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Gender and Emotional Maturity Categories Among Students at SMP Negeri 1 Pakis: Implications for Gender-Responsive Guidance and Counseling Services

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Abstract

Emotional maturity is an important developmental competence that supports adolescents in regulating emotions, building healthy interpersonal relationships, and responding adaptively to developmental demands. This study aimed to examine the association between gender and emotional maturity categories among students at SMP Negeri 1 Pakis and to identify its implications for gender-responsive Guidance and Counseling services. A quantitative cross-sectional comparative design was employed involving 134 students, consisting of 67 male and 67 female students aged 12–15 years. Data were collected using a 25-item emotional maturity scale adapted from Hilyana (2020), covering self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills. The instrument demonstrated excellent internal consistency, with McDonald's ω = .933. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and the Fisher–Freeman–Halton exact test, while Cramér's *V* was used to estimate the effect size. The results showed that 91.0% of students were classified in the moderate emotional maturity category, 5.2% in the low category, and 3.7% in the high category. Although female students showed a higher proportion in the high category than male students, no statistically significant association was found between gender and emotional maturity category, $p = .350$, with a small effect size, Cramér's $V = .124$. These findings indicate that gender should not be used as the sole basis for evaluating students' emotional development. Guidance and Counseling services should therefore be universal, inclusive, and gender-responsive, while remaining grounded in students' actual developmental needs rather than gender stereotypes.

Keywords: *Emotional Maturity; Gender; Junior High school Students; Guidance and Counseling; Gender-Responsive Services*

INTRODUCTION

Adolescence is a critical developmental stage characterized by rapid biological, cognitive, emotional, and social changes that require individuals to continuously adapt to increasingly complex developmental demands. During this period, adolescents experience substantial physical maturation, identity exploration, emotional fluctuations, expanding peer relationships, and increasing academic expectations. These developmental transitions place adolescents in a vulnerable position because they are expected to regulate their emotions while simultaneously adjusting to various internal and external challenges. Consequently, emotional maturity becomes one of the essential developmental competencies that enables adolescents to respond adaptively to stressful situations, establish healthy interpersonal relationships, and make responsible decisions throughout their developmental process (Santrock, 2019; Papalia & Martorell, 2021; Gross, 2015). Recent studies have consistently identified emotional

regulation as a protective factor for adolescents' mental health, psychosocial adjustment, and academic functioning, highlighting its importance as a target for school-based developmental interventions (Haag et al., 2024; Sharma et al., 2025).

Emotional maturity refers to an individual's ability to recognize, understand, regulate, and appropriately express emotions according to situational demands while maintaining adaptive relationships with others. Emotionally mature adolescents are generally able to control emotional impulses, tolerate frustration, demonstrate empathy, and solve interpersonal problems constructively. In contrast, inadequate emotional maturity has been associated with aggressive behavior, bullying, emotional dysregulation, anxiety, poor peer relationships, and low academic adjustment among adolescents (Goleman, 1995; Gross, 2015; Haslinda et al., 2022; Putra, 2018; Pangesti et al., 2024). Systematic reviews further demonstrate that strengthening adolescents' emotional competence contributes significantly to psychological well-being and resilience, emphasizing the need for preventive interventions delivered through educational settings (Pedrini et al., 2022; Haag et al., 2024).

Among the various factors associated with emotional maturity, gender has received considerable attention because male and female adolescents experience different biological maturation processes, emotional socialization, and sociocultural expectations. Female adolescents are generally encouraged to express emotions openly and develop interpersonal sensitivity, whereas male adolescents are more frequently socialized to suppress emotional expression and display independence. These developmental experiences may contribute to differences in emotional awareness, emotional regulation, and interpersonal behaviors. Nevertheless, gender should not be interpreted as the sole determinant of emotional maturity because emotional development is simultaneously influenced by parenting practices, peer relationships, school climate, and individual psychosocial experiences (Chaplin, 2015; Papalia & Martorell, 2021; Sanchis-Sanchis et al., 2020).

Previous empirical findings regarding gender differences in emotional maturity remain inconsistent. Several studies reported that female adolescents demonstrate higher emotional maturity because they possess greater empathy, emotional awareness, and interpersonal sensitivity than male adolescents (Haslinda et al., 2022; Puspita et al., 2024). Conversely, other studies found that male adolescents exhibit stronger emotional control and behavioral regulation when facing stressful situations (Sitinjak et al., 2024). Meanwhile, other investigations reported no statistically significant gender differences, suggesting that emotional maturity develops through complex interactions among biological, psychological, familial, educational, and sociocultural factors rather than gender alone (Hyde, 2014; Nyiagani & Kristinawati, 2021; Sanchis-Sanchis et al., 2020). These inconsistent findings indicate that empirical evidence concerning gender differences in emotional maturity remains inconclusive, particularly among Indonesian early adolescents, thereby requiring further investigation using comparative research designs.

Table 1. Summary of Previous Studies and Research Gap

No.	Previous Studies	Main Findings	Limitations	Current Study
1.	Amaliasari & Zulfiana (2019)	Emotional maturity associated with aggression	Did not compare gender	Compare emotional maturity based on gender
2.	Permatasari et al. (2024)	Peer interaction influences emotional maturity	Gender not analyzed	Gender comparison
3.	Puspita et al. (2024)	Female university students higher	University students	Junior high school students
4.	Sitinjak et al. (2024)	Emotional coping differs by gender	Focus on coping	Focus on emotional maturity
5.	Present Study	Emotional maturity differences	BK implication	Gender-responsive counseling

Although emotional maturity has been widely investigated, several research gaps remain. First, previous studies have predominantly focused on university students or senior high school students, while

investigations involving early adolescents at the junior high school level remain relatively limited (Puspita et al., 2024; Permatasari et al., 2024). Second, most previous studies have examined emotional maturity in relation to aggression, peer conformity, resilience, or social interaction without specifically comparing emotional maturity based on gender using balanced comparative samples (Amaliasari & Zulfiana, 2019; Putra, 2018; Permatasari et al., 2024). Third, relatively few studies have translated empirical findings into practical implications for designing gender-responsive Guidance and Counseling services. Consequently, empirical evidence that directly supports school counselors in developing evidence-based counseling interventions remains limited.

The need for further investigation is also supported by the empirical context of Pakis Public Junior High School 1. Preliminary observations and discussions with Guidance and Counseling teachers indicated that male and female students demonstrate different emotional characteristics when responding to academic demands, peer relationships, and interpersonal conflicts. Female students tend to display greater emotional sensitivity, interpersonal concerns, and relational conflicts, whereas male students more frequently exhibit impulsive reactions, verbal aggression, and difficulties regulating emotional responses during social interactions. Nevertheless, these observable differences in emotional expression do not necessarily indicate statistically significant differences in emotional maturity. Therefore, empirical verification is necessary to determine whether emotional maturity differs between male and female students, thereby preventing educational practices from relying solely on gender stereotypes.

School Guidance and Counseling services play a strategic role in facilitating adolescents' emotional development through preventive, developmental, and responsive interventions that strengthen emotional awareness, self-regulation, empathy, and interpersonal competence. Understanding students' emotional characteristics is fundamental for designing counseling services that are responsive to their developmental needs. Although gender should not be regarded as the primary determinant of emotional maturity, empirical evidence regarding gender-related emotional characteristics may assist school counselors in selecting appropriate intervention strategies, communication approaches, and counseling activities that accommodate students' diverse developmental experiences (ASCA, 2022; Gysbers & Henderson, 2012; Sink, 2019).

Unlike previous studies that primarily described adolescents' emotional maturity or examined its association with other psychological variables, the present study specifically compares emotional maturity between male and female junior high school students using a balanced comparative design and translates the findings into practical implications for gender-responsive Guidance and Counseling services. Accordingly, this study aims to examine whether significant differences exist in emotional maturity between male and female students at Pakis Public Junior High School 1 and to formulate evidence-based implications for developing gender-responsive Guidance and Counseling services. The findings are expected to enrich the literature on adolescent emotional development while providing practical recommendations for school counselors in designing more adaptive, inclusive, and developmentally appropriate counseling programs.

METHOD

Research Design

This study employed a quantitative cross-sectional comparative design to examine differences in emotional maturity between male and female students at SMP Negeri 1 Pakis. The comparative design was selected because the study involved two independent groups classified according to gender and aimed to determine whether their emotional maturity scores differed statistically. No experimental manipulation was administered because gender was treated as a naturally occurring participant characteristic. Data were collected at one point in time using an emotional maturity scale and were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistical procedures.

Participants and Sampling

The participants were 134 students enrolled in Grades VII, VIII, and IX at SMP Negeri 1 Pakis. Their ages ranged from 12 to 15 years. A balanced quota sampling procedure was applied, with gender used as the quota variable to provide equal representation of male and female students. The final sample comprised 67 male students and 67 female students. Only students who were officially enrolled at the school, fell within the specified age range, and completed all questionnaire items were included in the analysis. The balanced composition was intended to reduce unequal-group bias in the statistical comparison.

Table 2. Participant Characteristics

No.	Characteristic	Category	*n*	%
1.	Gender	Male	67	50.0
		Female	67	50.0
2.	Grade	VII	32	23.9
		VIII	67	50.0
		IX	35	26.1
3.	Age	12 years	32	23.9
		13 years	59	44.0
		14 years	38	28.4
		15 years	5	3.7
	Total		134	100.0

Instrument

Emotional maturity was measured using a 25-item Emotional Maturity Scale adapted from Hilyana (2020) and developed based on Goleman's (1995) emotional intelligence framework. The instrument consisted of five dimensions: self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills. The self-awareness dimension comprised seven items assessing students' ability to recognize their feelings and emotional conditions. The self-regulation dimension comprised six items measuring the ability to manage impulses and emotional reactions. The motivation dimension consisted of four items related to persistence and goal-directed behavior. The empathy dimension contained three items assessing the ability to understand other people's feelings, while the social skills dimension comprised five items measuring communication and relationship-management abilities.

The items were rated on a four-point Likert scale ranging from 1 to 4, with higher total scores indicating higher emotional maturity. The possible total score ranged from 25 to 100. Permission to use and adapt the instrument was obtained from the original developer. The wording was adjusted to suit the linguistic and developmental characteristics of Indonesian junior high school students. Before administration, the adapted version was reviewed for clarity, cultural appropriateness, and consistency with the conceptual indicators of each dimension.

Evidence of item validity in the present sample was examined using Pearson item–total correlations. All 25 items demonstrated statistically significant correlations with the total score at $p < .001$. Internal consistency was evaluated using McDonald's omega, resulting in a coefficient of $\omega = .933$, which indicated excellent reliability. McDonald's omega was selected because it provides an appropriate estimate of internal consistency for a multidimensional psychological scale.

Data Collection Procedure

Data collection was conducted after permission had been obtained from the school. The questionnaire was distributed electronically through Google Forms under the coordination of the school and Guidance and Counseling teachers. Before completing the questionnaire, students received information concerning the purpose of the study, completion instructions, confidentiality of their responses, and their right to participate without academic consequences. Participants completed the questionnaire individually. All submitted responses were screened for completeness before analysis. The

final dataset contained 134 complete responses, with no missing scores on the 25 emotional maturity items.

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistical procedures. Descriptive statistics, including frequency, percentage, mean, standard deviation, minimum score, and maximum score, were used to describe the students' emotional maturity. Emotional maturity scores were classified into low, moderate, and high categories based on the categorization criteria applied in the original analysis.

To examine whether the distribution of emotional maturity categories differed between male and female students, a contingency-table analysis was conducted. Because several cells had expected frequencies below five, the Fisher–Freeman–Halton exact test was used as the primary inferential procedure. Pearson's chi-square statistic was also calculated to estimate Cramér's V as the measure of effect size. All statistical tests were two-tailed and evaluated at a significance level of $\alpha = .05$.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

Students Emotional Maturity

The descriptive analysis involved 134 students with complete responses on all 25 emotional maturity items. The students' total emotional maturity scores ranged from 35 to 96, with a mean score of 83.29 and a standard deviation of 10.24. No missing data were identified.

Table 3. Descriptive Statistics of Students' Emotional Maturity

No.	Variable	*N*	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Standard deviation
1.	Emotional maturity	134	35	96	83.29	10.24

The emotional maturity scores were subsequently classified into three categories. Based on the categorization criteria applied in the analysis, scores below 73 were categorized as low, scores ranging from 73 to below 93 were categorized as moderate, and scores of 93 or higher were categorized as high.

Table 4. Categorization Criteria for Emotional Maturity

No.	Category	Score criterion
1.	Low	$X < 73$
2.	Moderate	$73 \leq X < 93$
3.	High	$X \geq 93$

The categorization results showed that the majority of students were classified as having a moderate level of emotional maturity.

Table 5. Distribution of Students' Emotional Maturity Levels

No.	Category	Frequency	Percentage
1.	Low	7	5.2
2.	Moderate	122	91.0
3.	High	5	3.7
	Total	134	100.0

As presented in Table 4, 122 students, or 91.0% of the participants, were classified in the moderate emotional maturity category. Seven students, or 5.2%, were classified in the low category, while five students, or 3.7%, were classified in the high category. These results indicate that emotional maturity among students at SMP Negeri 1 Pakis was predominantly at the moderate level.

Emotional Maturity Based on Gender

The distribution of emotional maturity categories was also examined according to gender. The labels "Rendah" and "rendah" appearing separately in the original output were combined into a single low category because they represented the same classification.

Table 6. Distribution of Emotional Maturity Levels by Gender

No.	Gender	Low, *n* (%)	Moderate, *n* (%)	High, *n* (%)	Total, *n* (%)
1.	Male	3 (4.5)	63 (94.0)	1 (1.5)	67 (100.0)
2.	Female	4 (6.0)	59 (88.1)	4 (6.0)	67 (100.0)
	Total	7 (5.2)	122 (91.0)	5 (3.7)	134 (100.0)

Among the male students, 63 students, or 94.0%, were classified in the moderate emotional maturity category. Three male students, or 4.5%, were classified in the low category, whereas one student, or 1.5%, was classified in the high category. Among the female students, 59 students, or 88.1%, were classified in the moderate category. Four female students, or 6.0%, were classified in the low category, and another four students, or 6.0%, were classified in the high category. Descriptively, the proportion of female students in the high emotional maturity category was greater than that of male students. However, female students also showed a slightly higher proportion in the low category. Both groups were predominantly classified in the moderate emotional maturity category.

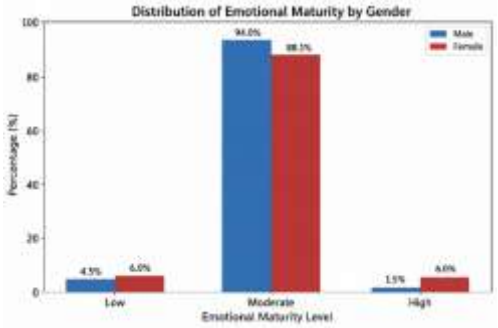


Figure 1. Distribution of Emotional Maturity Levels by Gender

Gender Differences in Emotional Maturity

A Fisher–Freeman–Halton exact test was conducted to determine whether the distribution of emotional maturity categories differed significantly between male and female students. This exact procedure was selected because several cells had expected frequencies below five.

Table 7. Test of Emotional Maturity Distribution by Gender

No.	Statistical test	Statistic	*df*	*p*	Effect size
1.	Pearson's chi-square	2.074	2	.355	Cramér's $V = .124$
2.	Fisher–Freeman–Halton exact test	—	—	.350	—

The Fisher-Freeman-Halton exact test produced a probability value of $p = .350$. Because the probability value was greater than .05, the distribution of emotional maturity categories did not differ significantly between male and female students. The Pearson chi-square analysis produced a consistent result, $\chi^2(2, N = 134) = 2.074$, $p = .355$. Cramér's V was .124, indicating a small association between gender and emotional maturity category.

Therefore, the null hypothesis was retained. Male and female students at SMP Negeri 1 Pakis did not demonstrate a statistically significant difference in the distribution of emotional maturity levels. Although female students showed a higher proportion in the high emotional maturity category, the descriptive difference was insufficient to demonstrate a statistically meaningful gender difference

Discussion

The findings showed that the emotional maturity of most students at SMP Negeri 1 Pakis was classified in the moderate category. Of the 134 participants, 91.0% were in the moderate category, while only a small proportion was classified in the low or high categories. This result suggests that most students have begun to demonstrate the emotional competencies measured in this study, including self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills, but these competencies have not yet developed consistently at an optimal level. A moderate level of emotional maturity is understandable because junior high school students are in early adolescence, a transitional period marked by changes in emotional intensity, social relationships, self-concept, and the ability to regulate behavior. During this

developmental stage, adolescents gradually learn to recognize emotional experiences, control impulsive reactions, consider the consequences of their behavior, and respond appropriately to interpersonal situations.

The predominance of the moderate category should not be interpreted as an indication of emotional problems or clinical impairment. The categorization used in this study was based on the empirical mean and standard deviation of the sample; therefore, it describes the relative position of students within the group rather than providing a diagnostic classification. Nevertheless, the finding indicates that students still require systematic opportunities to strengthen their emotional competence. Emotional maturity is not a fixed personal characteristic but a developmental capacity that can be strengthened through interactions with parents, peers, teachers, and the broader school environment. Permatasari et al. (2024), for example, demonstrated that peer social interaction is related to the emotional maturity of eighth-grade students, suggesting that the quality of students' daily relationships contributes to their ability to understand and manage emotions.

The principal finding of this study was that gender was not significantly associated with students' emotional maturity category. Although female students had a higher proportion in the high category than male students, the Fisher–Freeman–Halton exact test showed that the overall distribution of low, moderate, and high emotional maturity did not differ significantly between the two groups. The small value of Cramér's V also indicated that the association between gender and emotional maturity category was weak. Therefore, the descriptive difference observed in the graph should not be interpreted as evidence that female students possess better emotional maturity than male students or vice versa.

This result is consistent with the findings of Puspita et al. (2024), who found no significant difference in emotional maturity between male and female students in a Guidance and Counseling study program. Although their participants were university students, the similarity of the results indicates that gender may not independently determine the overall level of emotional maturity. The present finding is also compatible with Sanchis-Sanchis et al. (2020), who reported that girls used certain emotion-regulation strategies more frequently than boys, but age had a stronger influence than gender on the latent emotion-regulation construct. These findings suggest that differences in specific emotional responses or strategies do not necessarily produce differences in general emotional competence.

The absence of a significant association is also consistent with the gender similarities hypothesis, which proposes that males and females are psychologically similar in most domains and that many observed differences are small or dependent on context (Hyde, 2005). Gender-related socialization may influence how adolescents express anger, sadness, anxiety, vulnerability, or help-seeking behavior, but it does not automatically determine whether one group is more emotionally mature. Chaplin (2015) emphasized that gender differences in emotional expression vary according to the type of emotion, age, interpersonal context, and social expectations. Consequently, male and female students may display their emotions differently while still possessing relatively comparable overall capacities to recognize, regulate, and use emotions adaptively.

The current result differs from Ulfah and Syafrizaldi (2017), who reported significant differences in emotional maturity between male and female adolescents, with male participants obtaining higher emotional maturity scores. The discrepancy between the findings may be related to differences in participants' ages, school environments, cultural contexts, instruments, scoring procedures, and statistical methods. The present study examined students from one junior high school and compared three emotional maturity categories, whereas previous research may have compared continuous total scores or employed different conceptual dimensions. These methodological distinctions can produce different conclusions even when the studies investigate a seemingly similar construct.

Furthermore, the lack of a significant association does not mean that gender is entirely irrelevant to adolescents' emotional experiences. Female students in the present study were more widely distributed across the three categories, with a greater proportion in both the high and low categories. Male students,

in contrast, were more strongly concentrated in the moderate category. This pattern may indicate variation in emotional experiences or expression within each gender group, but it cannot be used to infer the causes of such variation. The finding reinforces the need to avoid treating male and female students as two homogeneous groups. Individual differences within each group may be greater than the average differences between the groups.

These findings have important implications for Guidance and Counseling services. Because male and female students were predominantly in the same emotional maturity category and the association with gender was small, school counselors should not design completely separate programs based solely on gender. A universal developmental service can be provided to all students to strengthen emotional awareness, emotion regulation, constructive expression, empathy, motivation, communication, and interpersonal problem-solving. Meta-analytic evidence has shown that universal school-based social and emotional learning programs can improve students' social-emotional competencies, behavior, school functioning, and academic outcomes (Cipriano et al., 2023; Durlak et al., 2011; Taylor et al., 2017).

However, universal services should remain gender-responsive. In this context, gender-responsive counseling does not mean assuming that boys are less empathetic or that girls are more emotionally unstable. Instead, it means recognizing that gender norms may influence the ways students communicate distress, express emotions, respond to conflict, and seek support. School counselors should create emotionally safe services in which all students can communicate their experiences without being constrained by stereotypes. The language, examples, case illustrations, and group activities used in Guidance and Counseling services should represent diverse emotional experiences and provide equal opportunities for male and female students to participate.

Based on the findings, classroom guidance may be implemented as the primary preventive and developmental service. Relevant topics may include identifying emotions and their triggers, distinguishing emotions from impulsive actions, applying adaptive emotion-regulation strategies, developing empathy, managing peer conflict, and communicating feelings assertively. Group guidance may be provided to students who require more intensive practice in interpersonal and emotional skills through discussion, role-playing, reflection, and collaborative problem-solving. Meanwhile, students classified in the low category should receive follow-up assessment to identify their individual needs before being referred to responsive services such as individual or group counseling. The students in the high category may also be involved in peer-support activities, provided that their readiness and interpersonal competence are assessed by the counselor.

The results also emphasize the importance of needs-based rather than stereotype-based service planning. Gender may remain one of the demographic variables considered in needs assessment, but it should not become the sole basis for determining interventions. School counselors should combine emotional maturity data with information about peer relationships, family support, school adjustment, academic pressures, behavioral concerns, and students' help-seeking patterns. Such an approach allows counseling services to respond to the actual needs of individual students while remaining sensitive to the social expectations that may affect male and female adolescents differently.

Several limitations should be considered when interpreting the findings. First, the participants came from a single junior high school; therefore, the findings cannot automatically be generalized to adolescents in different schools or sociocultural settings. Second, the study employed a cross-sectional design, so it could not describe changes in emotional maturity across developmental periods. Third, the data were obtained through a self-report scale and may have been influenced by students' understanding of the statements or their tendency to provide socially desirable responses. Fourth, the inferential analysis was conducted using emotional maturity categories rather than continuous total scores. Categorizing scores may reduce the detail and statistical information contained in the original data. Finally, the study did not examine other variables that may be related to emotional maturity, such as parenting, peer interaction, school climate, age, grade level, socioeconomic conditions, or previous

emotional experiences.

Future studies should involve participants from several schools, use longitudinal designs, and combine questionnaires with interviews, observations, or reports from teachers and parents. Future researchers should also analyze continuous emotional maturity scores and examine each dimension separately. Dimension-level analysis may reveal whether male and female students differ in particular competencies, such as empathy or emotional expression, even when their overall emotional maturity does not differ significantly. Variables such as peer relationships, parenting practices, school climate, and social expectations should also be investigated to provide a more comprehensive explanation of adolescents' emotional development.

Overall, this study contributes empirical evidence that gender alone is not strongly associated with emotional maturity categories among students at SMP Negeri 1 Pakis. The findings shift the focus from identifying which gender is more emotionally mature toward understanding the developmental and contextual needs shared by students. Therefore, Guidance and Counseling services should be universal, inclusive, evidence-based, and responsive to individual differences while remaining sensitive to the different social experiences that may shape the emotional expression of male and female students

CONCLUSION

This study found that most students at SMP Negeri 1 Pakis had a moderate level of emotional maturity, with 91.0% of the 134 participants classified in the moderate category, 5.2% in the low category, and 3.7% in the high category. Although female students showed a higher proportion in the high emotional maturity category than male students, the Fisher–Freeman–Halton exact test indicated that there was no statistically significant association between gender and emotional maturity category, $p = .350$, with a small effect size as indicated by Cramér's $V = .124$. These findings suggest that gender should not be used as the sole basis for assessing students' emotional development or designing Guidance and Counseling services. Therefore, school counselors are encouraged to provide universal, inclusive, and gender-responsive services that strengthen self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills based on students' actual developmental needs rather than gender stereotypes. Future studies are recommended to involve participants from multiple schools, analyze continuous emotional maturity scores, and examine additional factors such as parenting, peer relationships, school climate, and students' social experiences.

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