication, and regulation continue to emerge during this period. The synthesis therefore identifies contextual conditions as potential influences on the interpretation and applicability of parental emotional literacy. However, no country-specific field observations, family interviews, socioeconomic comparisons, or cross-cultural subgroup analyses were conducted in this study. Consequently, contextual differences are identified through published literature rather than measured as relationships within a newly recruited population. Table 5 presents the principal contextual conditions and their implications for interpreting the proposed framework.

Table 5. Contextual and Developmental Conditions Relevant to Parental Emotional Literacy

Contextual condition	Evidence-based consideration	Relevance to the framework	Limitation
Socioeconomic circumstances	Family resources and stressors may influence developmental experiences	Contextualizes caregiver resources and children's emotional adjustment	No socioeconomic subgroup comparison was conducted
Cultural caregiving practices	Emotional expression and responses may differ across cultural settings	Supports culturally sensitive interpretation of parental emotional literacy	No country-specific cultural effects were measured
Parental emotional well-being	Caregiver emotional functioning may be relevant to parent–child interactions	Informs the interpretation of emotional regulation and responsiveness	No parental psychological assessment was conducted
Developmental characteristics	Emotional capacities change across childhood	Supports age-sensitive interpretation for children aged five to eight	No developmental trajectories were directly measured
Educational environments	Family–school relationships may influence opportunities for emotional support	Provides a basis for considering parent education and school collaboration	No school-based intervention was evaluated
Access to support services	Availability of educational and psychological resources may vary across communities	Contextualizes potential implementation conditions	No service-access data were collected

Source: Conceptual synthesis informed by Bozicevic et al. (2023), Grüning Parache et al. (2024), Morris et al. (2022), and Havighurst et al. (2025).

Table 5 demonstrates that parental emotional literacy must be interpreted in relation to developmental, relational, cultural, and socioeconomic circumstances. The synthesis identifies two principal contextual distinctions. First, emotional responsiveness cannot be assumed to have an identical behavioral expression across families because cultural expectations and communication practices may influence how emotional support is expressed and understood. Second, children's psychological adjustment cannot be attributed exclusively to parental emotional capacities because broader environmental resources and developmental vulnerabilities may also contribute to emotional experiences. These distinctions are consistent with research examining caregiving across cultural settings and the relationships between family circumstances and psychological well-being. Havighurst et al. (2025) further identify family, organizational, and sociocultural conditions as relevant to the implementation of emotion-focused parenting programs. Nevertheless, evidence concerning established programs does not establish that the proposed parental emotional literacy framework operates identically across different populations. The available literature therefore supports the identification of contextual conditions without providing statistical estimates of their moderating effects. The resulting finding is that cultural responsiveness, developmental appropriateness, and sensitivity to family circumstances are necessary considerations for interpreting the framework. These conditions also identify areas requiring attention in future research involving clearly defined populations, educational environments, and culturally appropriate assessments.

3.7. Integrated Conceptual Findings in Relation to the Research Questions

The integration of findings across the preceding subsections produces a multilevel conceptual framework connecting parental emotional capacities, theoretical explanations, developmental mechanisms, protective pathways, and potential psychological outcomes. The first research question concerns how parental emotional literacy can be understood through awareness, understanding, expression, and regulation. The synthesis addresses this question by identifying four interrelated capacities and distinguishing their conceptual functions within parent–child emotional interactions. The second research question concerns the explanatory contributions of attachment theory, social learning theory, and developmental psychopathology. The synthesis identifies their complementary relevance to relational security, emotional learning, developmental vulnerability, and protective processes. The third research question concerns the potential implications of parental emotional literacy for children's emotional well-being and preventive educational support. The findings indicate that four proposed mechanisms—neurobiological processes, parent–child co-regulation, emotional socialization, and cognitive processes—may be linked to attachment security, emotional competence, social competence, and cognitive resilience. These relationships provide a theoretical basis for considering children's psychological adjustment but do not establish clinical prevention effectiveness.

The principal contribution lies in organizing theoretically related constructs into a coherent explanatory framework rather than establishing new statistical associations or experimentally verified developmental effects. The synthesis also identifies important relationships among its findings. Emotional awareness, understanding, expression, and regulation describe parental capacities; the three theoretical perspectives explain different aspects of these capacities; and the proposed mechanisms specify potential processes through which parental practices may relate to children's developmental adjustment. Attachment security, emotional competence, social competence, and cognitive resilience represent intermediate protective constructs rather than direct evidence of reductions in anxiety or depressive symptoms. Furthermore, cultural practices, family circumstances, and developmental characteristics influence how the framework should be interpreted and may condition its applicability. The resulting conceptual organization therefore integrates established areas of developmental research while retaining the distinction between relevant

evidence and untested propositions. Figure 4 presents this integrated framework, including the contextual conditions that inform interpretation. The findings provide a structured basis for subsequent empirical investigation without claiming observed protective effects among foundation-phase children.

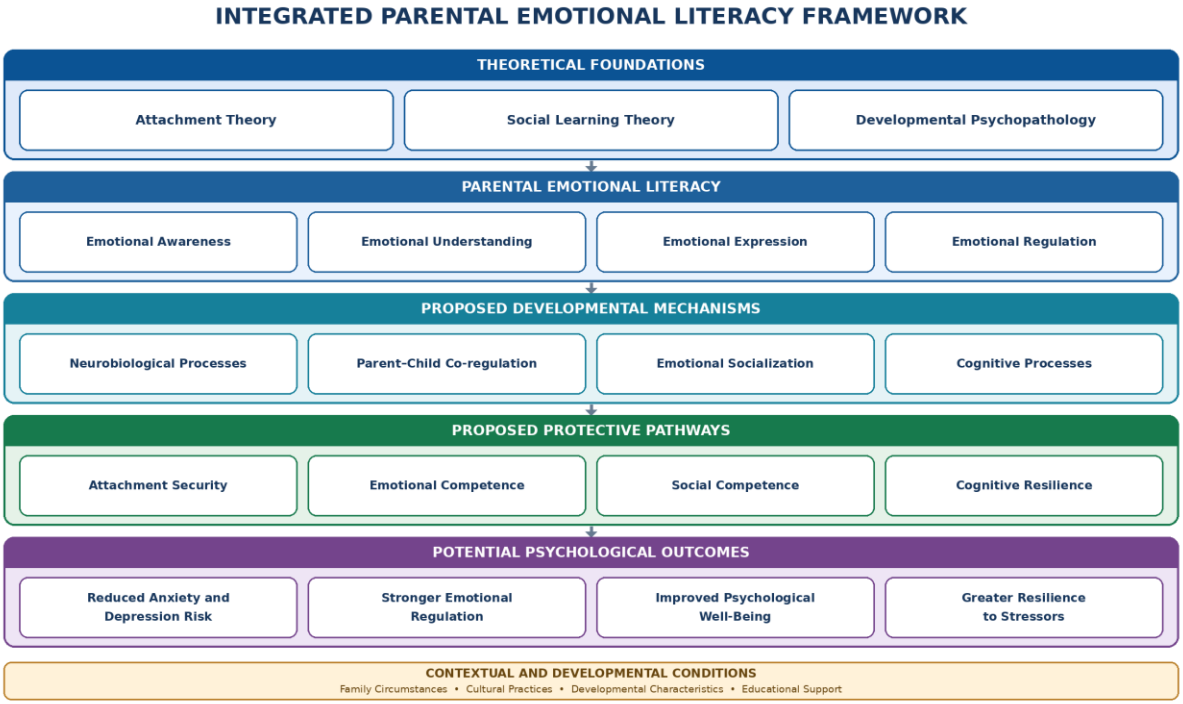


Figure 4. Integrated Conceptual Framework of Parental Emotional Literacy and Potential Developmental Protection

Source: Integrated conceptual synthesis informed by Denham et al. (2020), Luby et al. (2020), Lunkenheimer et al. (2020), Morris et al. (2022), Price and Kiel (2022), and Havighurst et al. (2025). Arrows indicate proposed theoretical relationships rather than statistically confirmed causal effects.

Figure 4 illustrates the integrated relationships among the five principal components of the proposed parental emotional literacy framework. The upper layer identifies three theoretical foundations that inform the conceptual understanding of parental emotional capacities. The subsequent layers distinguish four parental emotional literacy dimensions, four candidate developmental mechanisms, four protective pathways, and four potential psychological outcomes. Contextual and developmental conditions are included as interpretive considerations because emotional caregiving and psychological adjustment may differ across families, developmental stages, and educational environments. The diagram provides a structured representation of the synthesis rather than a statistical pathway model. Its arrows illustrate proposed relationships and should not be interpreted as evidence that each dimension influences only one mechanism or that the suggested pathways have been empirically confirmed. In particular, the framework does not demonstrate that parental emotional literacy independently prevents anxiety or depression among foundation-phase children. Its contribution is to identify theoretically connected constructs and distinguish potential protective processes from clinically established outcomes. The resulting conceptual model addresses the research questions through an integrated explanation of parental emotional capacities, developmental processes, and contextual influences. Further empirical investigation is necessary to examine the strength, direction, and developmental applicability of the proposed relationships.

4. DISCUSSION

The discussion critically interprets the conceptual synthesis by examining why parental emotional literacy may contribute to children's emotional adjustment, how the proposed relationships can be explained through the three theoretical perspectives, and under what developmental and contextual circumstances their relevance may vary. Rather than treating the proposed framework as evidence of preventive effectiveness, the analysis evaluates its explanatory contribution, its relationship to previous scholarship, and the limitations that must be addressed before empirical applications can be justified. Particular attention is given to distinguishing parental emotional capacities from child-level developmental outcomes, examining competing explanations, and considering the educational implications of a framework that has not yet undergone empirical validation.

4.1. Theoretical Significance of Parental Emotional Literacy as a Multidimensional Protective Construct

The first objective of this study concerns how parental emotional literacy can be conceptually understood as a potential protective factor against anxiety and depression among foundation-phase children. The significance of the proposed framework lies not in identifying emotional awareness, understanding, expression, and regulation as previously unknown parenting capacities, but in examining whether their integration provides a more coherent explanation of emotional support than an isolated focus on individual parenting behaviours. Denham et al. (2020) discussed emotional competence in relation to children's social development, whereas Lunkenheimer et al. (2020) examined dynamic parent–child emotional processes, emphasizing the relational character of emotional socialization. Price and Kiel (2022) investigated longitudinal relationships among maternal emotion regulation, emotion socialization, and child anxiety, demonstrating the relevance of examining parental and child emotional processes together. Morris et al. (2022) extended this developmental discussion by considering emotional socialization across childhood and adolescence. These contributions provide a substantial foundation for the present conceptual synthesis, but their different analytical emphases reveal a conceptual difficulty: parental emotional capacities, parenting practices, child emotional competencies, and psychological outcomes are related constructs that cannot be treated as interchangeable. The proposed framework responds to this difficulty by positioning parental emotional literacy as an organizing construct whose dimensions may influence relational practices through distinguishable but interacting mechanisms. This interpretation extends previous scholarship by separating what parents are theoretically capable of doing from how those capacities may be expressed in interactions and how such interactions might relate to children's adjustment. The distinction is consequential because emotional awareness alone does not guarantee sensitive parental responses, just as emotional regulation does not necessarily imply emotionally supportive communication. A parent may recognize a child's distress but respond in ways that discourage emotional expression, while another may maintain behavioural composure without accurately interpreting the child's emotional needs. The framework therefore challenges any assumption that isolated emotional competencies necessarily produce beneficial developmental outcomes. Its contribution is an explanatory proposition concerning the coordination of parental capacities, not evidence that all four dimensions operate equally or independently. Future research must determine whether these dimensions are empirically distinguishable, whether their interactions

improve developmental explanations, and whether they predict outcomes beyond established measures of parenting sensitivity and emotional socialization.

4.2. Integrating Attachment Theory, Social Learning Theory, and Developmental Psychopathology

The integration of attachment theory, social learning theory, and developmental psychopathology addresses the theoretical objective of explaining how parental emotional capacities may operate through relational, behavioural, and developmental processes. Attachment theory offers an account of why emotionally responsive caregiving may acquire psychological significance: repeated interactions contribute to children's expectations concerning caregiver availability and relational security. Social learning theory addresses a different explanatory question by considering how children acquire emotional practices through observation, modelling, communication, and guided participation. Developmental psychopathology broadens these explanations by emphasizing that similar experiences may have different consequences depending on developmental timing, individual characteristics, and surrounding conditions. Contemporary research illustrates the importance of distinguishing these explanatory levels. Lunkenheimer et al. (2020) investigated dynamic parent–child interactions, while Morris et al. (2022) examined broader emotional socialization processes. Price and Kiel (2022) investigated the relationship between maternal and child emotional regulation and anxiety, whereas Barry et al. (2023) discussed developmental psychopathology as an approach to understanding psychological development through interacting processes. The present framework extends these perspectives by suggesting that attachment-related security may influence the context in which emotional learning occurs, while repeated emotional learning experiences may contribute to capacities that become relevant under conditions of developmental stress. This proposed interaction is more informative than presenting three theories as independent explanations of the same phenomenon. Nonetheless, theoretical integration creates a risk of conceptual overlap. Parental responsiveness, emotion coaching, and co-regulation can describe aspects of the same interaction even though different theories assign them different explanatory functions. Without precise operational definitions, the framework could appear comprehensive while offering limited discriminating power. Theoretical adequacy therefore depends on identifying what each perspective explains that the others do not. Attachment theory contributes relational expectations; social learning theory contributes processes of behavioural acquisition; developmental psychopathology contributes developmental variability and contextual risk. The conceptual contribution emerges from their differentiated interaction, whereas empirical confirmation requires evidence capable of distinguishing these pathways rather than assuming that their coexistence demonstrates causal integration.

4.3. Interpreting the Proposed Mechanisms and Their Evidentiary Boundaries

A central interpretive issue concerns whether the mechanisms included in the proposed framework should be regarded as established explanations or provisional pathways requiring verification. The distinction is particularly important for neurobiological mechanisms, because research concerning responsive parenting, early adversity, and neural development does not automatically demonstrate that parental emotional literacy, as defined in this article, produces specific neurological changes. Luby et al. (2020) examined neurodevelopmental processes associated with early-life adversity and sensitive developmental periods, providing a relevant foundation for considering how early environments may matter for developmental functioning. This literature supports the plausibility of relationships between caregiving environments and neurodevelopment but cannot independently verify the complete sequence proposed here. In contrast, Lunkenheimer et al. (2020) investigated interpersonal emotional processes that offer a more direct basis for examining how regulation is coordinated between parents and children. Morris et al. (2022) discussed the

socialization of emotion through parenting practices, while Price and Kiel (2022) investigated longitudinal relationships connecting maternal emotional functioning and child anxiety. These studies differ in their constructs, methods, and explanatory levels, making it inappropriate to merge their conclusions into a single verified causal pathway. The present synthesis extends their collective relevance by distinguishing neurobiological, co-regulatory, emotional-socialization, and cognitive processes as candidate mechanisms. Yet this differentiation also exposes an important conceptual challenge: mechanisms may operate reciprocally rather than sequentially. A child's emotional responses may influence parental regulation, just as parental responses may influence the child's subsequent emotional experiences. Likewise, emotional communication can contribute simultaneously to social learning, relational security, and cognitive interpretation. Cañas et al. (2022), through their examination of parent–child interaction coding, further illustrates why specific interaction patterns require careful operational interpretation rather than broad attribution to parental competence. The proposed model should therefore be interpreted as an explanatory map of potentially interacting processes, not as a demonstrated chain of events. Its scientific value depends on enabling researchers to formulate more precise questions about temporal ordering, reciprocal influence, and the circumstances under which particular mechanisms may become developmentally relevant.

4.4. Protective Pathways, Internalizing Symptoms, and the Limits of Causal Interpretation

The interpretation of parental emotional literacy as a protective factor requires particular caution because developmental adjustment, emotional competence, internalizing symptoms, and clinically diagnosed mental health disorders represent different outcomes. The literature incorporated into this synthesis suggests plausible relationships between supportive parenting and children's emotional functioning, but the nature of these relationships varies considerably across studies. Price and Kiel (2022) examined longitudinal associations involving maternal emotional regulation, emotional socialization, and child anxiety. Their work provides a stronger basis for considering temporal relationships than a purely cross-sectional account, although longitudinal association alone cannot eliminate all competing explanations. Nimphy et al. (2023) reviewed parent-to-offspring fear transmission through modelling, offering evidence relevant to emotional learning while also indicating that the direction and character of parental influence may be more complex than a uniformly protective interpretation suggests. Denham et al. (2020) addressed emotional competence and social competence, but improvements in social functioning should not automatically be interpreted as reductions in clinically diagnosed anxiety or depression. Similarly, Havighurst et al. (2025) discussed the theoretical and practical foundations of an established parenting programme; this does not establish that the newly synthesized parental emotional literacy framework has been tested as an equivalent intervention. The present model extends these perspectives by proposing several intermediate protective pathways rather than treating reduced psychological difficulties as an immediate consequence of parental competence. This distinction matters because children's emotional adjustment may be influenced by temperament, school experiences, socioeconomic adversity, and other developmental circumstances that operate independently of, or interact with, parental characteristics. The framework consequently challenges a simplified protective-factor assumption in which emotionally competent parenting is expected to generate uniformly positive outcomes. Attachment security, emotional competence, social competence, and cognitive resilience should instead be examined as possible intermediate constructs whose relationships with subsequent psychological adjustment remain conditional. A defensible interpretation is that parental emotional literacy may contribute to developmental resources associated with emotional well-being. Whether these resources reduce the likelihood, severity, or persistence of specific internalizing difficulties remains a separate empirical question requiring age-appropriate outcome measures and longitudinal or intervention-based evaluation.

4.5. Developmental Specificity and the Challenge of Applying Broader Evidence to Foundation-Phase Children

The developmental focus on children aged approximately five to eight years raises questions about how findings obtained from different childhood and adolescent populations should inform an integrative framework for the foundation phase. Emotional awareness, verbal communication, cognitive appraisal, and self-regulation undergo developmental changes, making it problematic to assume that mechanisms identified in older populations operate identically during the earliest years of formal schooling. Denham et al. (2020) addressed emotional competence during preschool development, providing a relevant developmental foundation while not directly encompassing all experiences of foundation-phase children. Morris et al. (2022) examined emotion socialization across childhood and adolescence, enabling broader theoretical comparisons but requiring caution when applying general developmental observations to a narrower age group. Price and Kiel (2022) focused on relationships involving maternal emotional regulation and child anxiety, whereas Nimphy et al. (2023) synthesized evidence concerning fear transmission in early life. These studies contribute complementary knowledge, but their different emphases cannot substitute for direct examination of every proposed framework component among five- to eight-year-olds. Developmental specificity also complicates the assumption that effective emotional regulation necessarily resembles independent self-control. During the foundation phase, children's capacity to interpret emotional experiences and employ coping strategies may depend on communication abilities, available support, and the demands of particular situations. An exclusive emphasis on independent regulation risks underestimating the developmental importance of supportive interpersonal processes. The proposed framework therefore extends previous discussions by treating co-regulation as a potentially continuing relational process rather than merely a preliminary stage that must disappear as children become more competent. This interpretation also permits consideration of variation in communication styles, developmental pace, and support needs without equating difference with psychological dysfunction. Its limitation is that these developmental qualifications have not been tested within the model itself. The framework consequently provides a rationale for age-sensitive research designs, but it cannot establish developmental thresholds, normative emotional profiles, or intervention effects for foundation-phase children without appropriately designed empirical studies.

4.6. Cultural, Family, and Educational Conditions as Boundaries of the Framework

The second research question concerns how culturally grounded approaches may strengthen parent–child emotional interactions, particularly in relation to the Nigerian context mentioned in the original manuscript. This question cannot be answered through claims of observed Nigerian parenting practices because the present article does not report original fieldwork, interviews, or context-specific intervention outcomes. Its contribution is instead to clarify why cultural and contextual conditions should be treated as potential influences on the interpretation and application of parental emotional literacy. Bozicevic et al. (2023) examined cross-cultural differences in early caregiving between the United Kingdom and India, demonstrating the importance of attending to variation in caregiving practices rather than assuming that one behavioural expression necessarily carries the same meaning across settings. Grüning Parache et al. (2024) investigated family structure, socioeconomic status, and childhood mental health, highlighting the relevance of family circumstances when interpreting developmental adjustment. Morris et al. (2022) provided a broader account of emotional socialization that can inform culturally responsive examination of parenting practices, while Havighurst et al. (2025) discussed factors affecting the implementation and effectiveness of an emotion-focused parenting programme. Together, these contributions challenge the assumption that a theoretically coherent parenting framework can be transferred between social

environments without further examination. Emotional support may be expressed through verbal discussion, nonverbal responsiveness, family routines, or forms of interpersonal guidance whose meanings depend on relational expectations and cultural practices. Structural conditions can also constrain caregivers' opportunities to provide consistent emotional support, regardless of their individual competencies. The proposed framework therefore extends parental emotional literacy beyond an exclusively individual-level explanation by identifying context as a potential condition shaping how emotional capacities are expressed. However, the available synthesis does not justify selecting a particular cultural practice as uniquely protective or attributing specific emotional outcomes to Nigerian families. Culturally grounded application requires context-specific evidence, participation by families and educators, and careful differentiation between cultural variation and barriers arising from unequal access to resources. The Nigerian focus should consequently be interpreted as a proposed direction for future contextual validation rather than as an empirically investigated setting in the present study.

4.7. Scientific Contribution, Educational Implications, and Priorities for Future Validation

The overall contribution of this conceptual synthesis concerns the development of a structured explanation that can support more precise empirical investigation and potentially inform educational approaches to children's emotional well-being. Existing scholarship establishes the importance of examining emotional competence, parenting interactions, emotional socialization, and developmental adjustment, but it does so through distinct theoretical and methodological perspectives (Denham et al., 2020; Lunkenheimer et al., 2020; Price & Kiel, 2022; Morris et al., 2022). Havighurst et al. (2025) provides a programme-oriented perspective, whereas Santana-Ferrándiz et al. (2025) examines parental sensitivity and socioemotional development from several explanatory viewpoints. Gebre et al. (2025) adds an educational perspective concerning teachers' socioemotional competence and student engagement. These contributions support consideration of emotional development across family and educational contexts, but they do not establish that the particular parental emotional literacy model proposed in this article has demonstrated effectiveness. The framework's theoretical contribution is to make explicit a set of relationships that can be investigated rather than leaving parental emotional competence as a broad explanatory label. Its educational implications must be interpreted within the same evidentiary limits. Schools may use established approaches to strengthen communication with families, encourage developmentally appropriate emotional support, and facilitate referral to qualified professionals when children exhibit persistent difficulties. Such practices should not be presented as validated applications of the new model unless they are independently evaluated. A more rigorous application pathway would begin with operational definitions and content validation of the four parental capacities, followed by investigation of their relationships with observable parenting practices and child-level outcomes. Longitudinal studies could examine reciprocal relationships and temporal ordering, while intervention research could assess whether programmes explicitly targeting these capacities produce changes beyond existing parenting support approaches. Cross-cultural research would be necessary to determine whether the framework remains conceptually meaningful across different caregiving environments. The central scientific implication is therefore methodological as well as theoretical: the proposed model offers a basis for developing falsifiable propositions, examining competing explanations, and distinguishing plausible developmental mechanisms from demonstrated prevention effects. Its value will ultimately depend on whether subsequent evidence confirms, modifies, or challenges the relationships advanced in this synthesis.

5. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1. Conclusions

1. **Core Finding and Conceptual Answer.** The principal conclusion of this study is that parental emotional literacy can be conceptualized as a potentially important, but not independently sufficient, contributor to emotional protection during the foundation phase of childhood. The integrative framework explains how parental emotional capacities may operate through relational, behavioural, cognitive, and developmental processes associated with children's emotional adjustment. Its contribution is an organized theoretical explanation of potential protective relationships rather than empirical proof that parental emotional literacy prevents anxiety or depression. The proposed model consequently offers a conceptual answer to the primary research question while recognizing that its specific pathways and outcomes remain unvalidated.
2. **Theoretical Contribution.** The study contributes to educational and developmental psychology by integrating attachment theory, social learning theory, and developmental psychopathology into a multilevel conceptual framework. Its originality lies in distinguishing parental emotional capacities, candidate mechanisms, intermediate protective pathways, and proposed psychological outcomes while clarifying how these components may interact. This theoretical organization extends existing discussions of emotion socialization and parenting by identifying relationships that can be formulated as empirically testable propositions. The framework does not establish a new causal theory or validated measurement instrument, but it provides a structured basis for investigating whether parental emotional literacy contributes explanatory value beyond previously established parenting constructs.
3. **Educational and Practical Implications.** The framework has potential implications for parent education, early childhood educational support, and collaboration between families and schools. Its principal practical value is to encourage developmentally appropriate attention to parental emotional awareness, understanding, expression, and regulation without treating caregivers as the sole determinants of children's psychological outcomes. Educational stakeholders may use the framework to inform future programme design, professional dialogue, and context-sensitive support planning. Any application should remain consistent with established safeguarding practices, respect developmental and cultural variation, and distinguish educational emotional support from clinical assessment or treatment. Its relevance to Nigerian and other cultural contexts requires locally grounded investigation before specific implementation recommendations can be justified.
4. **Limitations and Future Research Agenda.** This study is limited by its non-systematic narrative conceptual approach, reliance on previously published literature, variation in the populations and research designs represented by the cited sources, and absence of original empirical validation. The proposed dimensions and pathways have not been tested as a complete model, and no direct evidence is presented concerning their preventive effectiveness among foundation-phase children. The geographical scope also remains primarily conceptual, with no original Nigerian or South African field data used to establish contextual differences. Future research should prioritize construct validation, longitudinal examination of developmental pathways, culturally responsive investigation, and controlled evaluation of interventions derived from the framework. These studies are necessary to determine whether the conceptual relationships remain valid under empirical examination.

5.2. Recommendations

Future research should operationalize the four dimensions of parental emotional literacy through clearly defined and developmentally appropriate indicators, followed by expert evaluation and empirical testing of their measurement properties. Longitudinal investigations involving foundation-phase children, caregivers, and educators should examine the direction and strength of associations among parental emotional capacities, parent–child interaction processes, emotional competence, and internalizing symptoms. Cross-cultural studies, including research in Nigerian and South African educational contexts, should investigate how family practices, language, socioeconomic circumstances, and school environments influence these relationships. Subsequent intervention studies should compare programmes informed by the proposed framework with established parenting support approaches, employing validated outcome measures and appropriate comparison groups. Such investigations would provide the evidence needed to refine the conceptual model, establish its boundaries, and determine whether it offers practical benefits beyond existing theoretical and educational approaches.

Ethical & Author Statements

CRediT Statement: Judith Ngunan Age: Conceptualization, Theoretical Framework, Methodology, Investigation (Literature-Based), Formal Analysis, Writing – Original Draft, Project Administration. Susan Thuketana: Conceptualization, Theoretical Interpretation, Methodology, Validation, Writing – Review & Editing, Supervision. Both authors reviewed and approved the final version of the manuscript.

Conflict of Interest: The authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest related to this research, its interpretation, or publication.

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Data Availability Statement (Data Policy): This study is based on a conceptual synthesis of previously published theoretical and empirical literature concerning parental emotional literacy, emotional socialization, attachment relationships, and children's psychological adjustment. No original participant-level datasets, interviews, questionnaires, classroom observations, or experimental measurements were generated. The scholarly sources supporting the conceptual framework are identified in the reference list. Accordingly, no primary research dataset is available for public deposition. The conceptual relationships and theoretical interpretations are presented within the manuscript.

Ethical Approval and Informed Consent: This study involved the analysis and synthesis of previously published scholarly literature and did not involve direct recruitment, interaction, or intervention with human participants. No primary data were collected from children, parents, teachers, or clinical populations. Consequently, participant informed consent was not applicable. No institutional ethical approval number is reported. The study acknowledges the importance of child protection, developmental sensitivity, cultural considerations, and appropriate distinctions between educational emotional support and clinical mental health assessment.

AI Policy: Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools, including large language models, were used to support language editing, grammatical refinement, and manuscript organization. AI-generated suggestions were subject to critical evaluation and verification by the authors. AI tools were not used to fabricate empirical data, generate participant responses, misrepresent research findings, or replace the authors' scholarly interpretation. The authors retain full responsibility for the accuracy, originality, integrity, and final content of the manuscript.

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