Social Competence and Affective Styles of Emotion Regulation among University Students

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A B S T R A C T

Being social animals, human being always strive to interact with others, which needs social competence. However, they need to manage their emotions also. This particular research was carried out to find the relationship between social competence and different affective styles of emotion regulation of university students. Moreover, the gender difference on social competence and affective styles of emotion regulation were also checked. Correlation research design was used and data were collected through survey technique from male and female students of Foundation University, COMSATS University, Quaid-i-Azam University, Capital University and International Islamic University. Social Competence Scale and Affective Style Questionnaire were administered on university students for data collection which were analysed using mean, Standard Deviation, t-Test and Pearson correlation. A significant correlation between social competence and affective styles of emotional regulation (adjusting, tolerating and concealing styles) were found. It was also observed that gender difference between university students on social competence was significant. On the other hand, gender difference on emotional regulation was non-significant. Using positive affective styles of emotional regulation can help to reduce stress, tension, anxiety and depression among university students.

Introduction

Human beings need to interact with others in order to survive in this world. The functionality to engage with others and to be professional in doing so has been marked as one of the most vital skills that people can possess. This skill has been termed as social competence by experts (Hartup, 1992). The ability to attain social goals through socialization while maintaining good relationships with people over time and in diverse contexts has been termed as social competency (Rubin & Rose-Krasnor, 1992). It is linked to other areas of growth, such as emotional self-control (Blandon et al., 2010; Hill, Degnan, Calkins, & Keane, 2006).

The capacity to respond to emotional events and pressures in life in a socially suitable and adaptable manner is important for success in life and helps in defence, support, and relationship development. Different persons utilise various emotion management techniques. Reappraisers, according to research, have more pleasant feelings and express them more, whereas suppressors have less good emotions and express them less while having more unpleasant emotions (Moore, Zoellner & Mollenholt, 2008; Compare et al., 2014). Graduate students are through enormous life changes, stress, and uncertainty. The public press and scientific articles both highlight the widespread but understudied mental health difficulties at graduate schools (Eleftheriades, Fiala & Pasic, 2020; Satinsky, Kimura, & Kiang 2021). Anxiety is commonly caused by negative social comparison, self- consciousness and fear of judgement, tenacity through setbacks and

obstacles, dread of failure, and overall concern.

Social competence is a wide term that encompasses many characteristics; and it may be cultivated in both formal and informal educational contexts and under a variety of situations. As a result it might be regarded as a valuable credential for parents and educators. Social competence is defined as the ability to generate and sustain positive social outcomes (Arnold & Lindner-Müller, 2012).

Gross and John (2003) established a set of cognitive processes that influence both the type of emotional reaction and how people feel and express their emotions as important characteristic of emotional regulation. Emotion Regulation (ER) is the manipulation of emotions in service of one's aims. Individuals manage their own feelings through this process. Emotion management, on the other hand, does not involve suppressing or limiting emotional experiences. The capacity to respond to emotional events and pressures in life in a socially suitable and adaptable manner is referred to as emotion regulation. Emotions provide a purpose, such as defence, support and relationship development.

Affective styles are tendencies in emotional control that have been identified as inter-individual variances in emotional sensitivity and regulation (Davidson 1998). Affective styles refer to individual variances in how people react to and control their emotions (Hofmann & Heering, 2009). Three main affective styles are typically recognised in studies on Gross's process model of emotion regulation: concealing, adapting, and tolerating (Hofmann & Heering, 2009). Emotion Regulation (ER) is the manipulation of emotions in service of one's aims. Individuals manage their own feelings through the process of emotion regulation. Emotion management, on the other hand, does not involve suppressing or limiting emotional experiences. The capacity to respond to emotional events and pressures in life in a socially suitable and adaptable manner is important for success in life and helps in defence, support, and relationship development.

Different persons utilise various emotion management techniques. Reappraisers, according to their research, have more pleasant feelings and express them more, whereas suppressors have less good emotions and express them less while having more unpleasant emotions.

Concealing emotional control comprises response-focused techniques such as suppression, which are intended to hide and avoid feelings after they have surfaced. Maintaining and attempting to change emotional expressions as needed in a given context is what updating emotional regulation style comprises. Tolerating refers to accepting and non-defensive responses to overwhelming and stimulating emotions and controlling them. Both characteristics will increase acceptance and social inclusion, and therefore a sense of efficacy in social involvement. It motivated the researchers to conduct this research to find the relationship between social competence and different affective styles of emotion regulation of university students.

Objectives
The following objectives guided the research:
  i.   To examine the correlation between social competence and different affective styles of emotion regulation among university students.

  ii.   To investigate the effect of demographic variables like gender, education and family type on social competence and affective styles of emotion regulation among university students.

Hypotheses
To achieve the above mentioned objectives following hypotheses were formulated:

H_1: Social competence is positively correlated with adjusting style of emotional regulation.

H_2: Social competence is negatively correlated with concealing style of emotional regulation

H_3: Social competence is positively correlated with tolerating style of emotional regulation

H_4: There is a difference between male and female university students on social competence and affective styles of emotional regulation.

H_5: There is a difference between university students belonging to nuclear and joint families on social competence and affective styles of emotional regulation.

H_6: There is a difference between graduate and undergraduate university students on social competence and affective styles of emotional regulation.

Literature Review
From one-dimensional viewpoints that believe social skilfulness is an individual talent and associate SC with social skills -paying attention solely to behavioural components while disregarding cognitive or emotional ones- to more complicated multi-dimensional approaches. In this last perspective, SC is defined as the effectiveness in social interaction that arises from the deployment of skills to achieve personal goals across time and across different circumstances. It necessitates social and emotional talents, as well as adherence to the norms, customs, and values of the surroundings. Both characteristics will increase

acceptance and social inclusion, and therefore a sense of efficacy in social involvement (Gómez-Ortiz et al., 2019). Previous research indicates that suppressing emotions enhances physiological arousal and that concentrating on negative emotional experiences prolongs agitated and depressive moods (Nolen-Hoeksema & Morrow 1993; Rusting & Nolen-Hoeksema, 1998). A positive attitude toward stimulating emotional experiences, on the other hand, has been linked to greater tenacity in difficult situations and less subjective pain (Hayes et al., 2006). A youngster with great social skills has a better chance of having good mental health, healthy relationships, and academic and occupational success (Katz & McClellan, 1997). It has also been shown that people's habitual use of emotion management methods differs, and that these differences are connected to emotional experiences and psychosocial functioning (Gross & John, 2003). Another study published in the European Journal of Psychology revealed that using positive emotional styles is associated with happiness. It has also been demonstrated that individuals differ in their habitual use of emotion management mechanisms, and that these differences are associated with emotional experiences and psychosocial functioning (Gross & John, 2003).

Affective style refers to differences in emotional sensitivity and control between individuals. Some affective styles control emotional experience and expression in ways that facilitate progress toward desired goals, while others appear to have unanticipated negative repercussions. Emotions that are avoided or suppressed, for example, lead to psychopathology because they are poorly controlled. Recently, it has been claimed that emotional regulation flexibility is an important aspect in mental health.

People who use reassessment, for example, have higher levels of social functioning and well-being than those who use suppression (Gross & John, 2003).

Furthermore, past research (Aldao & Nolen-Hoeksema, 2010; Aldao, Nolen-Hoeksema, & Schweizer, 2010; Suveg, Morelen, Brewer. & Thomassin, 2010; Nolen-Hoeksema, 2012; Nolen-Hoeksema, & Aldao, 2012) reveals that affective methods of emotional regulation varies by demography. Previous research has also found a relationship between affective styles and depression. Emotional styles are accepted to assume a significant part in keeping up with pessimistic effect, including uneasiness and anxiety. Gross and John (2003) revealed that different persons utilise various emotion management techniques. Reappraisers, according to their research, have more pleasant feelings and express them more, whereas suppressors have less good emotions and express them less while having more unpleasant emotions.

Graduate students are through enormous life changes, stress, and uncertainty. The public press and scientific articles both highlight the widespread but understudied mental health difficulties at graduate schools. Anxiety is commonly caused by negative social comparison, self-consciousness and fear of judgement, tenacity through setbacks and obstacles, dread of failure, and overall concern. Another study revealed that students' emotional styles had a substantial negative link with their sadness, anxiety, and stress ratings. (Bernstein et al., 2021).

Methodology

Research Design

Keeping in view the nature and objectives of research, quantitative research methodology was used with the research design being the correlational research. The association between the variables was determined using correlational approach. The data was collected through the survey technique.

Population of Study

Data was collected from male and female students of all semesters of BS (Hons) and MS. The students of Foundation University, COMSATS University, Quaid-i-Azam University, Capital University and International Islamic University were the population of the study. The whole population was 4200 students, which consisted of 1200 MS students and 3000 BS (Hons) students

Sample and sampling technique

Probability sampling technique was used to collect data from 500 university students. A simple random sampling strategy was used to choose students from each university. The sample size comprised of 500 students i.e. 250 male and 250 female students. These students were enrolled in different programmes at undergraduate (BS Hons) and graduate level (MS).

Instruments

The instruments used in the study are Social Competence Scale and Affective Style Questionnaire.

Social Competence Scale.

It is a self-report questionnaire. It includes nine items that measures social competence. It's a Likert rating scale, on five points mentioning the extent of what the statements depict certain characteristics of individuals. The highest possible score on this scale is 36. It has been found to have satisfactory reliability

(alpha reliability coefficient=.79) (Shuja & Malik, 2011).

Affective Style Questionnaire

Affective style Questionnaire was developed by Hofmann and Kashdan (2010). It is a self-rating instrument, comprised of 20 items and assesses three broad emotion regulation styles: Concealing, Adjusting and Tolerating emotional regulation style. It is measured on a 5-point Likert rating scale mentioning to what extent the certain statements match with the students' styles. The internal consistency values of the Affective Style Questionnaire subscales are .84, .80 and 82 for concealing, adjusting, and tolerating emotional regulation styles respectively.

Data Collection

After taking permission from higher authorities, students were contacted in their classroom during their free time. Informed consent was provided to the students to sign it once they agreed to take part in the study. Social Competence Scale and Affective Style Questionnaire were administered for data collection from male and female students of Foundation University, COMSATS University, Quaid-i-Azam University, Capital University and International Islamic University. Moreover, their demographics as per objectives of the study were also collected using a demographic sheet. The ethical considerations for data collection were kept in mind. The anonymity of data was ensured and it was made sure that the participants do not have any threat by involving in data collection. The data were analysed using mean, Standard Deviation, t-Test and Pearson correlation as per the nature of objectives.

Data Analysis and Interpretation

All the data was statistically analysed using Statistical Package of Social Sciences (SPSS-21) and then the results were interpreted. A total of 500 participants took part in the study. Out of these 500 students, 250 (50%) were females and 250 (50%) were males. Furthermore, 275(55%) were undergraduate and 225(45%) were graduates; 300(60%) students belong to joint family system and 200 (40%) from nuclear family system.

Table 1

Descriptive statistics for Social Competence and Affective Styles of Emotion Regulation (N=500)

Variables	N	A	M (SD)	Min-Max	Skew	Kurt
Social Competence	9	.82	25.03(3.18)	9.00-36.00	.35	.38
Concealing Style	8	.84	26.96(3.25)	8.00-40.00	.45	.81
Tolerating Style	5	.83	13.09(3.09)	5.00-25.00	.37	.38
Adjusting Style	7	.87	12.30(3.76)	7.00-35.00	.23	.51

Table 1 depicts the mean scores of social competence, and various styles including concealing, tolerating and adjusting.

Table 2

Correlation Coefficient between Social Competence and Affective Styles of Emotional Regulation (Concealing, Adjusting and Tolerating Style) Among University Students (N=500)

Variables	1	2	3	4
Social Competence	-	-.33**	.36**	.25**
Concealing Style		-	.52**	-.41**
Adjusting Style			-	.47**
Tolerating Style				-

**p < .01

Table 2 indicates that social competence is significant negative correlated with concealing style of emotion regulation (r=-.33**). Social competence is significant positive correlated with adjusting style (r=.36**) and tolerating style of emotion regulation (r=.25**). Concealing style of emotion regulation is significant negatively correlated with adjusting style(r=-.52**) and tolerating style of emotion regulation (r=-.41**). Whereas there is significant positive relationship between adjusting and tolerating style of emotion regulation (r= .47**).

Table 3

Gender Difference of university students on social competence and affective styles of emotion regulation (N=500)

Variables	Male (n=250)	Female (n=250)			95% CI			
	M(S.D)	M(S.D)	t(148)		LL	UL		Cohen's d
Social Competence	22.76 (7.15)	25.76(4.99)	2.98	00	5	-1.01		0.49
Concealing	24.17(5.15)	25.67(6.10)	1.62	11	-3.31	.33		0.27
Tolerating	14.71(3.23)	14.44(3.21)	.51	61	-.77	1.31		0.08
Adjusting	22.31(5.23)	21.77(5.64)	.60	55	-1.22	2.29		0.10

Table 3 shows significant gender difference among university students on social competence. Female students (M=25.76, S.D=4.99) scored higher on social competence than male students (M=22.76, S.D=7.15). Whereas there is non-significant difference between male and female university students on different styles of emotion regulation.

Table 4

Nuclear and joint family systems vs social competence and affective styles of emotion regulation (N=500)

Variables	Nuclear (n=200)	Joint (n=300)			95% CI		
	M(S.D)	M(S.D)	t(148)	p	LL	UL	Cohen's d
Social Competence	24.31(5.58)	24.17(7.56)	.13	.90	-2.00	2.28	2.99
Concealing	24.78(5.94)	25.17(5.20)	.40	.62	-2.31	1.53	0.07
Tolerating	14.21(3.26)	15.25(3.04)	1.9	.05	-2.11	.04	0.33
Adjusting	21.18(5.44)	23.62(5.07)	-2.7	.07	-4.24	-.65	0.46

Table 4 shows non-significant difference between university students belonging to nuclear and joint family systems on social competence and affective styles of emotion regulation.

Table 5

Level of Studies vs social competence and affective styles of emotion regulation (N=500)

Variables	Graduate (n=225)	Undergraduate (n=275)			95% CI			
	M(S.D)	M(S.D)	t(148)	p	LL	UL		Cohen's d
Social Competence	23.86 (6.90)	24.56 (5.89)	.67	.50	-2.77	1.37		0.11
Concealing	24.55 (5.10)	25.20 (6.08)	.70	.49	-2.51	1.20		0.12
Tolerating	14.31 (3.35)	14.77 (3.11)	.86	.39	-1.50	.59		0.14
Adjusting	21.80 (4.77)	22.22 (5.88)	.47	.64	-2.20	1.35		0.08

Table 5 shows that there was no significant difference between social competence and affective styles of emotion regulation of undergraduate and graduate students.

Discussion

The present study was conducted to check the relationship between affective styles of emotional regulation (tolerating, concealing and adjusting styles) with social competence among undergraduate and post-graduate university students. The scales utilized in the study were Affective Style Questionnaire (ASQ) and Social Competence Scale each having a high reliability alpha coefficient.

It was hypothesized that both the independent variables will have a significant correlation among university students. This has been justified by the results of the present research according to the social competence being highly correlated with affective styles of emotional regulation (negative correlation with concealing style of emotion regulation and a positive correlated with adjusting style and tolerating style of emotion regulation). This has been supported by the previous literature which also found that the learners who have less emotional regulation skills have weak social competence. Furthermore, Eisenberg et al. (2005) also showed a link between social skills and emotional regulations. This research demonstrated those children who use their emotion knowledge in emotionally charged circumstances have stronger peer connections, are more sociable, are perceived as more pleasant by peers, and their teachers feel they are more socially competent. Longitudinal research has corroborated this information.

It was also hypothesized that there are gender differences among students on social competence and affective styles of emotional regulation. Results showed that female university students were more socially competent as compared to their male counterparts. There was non-significant difference between male and female university students on affective styles of emotional regulation. A probable reason for this non-significant difference might be justified by research conducted by McRae et el., (2008). According to this research, men and women behaviourally depicted comparable emotion regulation experience. However, neutrally, gender differences were observed. Men showed lower increases in prefrontal areas associated with reappraisal and higher declines in the amygdala than women. Thus, it maybe hypothesized that behaviourally or apparently, men and women may not show differences in emotional regulation; their internal biological as well as psychological emotional regulation processes may still differ.

There was a non-significant difference between university students belonging to nuclear and joint family systems on social competence and affective styles of emotion regulation in present study. The non-significant results might be justified through researches conducted on social competence which indicate that family dysfunction negatively impact social competence and those living in nuclear family structure present higher levels of family dysfunction as compared to those living joint family structure. In one such research conducted by Saleem and Gul (2016) found that family dysfunction is a significant predictor of social competence, those living in joint family systems had higher social competence as compared to those living in nuclear family system. Hence it is not the family structure in itself rather the adolescents' perception of the existence of a healthy home environment that impacts the development of healthy social skills (including social competence).

The students results of both variables of the study were compared based on the level of programmes they are enrolled in and it came out to be non-significant between graduate and undergraduate university students on social competence and affective styles of emotional regulation. As per literature, there is a proof of emotional regulation's link to "teachability" and "readiness to learn" (Denham, 2006), achievement in math and reading ability (Blair & Razza, 2007; Graziano et al., 2007), "ready for school" (Raver & Knitzer, 2002), attention (Trentacosta & Izard, 2007), Classroom productivity (Graziano et al., 2007), and behavioural self-regulation (Howse et al., 2003). This indicates that regardless of the level of education (pre-school, primary, high school, graduate or undergraduate) these factors impact the level, quality and type of emotional regulation skills a person possess. Same is the case with social competence. There are other factors that determine the level and quality of social competence than the level of academic education since learning academic skills does not equal to learning social skills as well.

Conclusion

Present research investigates the role of social competence and the use of different affective styles of emotional regulation among university students. The overall findings of the research suggest that social competence and affective styles of emotional regulation (adjusting, tolerating and concealing styles) are correlated.

Regarding social competence there was significant gender difference among male and female students. However there is non-significant difference between male and female university students on emotional regulation.

Furthermore, the results of this study also showed non- significant difference between university students belonging to nuclear and joint families as well as between graduate and undergraduate students on social competence and affective styles of emotion regulation.

So the hypotheses formulated were accepted to much extent and few were not accepted e.g. social competence was found to be positively correlated with adjusting style of emotional regulation, negatively correlated with concealing style of emotional regulation, positively correlated with tolerating style of emotional regulation. There is a difference between male and female university students on social competence but not on affective styles of emotional regulation. There is no difference between university students belonging to nuclear and joint families on social competence and affective styles of emotional regulation and there is a difference between graduate and undergraduate university students on social competence and affective styles of emotional regulation.

Implications

This particular research was carried out to find the relationship between social competence and different affective styles of emotion regulation of university students. Moreover the gender difference on social competence and affective styles of emotion regulation was also checked. Correlation research design was used and data were collected through survey technique from male and female students of Foundation University, COMSATS University, Quaid-i-Azam University, Capital University and International Islamic University. Social Competence Scale and Affective Style Questionnaire were administered on university students for data collection which were analysed using mean, Standard Deviation, t-Test and pearson correlation. A significant correlation between social competence and affective styles of emotional regulation (adjusting, tolerating and concealing styles) was found. It was also observed that gender difference between university students on social competence was significant. However gender difference on emotional regulation was non-significant. Using positive affective styles of emotional regulation can help to reduce stress, tension, anxiety and depression among university students.

The research will be helpful to spread awareness that how the use of positive affective styles of emotional regulation can help to reduce stress, tension, anxiety and depression among university students. The students and teachers as well as administrators might work on developing these skills among students. It may provide some useful information which can be further utilized to conduct seminars and public awareness programmes.

Limitations and Suggestions

The present study had certain limitations. Future research should look at the relationship while taking into account the mix or profiles of emotional styles among different levels of learners.

- The sample size selected for the research was limited, and the data was gathered in the city of Islamabad and Rawalpindi only due to which the results cannot be widely generalized.
- The sample was limited only to university students and could have been extended for better results.

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