

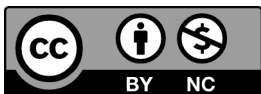
A Study on Development and Implementation Effectiveness of the Emotional Management Curriculum in Secondary Schools

Lei Zhou* Jie Gao Fengjiao Li Jingchun Wang Juan Ren

The Affiliated High School of Peking University Chaoyang Campus, Beijing

Abstract: This study presents the three-year implementation and effectiveness of the Adolescent Emotion Management Curriculum for junior third-grade students at The Affiliated High School of Peking University, Chaoyang Campus. Designed to meet the socio-emotional needs of students transitioning to senior high school, the curriculum aims to strengthen emotional awareness and regulation, enhance social-emotional competence, and improve interpersonal adaptability through systematic instructional design and diverse pedagogical approaches. Using a mixed-methods approach that integrates quantitative pre- and post-intervention data with qualitative feedback, the study demonstrates significant improvements in students' positive emotional expression, use of adaptive regulation strategies, and mental health literacy. The program also supported the professional development of homeroom teachers, fostering greater emotional awareness, empathy, and student support skills.

Keywords: School-based mental health education; Emotional management curriculum; Class teacher-centered approach; Adolescent emotional development; Socio-emotional competence; Teacher emotional literacy



Copyright © 2025 by author (s) and SciScan Publishing Limited

This article is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/). <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>

1 Background

Peking University Affiliated High School Chaoyang Future School operates as an experimental campus under Beijing's "1+3" educational model, which allows selected eighth-grade students from six central districts to begin high school early, exempting them from the high school entrance examination. Within this framework, students often shift their focus toward exploring personal interests and building peer relationships, while parents typically emphasize rapid academic adjustment and goal-setting. These differing expectations, combined with adolescents' growing desire for independence, often exacerbate parent-child communication challenges and mutual misunderstandings.

Upon entering the "1+3" program, students leave their original schools and peer networks, forming new and often fragile peer relationships. Initial screenings revealed that approximately 18.4% of students exhibited pronounced

Research/Funding project: 北京市教育科学“十四五”规划2023年度单位资助校本研究专项课题“中学生情绪管理课程建设及实施效果研究”(CHBB23099).

*Corresponding author: Lei Zhou, Party Branch Secretary at Peking University High School Chaoyang Future School. Research directions: High School Moral Education and Mental Health Education.

Article Citation: Zhou, L., Gao, J., Li, F. J., Wang, J. C., & Ren, J. (2025). A Study on Development and Implementation Effectiveness of the Emotional Management Curriculum in Secondary Schools. *Guide to Education Innovation*, 5(4), 213-222.

emotional volatility, irritability, or loneliness, while about 20% reported difficulties in social adaptation. These emotional and interpersonal challenges not only impact psychological well-being but also impede concentration, self-efficacy, and relationships with teachers and parents.

Thus, facilitating students' emotional adaptation during this transitional period has emerged as a critical priority for the school's mental health education initiatives. Adolescence is a pivotal stage of psychological development; failure to identify and support students' emotional regulation needs in a timely manner may lead to persistent academic disengagement, social withdrawal, or even risky behaviors.

Homeroom teachers, given their daily proximity to students, occupy a central role in supporting emotional development. Their ability to recognize, regulate, and respond empathetically to students' emotions directly influences students' psychological adjustment. Accordingly, this program also aimed to strengthen homeroom teachers' sensitivity to emotional cues, improve their response strategies, and deepen their awareness of student support needs—fostering safer and more empathetic classroom environments conducive to emotional growth.

On this basis, we developed the Adolescent Emotion Management Curriculum, a preventive, school-based initiative designed to enhance students' emotional competence while simultaneously building the psychological literacy of teachers, particularly homeroom teachers.

2 Curriculum Features

2.1 Thematically Aligned with Moral Education Objectives

The curriculum is closely aligned with China's national educational directive to “cultivate virtue through education”, addressing the emotional development needs of adolescents during the transitional period from middle to high school and helping teachers better support students' emotional growth.

2.2 Train-the-Trainer Model

The curriculum was developed and implemented using a Train-the-Trainer approach, which combines collaborative lesson planning with professional supervision and evaluation (Greenberg, 2023). This model not only improved instructional quality and standardization but also enhanced the teaching capacity of non-specialist educators.

2.3 Emphasis on Teachers' Emotional Literacy and Personal Growth

The program prioritizes teachers' emotional development, recognizing that their own well-being and growth are foundational. Through structured training and supportive systems, teachers' collective psychological literacy was significantly enhanced.

2.4 Expanded Role of Psychological Professionals

School psychologists were integral to curriculum design, provided coaching to homeroom and subject teachers, and assumed leadership roles within the school's mental health education framework — elevating their professional standing and impact.

2.5 Empirical Validation

In collaboration with Peking University's Laboratory of Clinical Psychology, the program underwent rigorous empirical evaluation, ensuring scientific validity and providing a robust evidence base for future scaling and dissemination.

3 Curriculum Content

3.1 Goals and Core Competencies

Guided by the developmental and cognitive characteristics of middle school students, the curriculum is structured around a modular sequence: “recognizing emotions — perceiving emotions — managing emotions” (Jennings & Greenberg, 2022). Its objectives are to cultivate emotional skills, adaptability, and self-regulation, thereby fostering psychological resilience and socio-emotional growth across three domains.

Cognitive: Understanding emotional types, causes, and behavioral impacts; constructing a foundational knowledge of emotional processes.

Awareness and Regulation: Enhancing recognition of self and others' emotions; acquiring practical expression and coping strategies.

Integration and Application: Applying emotional skills in real-life contexts; developing empathy, self-awareness, and interpersonal communication.

These competencies align with the school's overarching mission: nurturing healthy, confident, empathetic, and socially responsible students.

3.2 Curriculum Content and Structure

The curriculum centers on enhancing students' emotional management abilities. It aims to help students recognize, express, and regulate emotions, cultivate healthy emotional literacy, and promote psychological well-being.

The course is organized into thematic units — such as “Anger” “Anxiety”, and “Sadness” — each focusing on a specific emotion (Table 1). Lessons guide students through a progressive learning process: identifying the emotion, understanding its triggers, and practicing effective regulation strategies. Each unit incorporates diverse activities, including writing, drawing, and situational role-playing, to deepen emotional understanding and improve emotional granularity. Practical regulation techniques are introduced and reinforced through group discussions and role-plays to ensure transferability to real-life situations.

Table 1 Curriculum Structure and Content

Course Objective	Theme	Lesson	Course Content
Understanding Emotions	Course Introduction	Lesson 1: Let's Go! — Starting Our Emotional Journey	Course introduction. Embark on the journey of exploring emotions
Observation, Expression, and Regulation of Common Emotions	Anger	Lesson 2: I'm Angry! — Understanding Anger	Exploring the nature and triggers of anger through writing, drawing, and reflection
		Lesson 3: Escaping the Anger Trap — Regulating Anger	Learning the “Turtle Technique” and other strategies to manage anger
		Lesson 4: My Needs Matter — Nonviolent Communication	Practicing empathetic communication with parents, teachers, and peers through role-play

Continued

Course Objective	Theme	Lesson	Course Content
Observation, Expression, and Regulation of Common Emotions	Anxiety	Lesson 5: When Exams Approach — Understanding Anxiety Lesson 6: “Fight or Flight?” — Regulating Anxiety	Discussing exam anxiety, its causes, and functions Using emotional drawing and narrative writing to understand and cope with anxiety
	Body Practice*	Lesson 7: The Body’s Journey — Mindfulness Relaxation	Introducing body scanning and progressive relaxation techniques
	Sadness	Lesson 8: When EMO Knocks — Understanding Sadness Lesson 9: Fighting Depression	Identifying and normalizing feelings of sadness learning healthy coping methods
	C o m p r e h e n s i v e Application	Lessons 10–12: Scenario Drama Practice — Cry! Pat Pat	We’ll explore ways to express and cope with negative emotions through scenario dramas. In groups, students select themes, create and perform scripts to explore emotional expression and regulation
	Positive Emotions	Lesson 13: You’re Not Truly Happy — Understanding Happiness Lesson 14: Heading Toward Happiness — Activating Positive Emotions	Distinguishing between pleasure and lasting happiness through group discussion Applying positive psychology principles to cultivate sustained well-being
	Complex Emotions	Lesson 15: A Mix of Feelings — Complex Emotions Lesson 16: Sunshine and Storms — Coexisting with Emotions	Recognizing and managing blended emotional experiences Using breathing and mindfulness techniques to observe and accept emotional states so as to better observe and coexist with our emotional “sunny” and “rainy” days
	Self-Awareness & Resources	Lesson 17: Our Life Tree — Understanding Difficulties and Discovering Resources	Everyone’s life journey is like a tree of growth. This lesson will lead students to find resources by reflecting on personal challenges and resilience through metaphorical tree drawing
	Recognizing Others ‘ Emotions, Understanding and Empathy	Lesson 18: Reading Expressions — Recognizing Others ‘Emotions	In previous lessons, we learned to observe and express our own emotions. Now, how can we accurately read others’ emotions and understand their behavior? Let’s find out through interactive games
	Empathy and Response	Lesson 19: Empathizing and Responding to Others’ Emotions	Using interactive games to improve accurate perception of others’ emotions. Empathy and Response
	Peers, Parents, and School	Lesson 20: Those Who Help Others Are Always Helped — Understanding and Helping Others Lesson 21: Is This Love? — Friendship, Infatuation, and Commitment Lesson 22: A Shared Compulsory Course — Emotional Issues in Getting Along with Parents	Building supportive peer relationships is an important part of adolescence. Building supportive peer relationships through empathy-based helping behaviors Discussing adolescent affection, love, and relational boundaries Emotional awareness, expression, and regulation are shared “compulsory courses” for both children and parents. Through real parent–child cases, we’ll discuss how to handle emotional issues with parents

3.3 Main Approaches and Methods of Course Implementation

The Emotional Management Curriculum was integrated into the regular weekly school schedule, ensuring that all students participated consistently.

Classroom instruction, supported by group discussions and collaborative tasks, served as the primary delivery method. Each lesson typically followed a four-stage structure:

Course Introduction: Each lesson begins with a video, situational discussion, or review of the previous class to activate prior knowledge. For example, in Lesson 6: Regulating Anxiety, the teacher played a video of “the industrious ant and lazy grasshopper”, which helped students recall the concept of anxiety while introducing its positive functions (Xia, 2025). Subsequently, the teacher guided students to discuss the common source of anxiety during midterm

examinations. This introduction method quickly stimulates students' interest and helps them quickly enter a learning state.

Experiential Learning Activities: Two progressive experiential activities — emotional drawing and emotional narrative writing — are central to instruction. Students are guided to visualize and depict the physical manifestations of emotions through drawing, and then write reflective narratives describing how these emotions emerge in real-life situations. These activities help students deepen their understanding of emotions, transform abstract feelings into tangible expressions, and enhance their sense of control over emotional experiences.

Interactive Sharing and Teacher Feedback: During and after each experiential activity, students are encouraged to share their work and reflections with peers. The teacher responds with guidance and reinforcement, helping students refine emotional vocabulary and self-regulation skills. Such interaction not only consolidates learning but also provides a psychologically safe space for emotional expression and peer empathy.

Post-class Extension and Practice: At the end of each lesson, the teacher assigns emotional drawing or reflective writing tasks as homework to help students continue practicing emotional management in their daily lives (Wang et al., 2025). This extended design allows classroom learning to be integrated into real-world situations, enabling students to apply and internalize the emotional regulation strategies they have learned.

Through these four stages — introduction, experience, sharing, and application — the curriculum effectively supports students in identifying, expressing, and managing emotions, while cultivating their ability to transfer these skills to everyday interpersonal interactions and academic contexts.

4 Evaluation of Implementation Effectiveness

To date, two full rounds of systematic teaching interventions of the Emotional Management Course have been implemented. Standardized psychological assessments were conducted both before and after each intervention to evaluate the curriculum's effectiveness and monitor changes in students' emotional and psychological development (Chen, 2025).

The participants were approximately 480 students enrolled in the “1+3” program at The Affiliated High School of Peking University Chaoyang Campus, with each cohort consisting of about 240 ninth-grade students transitioning from junior to senior high school.

A series of standardized psychological scales and self-developed instruments were used to assess multiple dimensions, including emotional perception, regulation, psychological distress, and positive psychological qualities. The assessment tools included:

Alexithymia Scale (Lab-developed): Measures students' ability to perceive and express emotions.

Adolescent Irritability Questionnaire (Lab-developed): Assesses emotional lability under high arousal states.

Cognitive Emotion Regulation Questionnaire (CERQ-18): Evaluates cognitive coping styles in response to negative events.

Revised Children's Anxiety and Depression Scale (RCADS) and Test Anxiety Inventory (TAI-sf): Monitor anxiety and depression levels.

Parent-Child Relationship Scale (PCR): Measures emotional closeness and communication quality between students and parents.

Positive Psychology Measures: including the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES), Connor–Davidson Resilience Scale (CD-RISC), Subjective Happiness Scale (self-developed), and Sense of Security/Stability Scale (self-developed). Both rounds of data showed positive changes.

Positive Psychology Measures: including the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES), Connor–Davidson Resilience Scale (CD-RISC), Subjective Happiness Scale (self-developed), and Sense of Security/Stability Scale (self-developed). Both rounds of data showed positive changes.

Taking the first academic year as an example, students' ability to describe emotions improved significantly, particularly in the dimension of "clarity of emotional expression". Their self-esteem levels also showed a statistically significant increase (Figure 1). In addition, evaluations of parent–child relationships improved notably, reflected in more frequent communication and stronger feelings of closeness. These results indicate that the emotional management course provides solid empirical evidence for supporting students' emotional growth and enhancing their psychological well-being.

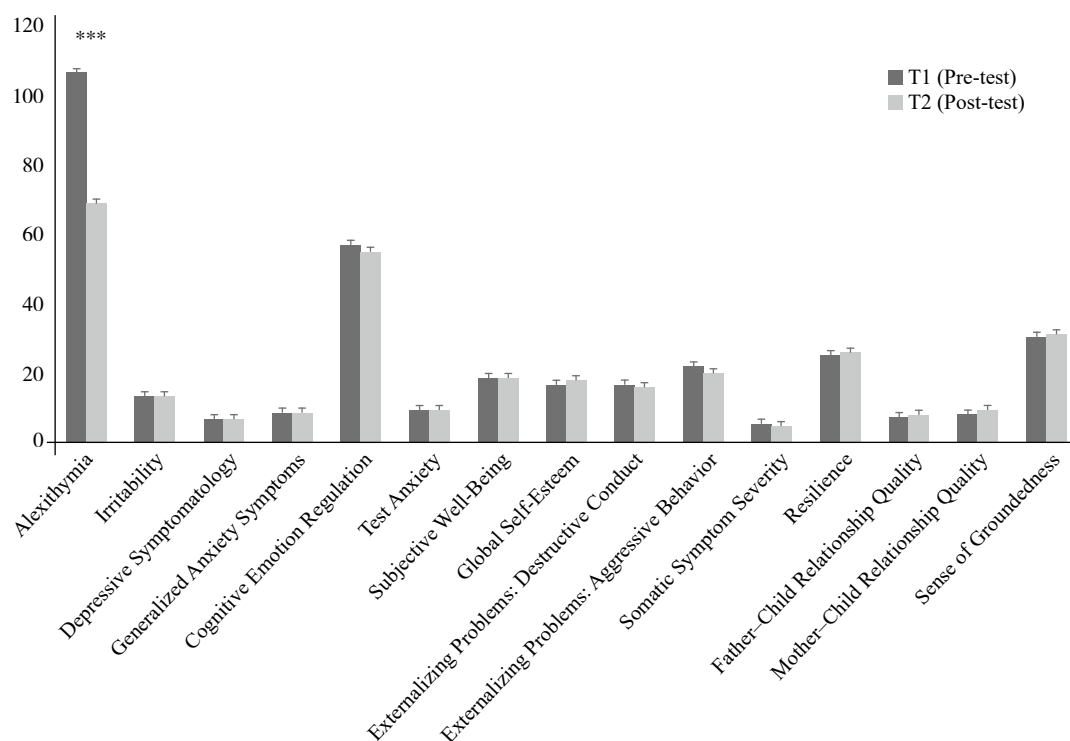


Figure 1 Evaluation of Course Effectiveness

Students' alexithymia scores (difficulty in identifying and describing emotions) significantly decreased as the course progressed. This finding indicates that the emotional management course and its supporting measures effectively enhanced students' ability to articulate emotions (Li & Zhao, 2025).

Previous research suggests that alexithymia includes symptoms such as suppression, anxiety, and impaired emotional processing. Adolescents with alexithymia often experience difficulties expressing or controlling emotions appropriately, tend to exhibit inadequate emotional responses, and struggle to communicate or connect emotionally with others.

Through the intervention of the emotional management course, students' ability to describe emotions improved significantly, thereby helping them better recognize and regulate emotions. This enhancement also serves as an effective preventive measure against emotional disorders (Figure 2).

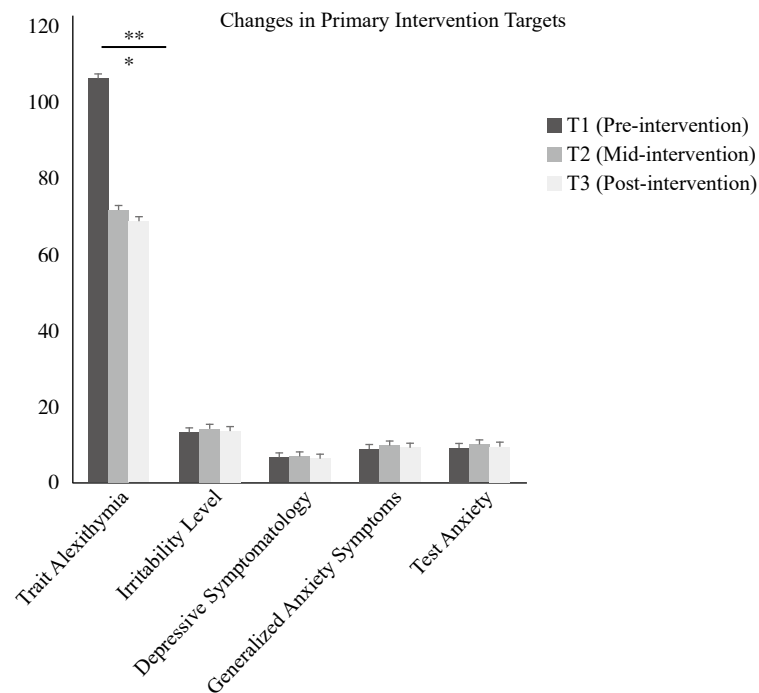


Figure 2 Changes in Major Intervention Targets

Emotion regulation strategies improved significantly. Students' scores on both acceptance and positive reappraisal strategies increased steadily as the course progressed. This result indicates that the emotional management course and its supporting measures helped students cultivate more adaptive emotional management strategies.

Students also showed an upward trend in other adaptive strategies, while their scores on non-adaptive strategies — except for rumination — did not change significantly. This may be because the course enhanced students' ability to describe and perceive emotions more accurately, thereby increasing their conscious use of emotion regulation strategies (Figure 3).

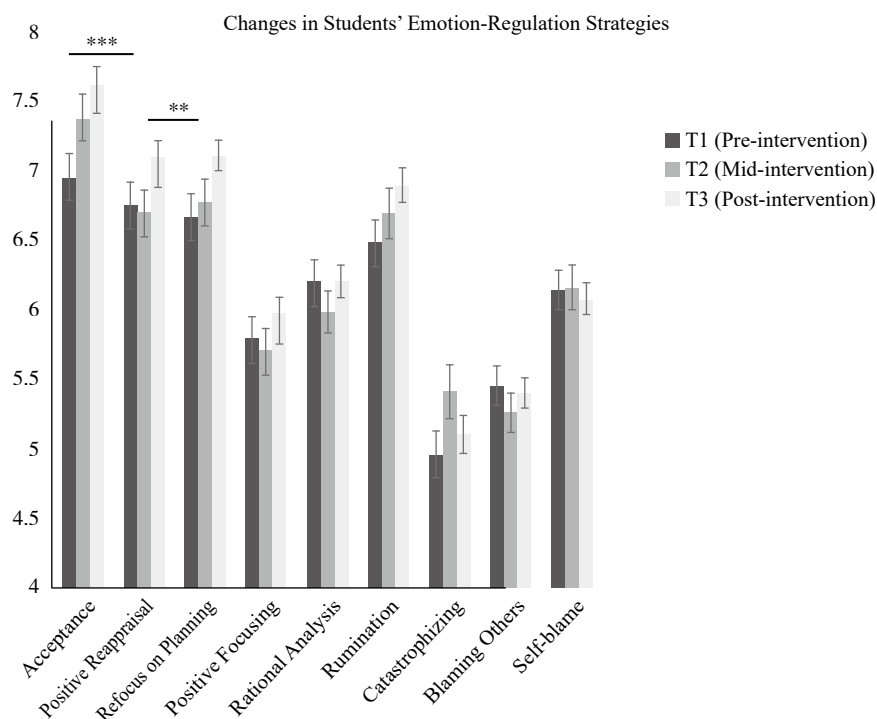


Figure 3 Changes in Emotion Regulation Strategies

In addition, students' self-reported levels of self-esteem increased significantly. Their evaluations of relationships with both fathers and mothers also showed clear improvement. Furthermore, compared with the pre-test results, the post-test indicated an upward trend in other positive psychological variables among students, while externalizing behavior problems and psychosomatic symptoms showed a declining tendency.

5 Conclusion

Throughout the implementation of this project, we have upheld the principle of integrating expert guidance with school-based curriculum development. On the one hand, we have relied on the academic expertise of Peking University's School of Psychology and Cognitive Sciences to ensure the curriculum's scientific rigor and theoretical foundation. On the other hand, we have aligned with students' developmental characteristics and the school's educational philosophy to independently design practical, relevant, and effective teaching content and activities — thereby achieving the localization of the curriculum.

Overall, the Emotional Management Course has preliminarily established a well-structured, scientifically grounded, and systematically supported school-based curriculum framework. It not only enhances students' psychological literacy but also promotes teachers' professional growth, offering a sustainable pathway for the development of school mental health education.

In November 2023, the project team was invited to participate in the Third National Forum on Basic Education in China and the 35th Annual Conference of the Chinese Society of Education, where a micro-forum on emotional management curriculum was organized. The team shared curriculum resources and engaged in in-depth exchanges with educators nationwide. This not only showcased The Affiliated High School of Peking University Chaoyang Campus's innovative practices in developing emotional management courses but also provided valuable experience and support for schools in regions such as Shaanxi and Fujian — promoting the broader dissemination and development of emotional management education.

Based on the outcomes of this curriculum project, it has been officially approved as part of the Beijing Education Science “14th Five-Year Plan” (2023) under the project title “Research on the Development and Implementation Effectiveness of Emotional Management Curriculum for Middle School Students”, with the project code CHBB23099.

6 Limitations

6.1 High Sample Homogeneity and Constrained External Validity

The participants were recruited from the same “1+3” experimental campus in Beijing for three consecutive cohorts. Admission is contingent on selective interviews, and students are exempt from the high-stakes entrance examination. Consequently, the sample experiences distinctive academic stressors, parent–child interaction patterns, and resource availability, probably inflating the observed effects. Multi-site cluster-randomized controlled trials involving non-selective schools, outer-suburban campuses, and districts with divergent socioeconomic profiles are required to corroborate the robustness of the findings.

6.2 School-based Instruments and Limited Comparability

Core measures such as the “Alexithymia Style Questionnaire” and the “Adolescent Irritability Scale” were developed in-house. Although they were piloted twice and underwent item analyses, they lack national norms and formal tests of measurement invariance, which hampers cross-study comparisons. Future work should concurrently administer internationally validated tools (e.g., FEEL-KJ, PANAS-C, ERC) and examine measurement equivalence to enhance interpretability and cumulative science.

6.3 Single-delivery Modality and Modest Ecological Validity

The program is currently scheduled as a stand-alone weekly lesson. While guaranteeing implementation fidelity, this format risks isolating the content from other curricular areas and curtails transfer opportunities. Embedding emotion-literacy tasks within language-arts essays, integrating breathing techniques into physical-education warm-ups, and linking color-expression projects to art classes — co-taught and evaluated through a purpose-built observation rubric—may increase ecological validity.

6.4 Shallow Parental Engagement and Under-utilized Family System

Parental participation has been restricted to satisfaction surveys and occasional seminars, without structured dyadic practice or feedback loops. A “family emotion assignment” is proposed: a ten-minute weekly dyadic listening task during which parents upload an audio clip to a mini-program; AI-based emotion recognition returns an immediate empathy score and targeted suggestions. Follow-up interviews with a random 20% of households can document changes in emotional climate and provide micro-level evidence for iterative refinement.

7 Future Directions

7.1 Gamification and AI Enhancement

(1) Co-develop “EmoQuest”, a hybrid board-game and mobile application, with Peking University’s School of Electronics Engineering and Computer Science. Emotion-regulation skills (anger-reduction, cognitive reappraisal, etc.) are translated into collectible cards; students earn “emotion badges” as they advance, while real-time analytics flow to teachers for precision instruction.

(2) Integrate a generative-AI “emotion companion” that allows anonymous student venting and delivers instant feedback grounded in reappraisal and mindfulness scripts, thereby lowering the threshold for help-seeking.

7.2 “2 + 2” Teacher-competence Upgrade Pathway

Each academic year, staff must complete: (1) a two-day “emotion first-aid” boot camp featuring scenario simulation and mindfulness-based stress reduction; (2) two AI-mediated peer-supervision assessments. Failure to pass results in suspension of teaching eligibility until remediation is achieved, establishing a sustainable “license-to-teach with dynamic review” cycle.

7.3 Regional Adaptation and Cost-effectiveness Trials

Beginning in 2025, establish “emotion-course enclaves” in one county-level school each in Beijing, Tianjin, Hebei, Shaanxi, and Fujian. A lightweight manual, locally recruited instructors, and remote supervision will be deployed within a cluster-RCT design. Per-pupil costs will be tracked to furnish economic evidence for national scaling.

7.4 Micro-intervention Track for Parents

Five-minute audio micro-lessons on “emotion-sensitive parent–child communication” will be pushed via WeChat weekly. The intervention is expected to cut family emotion-triggering events by $\geq 15\%$, forging a genuine school–family synergy.

Collectively, these initiatives will propel the program from an “0-to-1” proof of concept to “1-to-N” diffusion, buttressing teacher resilience and regional adaptability. We invite colleagues nationwide to co-create an open, iterative community that positions emotion education as a core component — rather than an optional showcase — of China’s basic education system. Through the above steps, the curriculum can migrate from experimental campuses to regional networks, shifting from project-based momentum to institutionalized policy, thereby supporting the national agenda of cultivating virtue and fostering students’ mental health across diverse contexts.

References

- [1] Greenberg, M. T. (2023). Social and emotional learning: Evidence-based approaches for promoting student well-being and academic success. *Journal of School Health*, 93(2), 101–110.
- [2] Jennings, P. A., & Greenberg, M. T. (2022). The prosocial classroom model: Theory, research, and implications for teacher professional development. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 114(3), 495–513.
- [3] Durlak, J. A., Weissberg, R. P., Dymnicki, A. B., Taylor, R. D., & Schellinger, K. B. (2021). The impact of enhancing students’ social and emotional learning: A meta-analysis of school-based universal interventions. *Child Development Perspectives*, 15(1), 11–25.
- [4] Xia, C. D. (2025). Starting from the “heart”: The deep logic and practical path of mental-health education in the new era. Retrieved October 24, 2025 from the official portal of the Ministry of Education of the People’s Republic of China.
- [5] Wang, L., Zhang, M., Liu, Y., et al. (2025). Emotional adjustment problems and intervention strategies among students in the junior-to-senior high-school transition. *Psychological Development and Education*, 41(3), 321–328.
- [6] Chen, C. (2025). *An empirical study of school-based emotion-management courses influencing middle-school students’ alexithymia* (Unpublished master’s thesis). East China Normal University, Shanghai.
- [7] Li, N., & Zhao, W. (2025). Integrating mindfulness training into middle-school emotion courses: A practical exploration. *China Education Daily*, (3), 4.