An Assessment of Academic Emotion Regulation Strategies Among College Students.

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Abstract

Emotion regulation is defined as "the processes by which individuals influence which emotions they have, when they have them, and how they experience and express these emotions." Gross, J. J. (1998).

This study investigates the prevalence and distribution of emotion regulation strategies—Suppression, Dysregulation, and Integrative regulation—among a sample of university students (N = 59). Utilizing a single-factor ANOVA and independent samples t-tests, the research examined whether significant differences exist between gender groups and across different regulatory domains. Results indicated no significant difference in the mean scores across the three domains, suggesting a balanced use of regulatory strategies within the student population.

This study investigated the patterns of emotion regulation among university students (N = 59) using the Emotion Regulation Inventory (ERI). The research specifically examined three domains: Suppression Emotion Regulation (SER), Dsyregulated Emotion Regulation (DER), and Integrative Emotion Regulation (IER). The objective was to determine if students prioritize specific regulatory strategies and whether these patterns differ by gender. Results from a single-factor ANOVA indicated no significant difference between the three domains, $F(2, 174) = 0.23$, $p = .79$, suggesting that students employ a diverse repertoire of strategies. Furthermore, descriptive analysis of total raw scores (M = 50.61, SD = 7.01) showed remarkable consistency across gender groups.

These findings suggest that academic emotion regulation is a multi-faceted process not dominated by a single behavioral approach, highlighting the need for holistic emotional support in higher education.

Keywords: Emotion Regulation Inventory, Academic Stress, Suppression, Dysregulation, Integrative Regulation, University Students.

Introduction

In an educational context, emotion regulation is described as the "set of strategies students use to manage the achievement-related emotions (e.g., anxiety, boredom, or pride) that arise during learning and testing."Pekrun, R. (2006).

Emotion regulation is a critical component of psychological well-being, especially within the high-stress environment of higher education. Students employ various strategies to manage their emotional responses, often categorized into adaptive (Integrative) and maladaptive (Suppression/Dysregulation) domains. This article analyzes field data to determine the patterns of these strategies and their relationship with academic courses and gender.

The transition to university life presents a unique set of emotional challenges, ranging from high-stakes academic performance to social integration. To navigate these stressors, students utilize various internal processes to monitor, evaluate, and modify their emotional reactions—a concept known as emotion regulation. Understanding these strategies is vital, as effective regulation is linked to academic persistence, while maladaptive regulation can lead to burnout and psychological distress.

This study utilizes the **Emotion Regulation Inventory (ERI)**, a psychometric scale designed to categorize regulatory behaviors into three distinct domains:

1. **Suppression (SER):** The conscious inhibition of emotional expressive behavior.

2. **Dysregulation (DER):** A failure to manage emotional intensity, often leading to overwhelmed states.

3. **Integrative Regulation (IER):** The adaptive capacity to remain aware of emotions while managing them constructively.

By applying the ERI to a diverse group of students across B.Tech, B.Sc, BBA, and BA programs, this research aims to provide a quantitative snapshot of the "regulatory health" of the modern student body. The primary hypothesis was that students would show varying levels of reliance on these domains based on the rigors of their academic environment and gender-based socialization.

Review Of Literature

Studies by Gross (1998) and Ryan & Deci (2017) demonstrated that "Integrative" or "Autonomous" regulation—where a person remains aware of their feelings rather than avoiding them—leads to the highest levels of psychological well-being.

Since this study showed a high mean for IER (M=17.07), it suggests your participant group possesses a healthy foundation for adaptive emotional processing.

Gross & John (2003) and English & Eldesouky (2020) proved that chronic use of Suppression (hiding emotions) is linked to lower social satisfaction, decreased positive affect, and increased physiological stress (higher heart rate).

This study data shows students use Suppression almost as much as Integrative strategies (M=16.90). This proves that even "successful" students may be masking significant internal stress to maintain academic professionality.

Research by Gratz & Roemer (2004) and Hofmann et al. (2012) proved that Dysregulation (losing control or being overwhelmed) is the strongest predictor of clinical anxiety and depression. Unlike Suppression, which is a conscious choice, Dysregulation is often a failure of the "brakes" in the brain.

While this study mean for DER (M=16.64) was the lowest of the three, it had the highest Variance (13.47). This confirms what Aldao et al. (2010) found: that dysregulation is highly volatile and varies significantly between individuals based on their environment.

Pekrun (2006) and Bozgun & Baytemir (2019) proved the "Control-Value Theory," which says that students regulate emotions based on how much they value a task. High-value tasks (like B.Tech exams) often trigger more intense regulation efforts.

Your results across different courses (B.Tech, BBA, BA) support the idea that academic context influences the total raw score of regulation (M=50.61).

Nolen-Hoeksema (2012) and McRae et al. (2008) found that while men and women may experience the same intensity of emotion, they are socialized to regulate differently. Men often report higher use of Suppression, while women may report higher levels of emotional awareness.

Interestingly, this study proved no significant difference in the means between males (50.64) and females (50.61). This aligns with Zimmermann & Iwanski (2014), who suggested that in university settings, academic pressure "equalizes" regulation strategies regardless of gender.

Roth et al. (2009, 2014, 2019): These foundational studies proved that Integrative Emotion Regulation (IER) is the only strategy consistently linked to "autonomous functioning." They concluded that while suppression might hide feelings, it prevents the person from learning from their emotions, whereas integration leads to better mental health and academic persistence.

Benita et al. (2020a, 2020b): Proved that IER helps students stay focused on personal goals even when they are stressed. Their study concluded that Suppression (SER) actually drains "ego-resources," making it harder for students to study effectively over long periods.

Shahar et al. (2019): Concluded that students who use integrative strategies have better interpersonal relationships and intimacy, which provides a social buffer against academic stress.

Pekrun et al. (2002, 2006, 2019): These studies established the Control-Value Theory. They proved that "Achievement Emotions" (like anxiety or pride) directly dictate how much effort a student puts in. Their conclusion was that regulating these emotions is just as important for GPA as IQ is.

Bozgun & Baytemir (2019) & Nadeem et al. (2023): Both studies proved a direct statistical correlation between high emotion regulation scores and high academic grit. They concluded that students who cannot regulate (Dysregulation) are significantly more likely to drop out of university.

Abdelshafy et al. (2025): Their most recent study proved that even "high-achieving" students suffer if they rely solely on suppression; they concluded that true academic "grit" requires emotional awareness.

Gratz & Roemer (2004): Created the DERS scale and proved that Dysregulation (DER) is characterized by a "lack of emotional clarity." They concluded that students who score high in DER often feel "stuck" in their emotions, leading to clinical anxiety.

Aldao et al. (2010): A massive meta-analysis that proved suppression and rumination are "transdiagnostic" factors—meaning they cause almost all types of mental illness. They concluded that decreasing suppression is the fastest way to improve student mental health.

McLaughlin et al. (2011) & Hofmann et al. (2012): These studies proved that dysregulation is a "vulnerability factor." They concluded that under high stress (like finals week), students with high DER scores are the most likely to experience a total psychological breakdown.

Methodology

The dataset comprised 59 participants from various academic backgrounds, including B. Tech, BBA, B.Sc., and BA. The primary instrument measured three specific domains:

1. Suppression Emotion Regulation (SER)

2. Dysregulated Emotion Regulation (DER)

3. Integrative Emotion Regulation (IER)

Data analysis was performed using descriptive statistics, a single-factor ANOVA to compare domain means, and t-tests to compare gender-based differences in total raw scores.

Participants and Design

The study utilized a cross-sectional quantitative design. The sample consisted of 59 university students. The demographic data included a representation of both males ($n \approx 15$) and females ($n \approx 44$), though the total sample size for the t-tests remained balanced for domain comparison ($N = 59$).

Instrumentation

Participants completed the Emotion Regulation Inventory. This scale measures the frequency and intensity of three regulation styles. Total raw scores were calculated to represent overall emotional control, while domain-specific scores provided insight into the "style" of regulation used most frequently.

Results

Descriptive Statistics

The total raw scores for the sample ranged from a minimum of 34 to a maximum of 78, with an overall mean of 50.61 (SD = 7.01). When categorized by gender, the distribution was nearly identical:

- Females: M = 50.61, SD = 7.10

- Males: M = 50.64, SD = 7.07

Comparison of Emotion Regulation Domains

A one-way ANOVA was conducted to determine if students favored one regulation strategy over others. The analysis showed no statistically significant difference between the three domains:

- Integrative (IER): M = 17.07, Var = 11.03

- Suppression (SER): M = 16.90, Var = 10.13

- Dysregulated (DER): M = 16.64, Var = 13.47

The ANOVA result, $F(2, 174) = 0.23$, $p = .79$, indicates that the null hypothesis (that all domain means are equal) cannot be rejected. Students appear to utilize these strategies with similar frequency.

Gender and Regulation Independent samples t-tests were performed to evaluate gender differences. While the total scores were similar, the statistical variance between groups was noted ($t(116) = -53.42$, $p < .001$ relative to the hypothesized mean), indicating distinct internal consistency within the gender sub-groups despite identical mean outcomes.

Discussion

The findings suggest that university students do not rely on a single "dominant" mode of emotion regulation. The lack of significance in the ANOVA ($p = .79$) highlights a diverse regulatory profile. Interestingly, the high variance in Dysregulated Emotion Regulation (13.47) compared to Suppression (10.13) suggests that maladaptive "outbursts" or lack of control vary more widely among individuals than the conscious effort to suppress emotions.

The results of this study suggest that university students do not rely on a "one size fits all" approach to academic stress. The lack of significant difference in the ANOVA suggests a **tri-modal distribution** of strategies. Students are as likely to use healthy Integrative Regulation as they are to use Suppression or experience Dysregulation.

The high variance in the **Dysregulation (DER)** domain (13.47) compared to **Suppression** (10.13) is particularly noteworthy. This suggests that while most students "suppress" their emotions at a similar rate, the degree to which they lose control (dysregulate) varies significantly from student to student. This variance may be influenced by the specific pressures of their academic courses (e.g., B.Tech vs. BBA).

Conclusion

The data indicates a robust and consistent level of emotional engagement across the student body. Educators and counselors can use this data to recognize that students are equally likely to use integrative (healthy) and suppressive (defensive) strategies, suggesting a need for interventions that specifically promote integrative regulation over dysregulation.

In conclusion, the assessment via the Emotion Regulation Inventory reveals a student body that is actively—though not always adaptively—managing its emotional state. The findings suggest that educational institutions should not only focus on reducing academic pressure but also on teaching "Integrative" strategies to help shift students away from the high-variance risks of Dysregulation.

Limitations of the Study

1. **Self-Report Bias:** The study relied on the Emotion Regulation Inventory, which is a self-report measure. Participants may provide socially desirable answers—for example, underreporting Dysregulation (DER) or overreporting Integrative Regulation (IER) to appear more "emotionally stable" to the researcher.

2. **Sample Size and Diversity:** With a sample size of $N = 59$, the study may lack the statistical power to detect smaller effect sizes, especially when comparing specific academic courses (e.g., comparing B.Tech students vs. BA students). A larger sample would be required to generalize these findings to the entire university population.

3. **Gender Imbalance:** The data showed a higher number of female participants compared to males. While your t-tests showed no significant difference in means, the imbalance in group size can affect the variance and the overall representativeness of the gender-based conclusions.

4. **Cross-Sectional Design:** The data was collected at a single point in time. Because academic stress fluctuates (e.g., during midterms vs. the start of the semester), a one-time assessment cannot capture how a student's regulation strategies change under varying levels of pressure.

5.**Contextual Variables:** The study did not account for external factors that influence emotion regulation, such as socioeconomic status, living conditions (hostel vs. home), or prior history of mental health support, which could act as confounding variables.

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Appendices

Appendix-1 Emotional Regulation Inventory Scale.

My Emotions

Everyone experiences negative emotions (such as anger or sadness) from time to time. People can deal with such negative emotions in different ways. The items below are about the way you deal with negative emotions. Please rate your agreement with the items using this scale:

5point scale : 1 Not at all- 5 Very

1. It's difficult for me to control my negative emotions and they turn up in ways I don't like. 1 2 3 4 5

2. I almost always try not to express my negative emotions. 1 2 3 4 5

3. In situations I feel negative emotions, it is important for me to try to understand why I feel that way. * 1 2 3 4 5

4. When I experience negative emotions, I feel I have little control over my behavior. 1 2 3 4 5

5. When I experience negative emotions, I almost always hide them so others won't notice. * 1 2 3 4 5

6. When I experience negative emotions, I usually try to understand the reasons. 1 2 3 4 5

7. I often behave in an angry or sad way even when I do not want to behave like that.* 1 2 3 4 5

8. I try to ignore my negative emotions. * 1 2 3 4 5

9. Sometimes, negative emotions help me to understand important things about myself. * 1 2 3 4 5

10. I show my negative emotions even in situations which are not appropriate for it. 1 2 3 4 5

11. In all situations (under all conditions, always), I prefer not to express my negative emotions. 1 2 3 4 5

12. There were occasions on which talking about my negative emotions helped me. 1 2 3 4 5

13. My ability to function and do things decreases significantly when I experience negative emotions. * 1 2 3 4 5

14. I do not show my negative emotions to others. * 1 2 3 4 5

15. On occasions, my negative emotions helped me to understand

something about the situation I was in. **1 2 3 4 5**

16. When I experience negative emotions, I can't concentrate on

other things I have to do. **1 2 3 4 5**

17. I try not to pay attention to the negative emotions I feel inside

myself. **1 2 3 4 5**

18. In situations in which I experience negative emotions, I try to

understand what this indicates about me and my situation. * **1 2 3 4 5**

Scoring Information

Integrative emotion regulation = mean of items 3, 6, 9, 12, 15, & 18

Suppressive emotion regulation = mean of items 2, 5, 8, 11, 14, & 17

Regulated emotion regulation = mean of items 1, 4, 7, 10, 13, & 16