

Understanding Emotion Regulation as the Key to Mental Wellbeing and Student Academic Success

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ABSTRACT

Emotion regulation is an individual's ability to recognize, understand, and manage emotions adaptively in various situations. In a higher education environment, this ability is crucial for students who are faced with academic pressures, social dynamics, and complex future demands. This literature study aims to examine the relationship between emotion regulation and students' mental wellbeing and academic performance. Through a review of various theoretical and empirical references, it was found that students with good emotion regulation capacity tend to have a more stable mental state and optimal academic achievement. Conversely, limitations in emotion regulation are often associated with the emergence of psychological disorders such as stress, anxiety and depression, which have a negative impact on learning ability. This research confirms that strengthening emotion regulation skills is an important element in character education and student academic success. The implications of these findings demand the integration of psychosocial approaches in the higher education system and the formulation of policies that favor students' emotional wellbeing. The results of this research are expected to be a conceptual basis for the development of a more humane learning system.

INTRODUCTION

In academic life, students are faced with a lot of pressure. Academic, social and personal pressures often arise simultaneously in the transition to adulthood. Changes in environment, demands for independence, and high expectations can lead to negative emotions (Pekrun & Stephens, 2010). This situation requires a strong internal capacity to respond to complex emotional dynamics. The ability to manage and regulate emotions, or what is called emotion regulation, is crucial in maintaining psychological balance amidst increasing academic demands (Vye et al., 2007).

Students' mental wellbeing is strongly influenced by the extent to which individuals are able to understand, accept, and respond adaptively to their emotions (Chow & Flynn, 2016). When emotion regulation is effective, individuals tend to have higher mental resilience and are able to cope with academic stress in a healthy way (Bhujade, 2017). On the contrary, the inability to manage emotions is often the starting point for symptoms of chronic stress, anxiety disorders, and even depression that significantly disrupt the learning process (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984).

In many cases, students who experience a decline in mental wellbeing show a strong correlation with low emotion regulation skills (Siwach & Devi, 2014). They tend to have difficulties in dealing with criticism, setting academic priorities, and maintaining motivation to learn. This condition can lead to burnout, decreased achievement, and even dropping out of college if in the long-term (Bask & Salmela-Aro, 2013). This situation is exacerbated by a college environment that has not been fully adaptive to the psychological needs of students, making interventions less effective (Paler et al., 2019).

Emotion regulation not only supports mental health, but is also directly related to academic performance. The ability to recognize, understand, and manage emotions effectively allows students to stay focused and calm in the face of high academic pressure. Students who are able to manage their emotions well generally show higher learning engagement, healthier social relationships, and more stable academic perseverance. A literature review is needed to understand how this relationship works and what strategies can be applied in the development of student welfare programs.

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The current problem is that there is not enough attention to the role of emotion regulation as the foundation of mental wellbeing in higher education. Academic guidance systems and counseling services in many institutions tend to be responsive to crises, rather than preventive of students' emotional dynamics (Xiao et al., 2017). This causes many cases of psychological disorders to be recognized and treated late. The loss due to this problem is not only experienced by individual students, but the institution as a whole due to decreased study retention and academic productivity (Cole et al., 2004; Tinto, 2012). If emotion regulation is systematically taught and trained from the beginning of the study period, the potential for psychological disorders can be minimized, and students will be better prepared to face academic and social challenges that come and go.

Mental wellbeing management is still often seen as an individual responsibility. Students are often seen as solely responsible for their emotional and mental state, without considering the social context that significantly affects their wellbeing (Pietarinen et al., 2014). This approach does not take into account the socio-psychological conditions of students who are often under structural pressures, such as family expectations, high academic demands, and intense competition. The absence of a support system based on an understanding of the importance of emotion regulation is the main cause of mental health services not having an optimal impact (Dwivedi & Harper, 2004). Many services are only available to students who actively seek help, while others are largely unreachable due to lack of education, stigma, or limited access.

The weakness in strengthening emotional capacity is also evident in the lack of curriculum or training systematically designed to help students recognize and process their emotions. This leads to many students lacking basic skills in identifying their own feelings or expressing them in a healthy way. In fact, as Goleman (1995) argues, emotional intelligence has a major contribution to success in academic and professional life. Students who have high emotional intelligence are generally better able to adapt to challenging learning environments, establish healthy interpersonal relationships, and manage conflict more wisely (Zeidner et al., 2012). They also tend to show higher levels of empathy and have good leadership skills, which are very important in the working world. Unfortunately, not many higher education institutions have explicitly integrated this dimension in their character development. The main focus of educational institutions is still on cognitive aspects and academic achievement, while emotional character development tends to be marginalized (Steinmayr et al., 2014).

Students' capability in regulating emotions should not be seen merely as a soft skill, but as a fundamental dimension in building psychological resilience. Good emotion management not only helps students in their daily academic life, but also plays a major role in shaping long-term psychological resilience (Cefai, 2008). This resilience is important to face the increasingly complex challenges of life, both in the context of study, social relations, and preparation for entering the world of work. Mental wellbeing is not just about the absence of disorders, but the creation of a balanced and productive quality of emotional life. Mentally healthy students are able to feel and manage their emotions wisely, maintain motivation, and maintain positive social relationships (Lo et al., 2020). An understanding of how emotions are managed consciously and constructively is needed to create a generation of academics who are mentally healthy and intellectually superior.

The direct influence of emotion regulation ability on learning quality and academic achievement should be a priority in policy formulation in the college environment. Especially in the increasingly competitive landscape of higher education, students are not only required to be cognitively intelligent, but also emotionally resilient (Zhoc et al., 2020). The college environment now requires students to be able to adapt quickly, compete fairly, and face intense academic pressure (Cornejo, 2020). Without the development of this aspect, stable academic performance and long-term achievement will be difficult to achieve evenly. Strengthening students' emotion regulation is not only a matter of concern for mental health, but also a strategic investment in producing quality graduates holistically.

This research is important to map the relationship between an individual's ability to manage their emotions and how it contributes to students' mental wellbeing. A comprehensive literature study will be able to highlight various existing theoretical and empirical perspectives, while pointing out spaces that are still open for further research. Thus, the results of this research will not only enrich theoretical understanding, but also have high applicative potential.

Understanding the dynamics of emotions in academia will broaden the horizon of approaches to creating a healthier learning environment. It also provides a foundation for developing more contextualized psychological and social support instruments. If this dimension is neglected, then the risk of student mental vulnerability will continue to increase, and academic achievement cannot develop holistically.

The purpose of this research is to explore the relationship between students' ability to manage their emotions and their level of mental wellbeing and academic achievement. Using a literature study approach, this research will explore various psychological theories and empirical findings to develop a strong conceptual foundation on the importance of emotion regulation in higher education. The results of this research are expected to contribute to the development of psychological support programs and educational policies that are more responsive to students' emotional needs.

RESEARCH METHOD

The literature study approach in this research is used to examine the relationship between students' emotion regulation skills and their mental wellbeing and academic achievement. This method allows researchers to examine various previous scientific works, both in the form of journal articles, scientific books, and relevant research results, in order to gain an understanding of existing concepts, theories, and empirical findings. Literature studies are not only descriptive, but also analytical and critical, which means that researchers have the space to compare various theoretical approaches and develop new syntheses of previously conducted studies. According to Neuman (2006), literature study is an important method in social research because it allows researchers to trace the patterns and structures of knowledge that have been formed in a particular discipline. This approach is considered appropriate for the topic of emotion regulation and student mental wellbeing because both have been widely discussed in the fields of educational psychology and social science, so that they can be conceptually assembled through complementary normative and empirical approaches.

The data collection process was conducted by tracing academic sources from relevant national and international publications, then analyzed using a conceptual-critical approach. This involved identifying key themes, synthesizing ideas, and evaluating the strengths and weaknesses of each argument or model studied. This research is qualitative in nature as it emphasizes understanding the meaning and relationships between conceptual variables rather than quantitative measurement. Berg (2001) emphasizes the importance of interpretive skills in literature-based qualitative research to build valid and scientifically significant arguments. This method also supports a comprehensive issue mapping process, which is much needed in topics involving psychological and social dimensions such as emotion regulation.

The literature study is used not only as a theoretical foundation, but also as the main method in constructing scientific arguments based on credible secondary data.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The ability of individuals to manage their emotions is one of the important aspects in the formation of a healthy psychological balance. Unrecognized and poorly regulated emotions can interfere with thought processes, decision-making, and social relationships. Among students, emotion regulation is key in dealing with the complex dynamics of academic and social life (Skinner & Pitzer, 2012). Academic pressure, social demands, and high future expectations often create a large emotional burden. Without the ability to manage emotions well, students can experience mental wellbeing disorders that have long-term impacts. Emotion regulation is not only an individual psychological ability, but also an important instrument in maintaining a healthy and productive learning process.

Mental wellbeing in students is closely related to how they respond to pressure and adjust to changes in academic situations. Students not only face academic demands such as assignments, exams, and presentations, but also have to adapt to changes in the social environment, parental expectations, and pressure towards the future. Individuals who have good emotion regulation skills tend to be better able to avoid excessive stress, feel calmer in the face of tests or challenges, and show high adaptive abilities (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Conversely, a lack of emotion management skills is often a contributing factor to anxiety, depression and even hopelessness. These conditions not only interfere with mental health, but also result in a decline in concentration, motivation to learn, and overall academic achievement.

Students' academic performance is strongly influenced by internal psychological factors, one of which is the ability to manage emotions when facing the pressure of assignments, exams, and the dynamics of social relations in the college environment. In many cases, students with poor emotion regulation show lower academic performance compared to those who are able to maintain their emotional stability (Tze, 2020). They are more prone to procrastination, less motivated to complete tasks effectively, and experience reduced performance when faced with competitive situations. Academic success, is not only determined by intellect, but also by emotional stability (Laidra et al., 2007). Students who are able to recognize emotions, calm themselves in times of stress, and stay motivated despite difficulties, have an advantage in undergoing the learning process.

In a broader scope, students' emotion regulation skills are an important foundation in building a healthy and productive academic community. Higher education as an institution that not only produces cognitively qualified graduates, but also emotionally, must pay special attention to this issue. Increased awareness and understanding of the importance of emotion regulation will have implications for the development of more adaptive educational curricula and psychological services. It is important for educational institutions to examine the relationship between emotion regulation, mental wellbeing, and academic achievement in order to create a learning environment that supports students' holistic growth.

One of the main problems in this issue is the lack of attention of higher education institutions to the importance of strengthening the capacity of emotional regulation in students. Educational policies often emphasize cognitive aspects and quantitative academic achievement, while affective and psychological aspects have not been thoroughly integrated in the student development system. In fact, according to Goleman (1995), emotional intelligence has a major contribution in determining individual success in various aspects of life, including academics. The absence of a holistic approach in education can deprive students of the space to develop their emotional capacity in a healthy manner.

The evaluation and assessment system in higher education has not considered the psychological dimension of students as part of the academic success indicators. For example, academic achievement-based examinations tend to emphasize final results without considering the emotional process experienced by students in achieving these results (Vogl & Pekrun, 2016). This is exacerbated by a coaching system that is still reactive to cases of mental disorders, not preventive. According to Lazarus and Folkman (1984), stress that is not managed properly in the long-term can trigger serious mental disorders, and this often stems from an individual's inability to regulate their emotions.

Students who come from family backgrounds or social environments that are not supportive also face double pressure. Not only do they have to adapt to academic demands, they also have to face the psychological burden of unstable social conditions. This imbalance makes them more vulnerable to emotional dysfunction (Chow & Flynn, 2016). Brown and Harris (1978) underlined the importance of social support as a protective factor against mental disorders. Unfortunately, not all institutions provide psychological assistance systems that are responsive to these conditions.

Emotion regulation should be part of a more comprehensive character education. Ideal character education not only emphasizes moral and ethical values, but also includes intrapersonal skills such as self-awareness, empathy, and the ability to manage emotions. In reality, many higher education curricula have not accommodated learning emotional skills as part of the core competencies. According to Argyris and Schön (1978), learning that does not integrate emotional experiences will only produce individuals with technical proficiency without reflective depth. This means that if students do not have the space to understand, manage and evaluate their emotions, then their academic success will tend to be superficial and fragile in the face of crisis or change.

Several studies have shown that students with good emotion regulation skills also exhibit more positive interpersonal relationships, are more cooperative in group work, and are more resilient to social conflict. Students with good emotion regulation are more resilient to complex social dynamics on college, such as academic pressure, cultural differences, or conflicts between individuals (Bonanno & Burton, 2013). This is important because college life demands not only individual performance, but also healthy social collaboration. Emotion regulation is not only an individual survival tool, but also a means of shaping a harmonious college social climate.

There are also gender and cultural dimensions that influence how students respond to their emotions. Research from Gross (1998) shows that differences in gender background can affect the types of emotion regulation strategies used. Similarly, students from collective cultures such as in Indonesia tend to suppress the expression of negative emotions in order to maintain harmony, which in the long-term may adversely affect their psychological wellbeing. It is important to examine emotion regulation not only from a psychological perspective, but also from a sociocultural perspective.

Competitive academic pressures also increase the likelihood of students experiencing negative emotions such as anxiety and feelings of inadequacy. The demands of high achievement, competing with peers, and meeting parental or institutional expectations often pose a significant mental burden. Under certain conditions, students feel they have nowhere to express their inner distress, especially if they fear being perceived as weak or incompetent. This leads to hidden psychological symptoms that are not easily detected but have a serious impact in the long-term. According to Selye (1976), accumulated and uncompensated stress can lead to emotional exhaustion and burnout which affects performance and overall health.

Supportive and inclusive academic environment can facilitate students in developing emotion regulation skills. This approach will only be effective if it is supported by institutional policies that favor mental health. For example, lecturers and teaching staff need to be trained in recognizing signs of emotional disturbance in students and given limited authority to intervene early. This emphasizes that managing students' emotions is a collective responsibility, not just a personal matter.

This research confirms that emotion regulation ability has a significant contribution to students' mental wellbeing and academic achievement. By understanding this relationship more deeply, educational institutions can design interventions that not only focus on academic achievement, but also on strengthening students' emotional capacity as part of a complete education. The results of this research are expected to contribute to the development of educational models that are more humane and adaptive to the psychosocial needs of today's students.

CONCLUSION

Emotion regulation ability has a close relationship with students' mental wellbeing and academic achievement. Under various academic and social pressures faced by students, emotion regulation is an important determinant of psychological stability and resilience in undergoing the higher education process. Students who are able to manage their emotions adaptively tend to be more resilient, mentally healthy, and able to achieve better academic performance. Conversely, a lack of emotion regulation skills can increase the risk of psychological disorders such as chronic stress, anxiety, and depression, which ultimately have an impact on the quality of learning. Attention to emotional aspects in higher education is an integral part of creating a humanized and sustainable learning system.

Understanding the importance of emotion regulation requires higher education institutions to review their approach to student learning and development. Psychosocial-based interventions need to be positioned alongside cognitive and academic development, as part of holistic human capital strengthening. The emphasis on emotion regulation also has implications for academic policies, counseling services, and training educators to be able to understand students' emotional dynamics and provide empathic and constructive responses. Thus, emotion regulation is not only relevant on an individual scale, but also within a broader institutional framework, as part of a long-term investment in the character and capability building of the younger generation.

Higher education institutions need to develop more proactive policies to support students' emotional wellbeing. This can be done through the integration of emotional education in the curriculum, providing access to quality psychological services, and applicable emotion regulation training. Lecturers and education personnel also need to be equipped with basic skills to recognize and respond to students' emotional conditions appropriately. Collaboration between faculty, student service centers, and college mental health units needs to be strengthened to create a more supportive learning environment. Empirical studies also need to be conducted to emphasize the correlation and mechanism between emotion regulation, mental wellbeing, and academic achievement in various educational institution settings.

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