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Alexithymia and Emotional Regulation in Higher Education: Implications for Student Self-Awareness

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Abstract

Alexithymia, emotion regulation, and self-awareness play a crucial role in influencing students' psychological well-being and mental health during this critical developmental stage. However, there is a lack of research examining the relationship between these variables among university students at Najran University. Therefore, this study explores the relationship between alexithymia, emotional regulation, and self-awareness among Najran University students using a quantitative approach. The researchers applied the Toronto Alexithymia Scale, the Gross and John Emotional Regulation Scale, and the Al-Ghuli Self-Awareness Scale to a sample of 660 undergraduates (373 males, 287 females). Results indicate a moderate level of alexithymia (3.18), a high level of emotional regulation (3.52), and a moderate level of self-awareness (2.08) among participants. A statistically significant negative correlation exists between alexithymia and both emotional regulation and self-awareness ($p < 0.01$). The study contributes to planning psychological counseling programs aimed at enhancing emotional expression among university students through self-awareness training and emotional regulation interventions.

Keywords: mental health, undergraduates, psychological well-being, psycho-social development, university education.

1. Introduction

The ability to express emotions is fundamental to successful social interactions. Emotions play a crucial role in guiding life and the personal decisions that accompany it. A lack of emotional awareness can be destructive, especially when making decisions that determine our destinies, social interactions, and dealings, in general. Since life's interactions are constantly evolving, logical thinking alone is insufficient; they also require emotions and the wisdom of feelings refined by experience.

Emotions and feelings are among the important features of daily life, as they guide and shape social behaviors. Emotions arise and can be inferred from internal sensation (interoception) and external sensation related to context and prior learning (Barrett, 2017). More importantly, the way emotions are formed differs from one person to another (Barrett & Satpute, 2019). Some experiences and emotions appear in a distinct and differentiated manner among individuals, such as the ability to distinguish between "disappointment" and "anger," whereas others have a "blurred" awareness limited to a general sense of valence and intensity (good or bad). In some cases, some individuals may be unable to recognize their emotions at all (Lane et al., 1997).

Research indicates that higher levels of self-reported alexithymia are associated with reduced activity in brain regions responsible for emotional perception and awareness, while excessive activation in somatic and motor areas in response to this is reflected in bodily sensations such as pain, as well as increased functional connectivity in these regions (Grynberg et al., 2012).

Alexithymia does not reflect meaningful differences in emotional self-awareness, and higher levels of alexithymia are positively associated with a focus on "lower-level" aspects of emotional awareness, such as bodily sensitivity. Moreover, alexithymia has also been linked to psychosomatic disorders (De Gucht & Heiser, 2003).

Alexithymia is considered an affective and cognitive trait of personality to lacks emotional awareness. It is characterized by an individual's inability to identify emotions and feelings, describe them, and express them verbally—either in oneself or in others—as well as difficulty distinguishing between emotions and bodily sensations resulting from arousal. In addition, restricted imaginative processes are observed through the rarity of dreams and fantasies, along with a predominance of an externally oriented thinking style that focuses on details of external events rather than on emotions and fantasies related to internal experience (Gilbert et al., 2014).

Alexithymia cases, which represent a lack of emotional awareness, are also characterized by disruption or impairment in bodily actions and interoceptive awareness. These ideas related to self-awareness may explain the effectiveness of embodiment activities in deepening awareness of bodily sensations, thereby increasing emotional awareness and enhancing the ability required for emotion regulation in cases of depression, anxiety, and trauma (Pitluk et al., 2021).

Studies indicate that individuals with high levels of alexithymia tend to experience negative emotions and suppress emotional expression, and they do not tend to engage in positive emotions or cognitive reappraisal, which suggests difficulty in emotion regulation among these individuals (Laloyaux et al., 2015).

Emotion regulation processes are influenced by several factors and can be impaired in various ways. One well-known symptom of emotion regulation failure is alexithymia (Taylor et al., 1997). Alexithymia is the inability to recognize and describe personal feelings verbally. It is characterized by certain features, including extreme poverty in symbolic thinking, which limits the ability to identify situations, emotions, desires, and motives; inability to use emotions as indicators of emotional problems; reduced recall of dreams; difficulty distinguishing between emotional states and bodily sensations; a rigid and formal appearance; limited facial emotional expressions; and a restricted capacity for empathy and self-awareness (Bagby et al., 1997).

Emotion regulation plays an important role in achieving psychological well-being (Hayes et al., 2006). On the other hand, deficits in emotion regulation play a fundamental role in shaping psychological disorders and problems (Walker et al., 2011).

The process of emotion regulation is influenced by several factors, most notably emotional intelligence. Emotional intelligence reflects the emotional abilities and skills individuals use to manage and regulate their feelings and emotions (Xiao et al., 2025). In addition, emotion regulation focuses on individual differences in the ability to perceive, understand, and regulate emotions. However, emotion regulation emphasizes the underlying processes of emotions, their timing, and the ways in which they are expressed and experienced. Theoretical perspectives and empirical reasoning suggest that individuals with high emotional intelligence employ different emotion regulation processes compared to those with lower emotional intelligence. Specifically, emotionally intelligent individuals tend to use more effective regulation strategies, such as engaging in problem solving, reframing thoughts in a positive direction, and seeking social support (Maccann, 2025).

Emotional intelligence is also considered a key factor influencing emotional well-being. It is defined as the ability to evaluate, express, regulate emotions, and use emotional content in thinking and behavior. Previous studies have shown that emotional well-being is one of the most important indicators of an individual's possession of an acceptable level of emotional intelligence. It contributes to shaping their level of emotion regulation (Sha et al., 2022).

In addition, findings have indicated that self-awareness has a positive effect on emotion regulation. Furthermore, emotional intelligence functions as a positive moderating factor that strengthens the relationship between self-awareness and emotion regulation. Hence, it enables individuals to manage and regulate their emotions in a constructive manner (Ghaith et al., 2025).

Moreover, emotional intelligence plays a central role in determining levels of emotion regulation, as individuals with high emotional intelligence are able to accurately identify their emotions and utilize this understanding to enhance communication within social relationships. For this reason, emotional intelligence is regarded as a more reliable indicator of life success than traditional intelligence, given its influence on social interactions, interpersonal relationships, and overall well-being (Thani, 2024).

Alexithymia is associated with maladaptive emotion regulation strategies that revolve around avoiding internal experiences, such as suppression, emotional restriction, and social avoidance (Bilotta et al., 2016). The lack of emotion regulation awareness in individuals with alexithymia is due to their inability to recognize their emotional states and describe them verbally. Avoidance of internal experiences may also be related to the fact that they are inaccurate in perceiving improvement cues and fail to integrate interoceptive sensory information from different sources (Grynberg & Pollatos, 2015). Another possibility that warrants examination is low self-awareness, defined as a lack of awareness of internal experiences, integrative signals, and other private events, particularly emotions.

Awareness of emotions and feelings reflects an individual's emotional, social, and professional competence. Expressing emotions is one of the most important forms of human behavior, and through emotional expression, a person's behavior, personality, ability to communicate with others, attract their attention, and influence them can be judged (Alfasi & Soffer-Dudek, 2018).

Previous psychological literature has shown that higher education students with high levels of emotion regulation demonstrate a positive capacity for emotional expression, a favorable level of emotion management skills, and strong emotional competence (López González et al., 2025; Mersin et al., 2025). It has also been found that emotion regulation strategies such as mindfulness and self-compassion can enhance emotional expressiveness, which in turn contributes to improved academic performance.

In addition, psychological literature has indicated that low self-awareness is inversely associated with levels of alexithymia among university students. This is because reduced self-awareness reflects diminished self-focused attention, lower awareness of internal experiences, and a tendency toward experiential avoidance (Maroti et al., 2018; Panayiotou et al., 2020).

Therefore, this study aims to examine the relationship between alexithymia, emotion regulation, and self-awareness, which has not been previously explored among students at Najran University in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. This topic requires greater attention due to the nature of the relationship between the study variables and the age group under investigation, as this stage marks the onset of psychological and social problems associated with these factors, which can have a significant impact on individuals' mental health in the future.

This study contributes to the existing literature; it is one of the first studies, investigating the interrelationships between alexithymia, emotion regulation, and self-awareness among university students in Saudi Arabia, specifically at Najran University. It provides new empirical evidence on how these psychological constructs interact during a critical developmental stage characterized by emotional and social challenges. The findings are expected to enhance understanding of the psychological well-being of young adults, inform mental health support programs within higher education institutions, and guide future research on emotional development and regulation in similar cultural and educational contexts.

Alexithymia is a recent topic that has attracted considerable attention from researchers both locally and globally in the psychological field, and it has gained increasing interest in recent times. It is a multifaceted topic that can be studied from affective, social-cognitive, or neurological perspectives. Alexithymia represents a fundamental functional impairment in a person's ability to recognize, perceive, or encode emotions and feelings (Perry & Hayaki, 2014).

This study aims to shed light on the relationship between alexithymia, emotion regulation, and self-awareness among students at Najran University by answering the following questions:

- What is the level of alexithymia among Najran University students?
- What is the level of emotion regulation among Najran University students?
- What is the level of self-awareness among Najran University students?
- Is there a statistically significant correlation between alexithymia and the levels of emotion regulation and self-awareness among Najran University students?

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

The researchers adopted a descriptive approach aimed at determining the level of alexithymia, self-awareness, and emotional regulation among students at Najran University. The study also sought to understand the relationship between alexithymia and both emotional regulation and self-awareness, as well as to identify individual differences between male and female students in alexithymia, self-awareness, and emotional regulation.

3.2 Population and Sample of the Study

The study population included all students enrolled at Najran University during the first semester of the academic year 2025–2026. The study sample consisted of 660 male and female students from Najran University, selected using a purposive sampling method. The distribution of the sample was as follows:

Table 1. Distribution of the sample by college specialization and gender

No.	Specialization	Males	Females	Total
1	Scientific	195	165	360
2	Humanities	178	122	300
	Total	373	287	

Ethical approval was obtained to administer the study instruments to male and female students at Najran University. In addition, the respondents provided a written consent form.

3.3 Instruments of the Study

3.3.1. Alexithymia Scale

In this study, the researchers relied on the Toronto Alexithymia Scale developed by Toronto (1994), which was translated and standardized for the Saudi context by Al-Zahrani (2019). The Toronto Alexithymia Scale consists of 20 items distributed across three dimensions: (1) Difficulty identifying feelings, (2) Difficulty describing or expressing feelings in words, and (3) Externally oriented thinking, which refers to a predisposition to focus on external events rather than internal personal experiences.

The scale is a self-report measure, and respondents answer its items using a five-point Likert scale: *Completely applies, Largely applies, Moderately applies, Slightly applies, Does not apply at all*.

3.3.2. Internal Consistency Validity of The Alexithymia Scale

The internal consistency validity of the alexithymia scale was calculated by administering the scale to a pilot sample of 30 male and female students who met the study criteria but were not part of the main sample. The researchers used internal consistency validity, which showed correlation coefficients and significance levels between each item score and the total scale score, as presented below:

Table 2. Correlation and significance levels between item scores and the total score of the alexithymia scale

Item No.	Correlation Coefficient	Significance Level	Item No.	Correlation Coefficient	Significance Level
1	0.651	0.01	11	0.575	0.01
2	0.751	0.01	12	0.489	0.01
3	0.720	0.01	13	0.634	0.01
4	0.690	0.01	14	0.582	0.01
5	0.599	0.01	15	0.567	0.01

6	0.601	0.01	16	0.670	0.01
7	0.721	0.01	17	0.210	0.05
8	0.700	0.01	18	0.611	0.01
9	0.231	0.05	19	0.509	0.01
10	0.559	0.01	20	0.711	0.01

Table 2 demonstrates the validity of the alexithymia scale through the correlation and significance levels between item scores and the total scale score.

3.3.3. Scale Reliability

The reliability of the scale was calculated using the test–retest method. The scale was administered to the same pilot sample used for internal consistency validity (30 male and female students). After two weeks, the scale was re-administered to the same individuals, and the Pearson correlation coefficient between the two administrations was computed, yielding a reliability coefficient of 0.791.

3.3.4. Emotion Regulation Scale

The researchers used the emotion regulation scale developed by Gross and John (2003), which was translated into Arabic by Al-Brahmeh and Al-Zaghloul (2017). The original scale consists of ten items rated on a seven-point Likert scale: *Strongly disagree, Disagree, Sometimes disagree, Neutral, Agree, Sometimes agree, Strongly agree*.

3.3.5. Validity of the Emotion Regulation Scale

The researchers applied the scale to the pilot sample used for calculating the internal consistency validity of the alexithymia scale. The analysis showed correlation coefficients and significance levels between each item score and the total scale score, as presented below:

Table 3. Correlation and significance levels between item scores and the total score of the emotion regulation scale

Item No.	Correlation Coefficient	Significance Level	Item No.	Correlation Coefficient	Significance Level
1	0.500	0.01	6	0.660	0.01
2	0.580	0.01	7	0.623	0.01
3	0.723	0.01	8	0.490	0.01
4	0.688	0.01	9	0.588	0.01
5	0.540	0.01	10	0.577	0.01

Table 3 demonstrates the validity of the emotion regulation scale through the correlation and significance levels between item scores and the total scale score.

3.3.6. Scale Reliability

The reliability of the emotional regulation scale was calculated using the test-retest method. The scale was administered to the same sample that participated in calculating the reliability of the Alexithymia Scale. After two weeks, the scale was re-administered to the same sample, and Pearson's correlation coefficient was computed between the two administrations. The reliability coefficient was 0.832.

3.3.7. Self-awareness Scale

The researchers adopted the Self-Awareness Scale developed by Al-Ghoul (2011), which consists of 25 items. The scale includes three response options: *Completely applies*, *Largely applies*, and *Moderately applies*.

3.3.8. Scale Validity

The researchers administered the scale to the pilot sample that participated in calculating the internal consistency validity of the alexithymia scale and the emotional regulation scale. The analysis showed correlation coefficients and significance levels between each item score and the total scale score, as presented below:

Table 4. Correlation and significance levels between item scores and the total score of the self-awareness scale

Item No.	Correlation Coefficient	Significance Level	Item No.	Correlation Coefficient	Significance Level
1	0.548	0.01	13	0.661	0.01
2	0.620	0.01	14	0.480	0.01
3	0.733	0.01	15	0.570	0.01
4	0.669	0.01	16	0.588	0.01
5	0.511	0.01	17	0.666	0.01
6	0.451	0.01	18	0.679	0.01
7	0.688	0.01	19	0.209	0.05
8	0.530	0.01	20	0.519	0.01
9	0.222	0.05	21	0.544	0.01
10	0.559	0.01	22	0.684	0.01
11	0.437	0.01	23	0.549	0.01
12	0.555	0.01	24	0.614	0.01
			25	0.620	0.01

It is evident from Table 4 that the self-awareness scale demonstrates validity through the correlation coefficients and significance levels between item scores and the total scale score.

3.3.9. Scale Reliability

The reliability of the self-awareness scale was calculated using the test-retest method. The scale was administered to the same sample that participated in calculating the reliability of the Alexithymia scale and the emotional regulation scale. After two weeks, the scale was re-administered to the same sample, and Pearson's correlation coefficient was computed between the two administrations. The reliability coefficient was 0.801.

2. Study Results and Discussion

4.1. The Level of Alexithymia

The means and standard deviations for the level of alexithymia among the study sample were calculated as follows:

Table 5. The level of alexithymia among Najran University students

Item	Statement	Mean	SD	Level
1	I am often confused about what I truly feel.	3.26	1.397	Moderate
2	I feel sensations in my body that even doctors cannot understand.	3.06	1.537	Moderate
3	When I am upset, I do not know whether I am sad, afraid, or angry.	3.17	1.443	Moderate
4	I am often confused about sensations in my body.	2.98	1.463	Moderate
5	I have feelings that I cannot clearly identify.	3.15	1.374	Moderate
6	I do not know what is going on inside me.	2.97	1.478	Moderate
7	Most of the time, I do not know why I am angry.	3.00	1.458	Moderate
8	It is hard for me to find the right words to describe my feelings.	3.40	1.360	Moderate
9	I can easily describe my feelings.	2.65	1.377	Moderate
10	I find it difficult to describe my feelings toward others.	3.23	1.336	Moderate
11	Others constantly ask me to express my feelings more.	2.64	1.345	Moderate

12	I find it difficult to share my private feelings even with close friends.	3.30	1.382	Moderate
13	I prefer solving the problem rather than just describing or talking about it.	3.52	1.172	High
14	I prefer to let things happen as they are rather than trying to understand why.	2.94	1.487	Moderate
15	It is essential for people to know what they feel.	3.67	1.173	High
16	I prefer talking to people about their daily routines rather than their feelings.	3.32	1.294	Moderate
17	I prefer watching entertainment and comedy shows rather than dramas.	3.20	1.318	Moderate
18	I can feel close to someone even in moments of silence.	3.56	1.170	High
19	I find that exploring my feelings limits me in solving my personal problems.	3.44	1.373	High
20	I find that searching for hidden meanings in movies and plays reduces the enjoyment.	3.12	1.366	Moderate
	Overall alexithymia level among Najran University students	3.18	0.735	Moderate

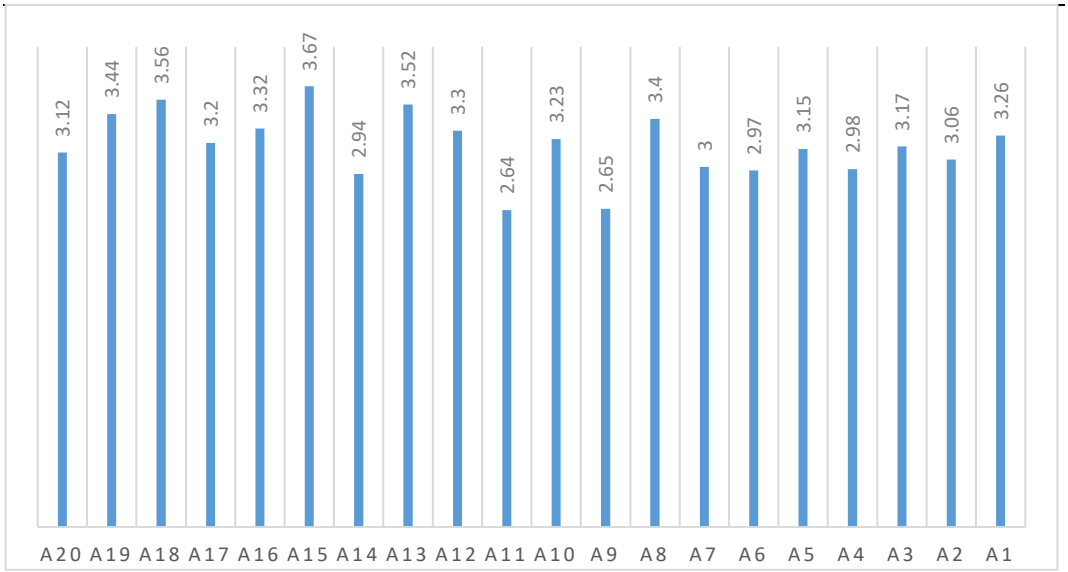

Figure 1. Alexithymia among Najran University students

It is evident from Table 5 and Figure 1 that the overall mean score of the study sample's responses regarding the level of alexithymia among Najran University students was 3.18, with a standard deviation of 0.735, indicating a moderate level.

The researchers interpret this result in light of the nature of family upbringing in Arab societies, where university students suffer from a major problem: a weak ability to express emotional and affective aspects in front of others. This issue tends to appear more among males than females and is linked to parenting styles and the family environment. Many families do not provide the student or child with space to think and express their emotions and feelings within; instead, they think and make decisions on their behalf. This negatively affects their way of thinking and expressing emotions, leaving these feelings suppressed and unable to be expressed positively. Over time, they turn into negative emotions that manifest in various negative behaviors and actions, significantly impacting the family, university, and society. Messina et al. (2014) emphasize the existence of wide cultural differences among countries regarding the value placed on emotional awareness and expression among individuals. People with moderate to high levels of alexithymia exhibit a range of difficulties in their relationships with others. This result is consistent with the study by Al-Masri and Al-Nawaiseh (2018) but differs from the study by Al-Ani and Salim (2020).

Based on the results of this question, and from an applied perspective, it is essential for faculty members and academic advisors to implement a range of strategies that foster emotional expression among university students. These include building trust and empathy, as working with such students requires establishing relationships characterized by respect and empathy. Therefore, students feel sufficiently safe to express their emotions.

In addition, the use of alternative communication methods is recommended, as students with low levels of emotional expression may respond more effectively to written communication, such as notes or email messages. They allow them time to reflect and formulate their responses rather than expressing themselves immediately in oral form. Furthermore, diversifying teaching methods is important. Activities encourage indirect forms of expression—such as self-reflection, free writing, or group projects that require collaboration and problem-solving—can be employed; they help develop self-awareness and emotion management skills.

4.2. The Level of Emotion Regulation

The means and standard deviations for the level of emotional regulation among the study sample were calculated as follows:

Table 6. The level of emotional regulation among Najran University students

Item	Statement	Mean	SD	Level
1	When I feel positive emotions, I am cautious in expressing them.	3.14	1.767	Moderate
2	I regulate my emotions by changing the way I think about the situation I am in.	3.42	1.681	High
3	I keep my emotions to myself.	3.55	1.617	High
4	When I face a stressful situation, I think of a way to help me stay calm.	3.76	1.616	High
5	When I feel negative emotions, I think positively.	3.67	1.542	High
6	I resort to not expressing my emotions as a way to regulate them.	3.11	1.635	Moderate
7	When I feel negative emotions (sadness, anger), I change what I was thinking about.	3.73	1.573	High
8	When I want to feel a positive emotion, I change the way I think about the situation.	3.92	1.450	High
9	When I feel negative emotions, I make sure not to disclose them.	3.64	1.584	High
10	When I want to feel a positive emotion (such as joy and happiness), I change what I was thinking about.	3.27	1.738	Moderate
	Overall emotional regulation level among Najran University students	3.52	0.861	High

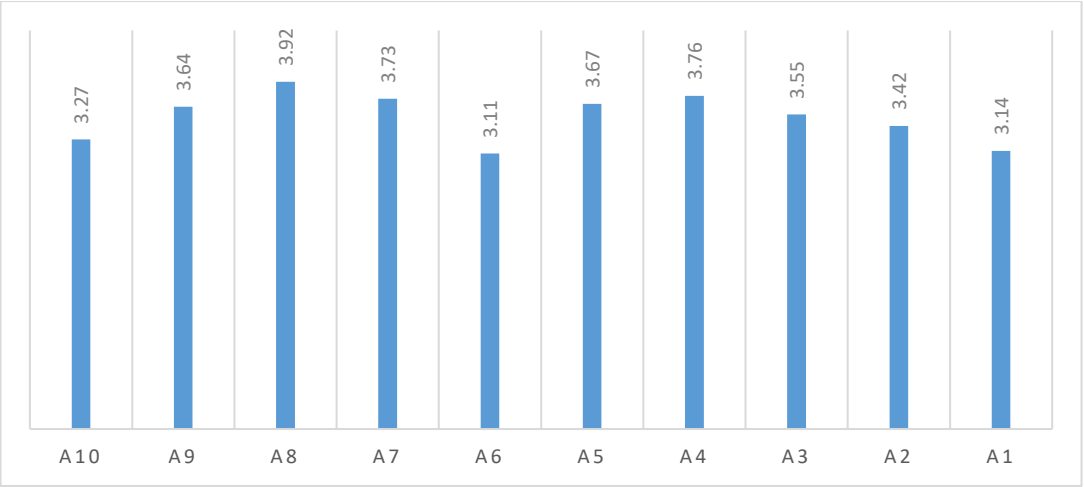

Figure 2. Emotional regulation among Najran University students

It is evident from Table 6 and Figure 2 that the overall mean score of the study sample's responses regarding the level of emotional regulation among Najran University students was 3.52, with a standard deviation of 0.861, indicating a high level.

The researchers interpret this result by noting that emotional regulation is associated with experiences acquired from culture, previous experiences, and the social context. Arab culture emphasizes interpersonal emotion regulation. Lisi (2015) points out that, despite the variety of support forms from others for emotion regulation—such as informational or behavioral support—emotional support remains the most effective in helping individuals regulate emotions. This result is consistent with the study by Yaqub (2011) but differs from the study by Abdel Hadi (2019).

Based on this result, the researchers recommend capitalizing on the high level of emotion regulation among university students through various methods that contribute to enhancing academic achievement. Emotion regulation may be achieved by promoting active learning environments, supporting autonomy in academic research, and implementing academic resilience strategies to cope with study-related pressures. In addition, this skill can be utilized to foster self-confidence, improve academic decision-making, and manage stress through counseling and reflective sessions.

4.3. The Level of Self-Awareness

The means and standard deviations for the level of self-awareness among the study sample were calculated as follows:

Table 7. The level of self-awareness among Najran University students

Item	Statement	Mean	SD	Level
1	I identify my true feelings responsible for my actions.	2.14	0.815	Moderate
2	I know exactly the reasons that lead to my anger.	2.08	0.804	Moderate
3	I can easily describe my feelings.	1.58	0.761	Low
4	When I recognize my feelings, I can make appropriate decisions.	2.24	0.720	Moderate
5	I can distinguish between my positive and negative emotions.	2.20	0.764	Moderate
6	I know that my thinking style is positive.	2.11	0.820	Moderate
7	When I feel anxious, I know exactly the physiological changes I experience.	1.89	0.838	Moderate
8	I do not know exactly what I want to do.	1.85	0.858	Moderate
9	I can identify my strengths and weaknesses.	2.27	0.790	Moderate
10	I am aware of how my mind works.	2.14	0.777	Moderate
11	I am aware of my true feelings.	2.09	0.774	Moderate
12	I know my abilities and direct them to achieve my goals.	2.08	0.766	Moderate
13	I am aware of the daily tasks I perform.	2.15	0.744	Moderate
14	I can identify my mistakes.	2.11	0.742	Moderate
15	I am aware of values and moral standards.	2.23	0.755	Moderate
16	I accurately assess my emotions and feelings.	2.12	0.789	Moderate
17	I lack the courage to criticize my behaviors.	1.70	0.798	Moderate
18	I feel confident in most situations.	2.24	0.799	Moderate
19	My sad emotions affect my important decisions.	2.02	0.808	Moderate
20	I feel comfortable when I talk to myself.	2.20	0.783	Moderate
21	I lack the ability to deal with unexpected situations.	1.79	0.750	Moderate
22	My self-esteem increases when I overcome my bad habits.	2.33	0.704	Moderate

23	I can find solutions to my personal problems.	2.06	0.815	Moderate
24	I strive to achieve my social goals by any means.	2.12	0.708	Moderate
25	I try to overcome social conditions that hinder my ambitions.	2.23	0.794	Moderate
	Overall self-awareness level among Najran University students	2.08	0.411	Moderate

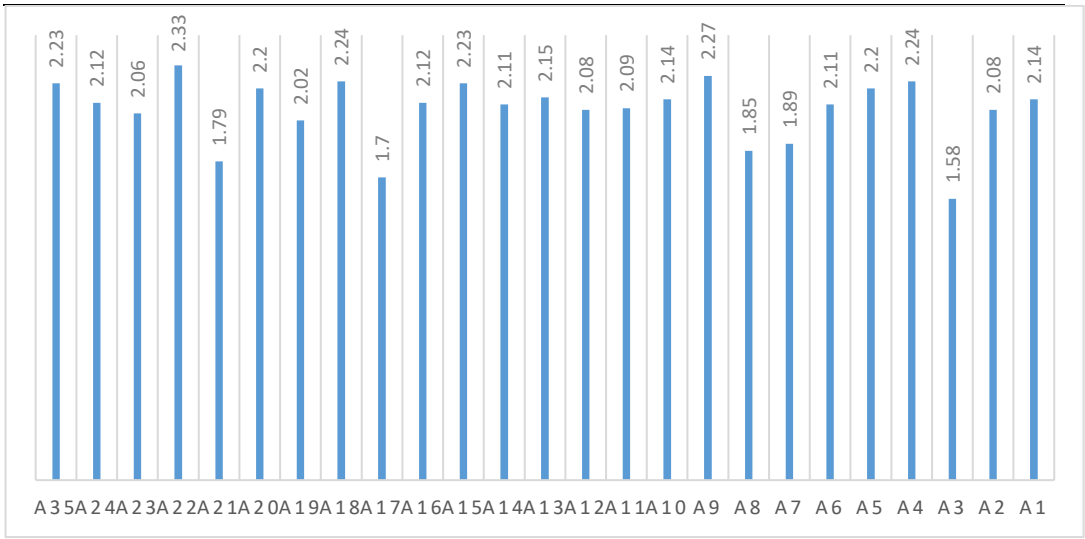

Figure 3. Self-awareness among Najran University students

It is evident from Table 7 and Figure 3 that the overall mean score of the study sample's responses regarding the level of self-awareness among Najran University students was 2.08, with a standard deviation of 0.411, indicating a moderate level.

The researchers interpret this result as stemming from differences in theoretical orientations regarding this aspect. Behavioral theory views self-awareness as a form of response that varies among individuals in degree and type. In contrast, psychoanalytic theory indicates that self-awareness is closely linked to the unconscious mind, emphasizing the unconscious as a significant and influential element in self-awareness. Cognitive theorists argue that each individual has a distinct self, independent of others, and that the concept of self-awareness is divided into two parts: private self-awareness, which focuses on internal aspects such as unique thoughts and feelings, and public self-awareness, which centers on social topics, communication, and interaction with others. According to cognitive theory, self-awareness develops through values, perceptions, and the individual's interaction with their environment to achieve adaptation. Ayranci (2000) notes that low self-awareness among individuals with alexithymia may be associated with increased avoidance of internal experiences, which may play a protective role in the short term

but, in the long term, may contribute to the link between alexithymia and mental health problems (Panayiotou et al., 2020). The study's result is consistent with the findings of Rosenberg et al. (2020).

Based on this result, the researchers recommend that faculty members and academic advisors provide emotional support and train students to understand their own emotions. Also, they should implement early detection systems to identify academic and personal challenges and offer targeted academic and psychological counseling to enhance psychological adjustment. In addition, they also emphasize the application of strategies that include interactive activities and constructive feedback to improve and develop self-awareness.

4.4. Correlation between alexithymia and the levels of emotion regulation and self-awareness

The Pearson correlation coefficients between alexithymia and both emotional regulation and self-awareness among Najran University students were calculated as follows:

Table 8. Pearson's correlation between alexithymia and the levels of emotional regulation and self-awareness

Study Variables	Emotional Regulation	Self-Awareness
Alexithymia (r)	-0.169**	-0.157**
p-value	.000	.000
n	660	660

Table 8 shows a statistically significant negative correlation at the 0.01 significance level between alexithymia and each of emotional regulation and self-awareness.

The researchers interpret this result by noting that individuals with alexithymia have difficulty perceiving, understanding, and expressing their emotions and feelings both verbally and nonverbally, as well as recognizing the emotions of others. They also exhibit a severe lack of vocabulary to describe these emotions and feelings, difficulty distinguishing between different emotions, an external rather than internal orientation, and a lack of imagination and daydreaming. They do not completely lack emotions; rather, they suffer from an inability to express their emotions and feelings verbally and nonverbally. Consequently, they attempt to express and regulate their emotions in a maladaptive manner by ignoring or suppressing them.

Alexithymia is associated with difficulties in emotional regulation and reflects a deficit in the cognitive processing of emotional information, which leads to impaired emotion regulation. This result is consistent with the studies by Pandey et al. (2011) and Chen et al. (2011).

The researchers believe that self-awareness represents an individual's perception of different aspects of themselves, such as traits, behaviors, and emotions. It reflects the ability to think about oneself and analyze actions and feelings objectively. Self-awareness involves understanding how thoughts and emotions influence behaviors, which suggests that a low level of self-awareness may lead to an increase in alexithymia due to the individual's lack of awareness of their own self. This, in turn, reflects a high level of inability to express emotions and feelings toward situations and events. Furthermore, an individual's level of emotional regulation indicates the degree of awareness of their emotions and the ability to control them in a manner appropriate to events and situations. This reflects a balanced and objective emotional response. Therefore, a high level of emotional regulation positively affects an individual's ability to express emotions and describe feelings as a form of emotional release. Such release enables the individual to disclose emotions, desires, and feelings, the suppression of which may lead to psychological and psychosomatic disorders.

This result, which found that the relationship between alexithymia and emotional regulation is negative, is consistent with the study by Pandey et al. (2011). Their study indicated that the previous theoretical assumption—that the inability to express emotions can be considered a disorder of emotional regulation—is supported by the current study's findings. These findings suggest that individuals with high levels of alexithymia experience difficulties in emotion regulation, such as non-acceptance of emotional responses, lack of emotional clarity, difficulties engaging in goal-directed behavior, problems controlling impulses, and limited access to emotion regulation strategies. Observing that these emotion regulation difficulties can distinguish individuals with high levels of alexithymia compared to those with low levels further reinforces this theoretical perspective.

This result is also consistent with the study by Preece et al. (2023), which indicated that individuals with high levels of alexithymia exhibit a less adaptive pattern of emotion regulation strategies. Regarding the negative relationship between alexithymia and self-awareness, the current study's findings align with those of Moriguchi et al. (2006), who reported that individuals with high levels of alexithymia experience impaired mentalizing, associated with an inability to adopt others' perspectives. Consequently, the skills required to understand oneself and others are linked to their awareness of themselves and others.

Based on this result, it is recommended to provide psychological and counseling support programs and integrate emotional intelligence skills within the academic environment. The aim is to help students enhance their ability to understand and manage their emotions, thereby reducing the impact of emotional deficits on their psychological and academic well-being.

5. Conclusion

The study clarified the inverse relationship between alexithymia, self-awareness, and emotional regulation, highlighting the significant role of self-awareness and emotional regulation in determining an individual's ability to express emotions. These findings contribute to planning psychological counseling programs aimed at enhancing emotional expression among university students through self-awareness training and emotional regulation interventions.

The study suggests organizing seminars and lectures for university students, delivered by specialists in psychology and psychological counseling, to address the study variables (alexithymia, emotional regulation, and self-awareness) in terms of their concepts, causes, methods of detection, and ways of dealing with them. It also recommends implementing counseling programs focused on emotional regulation, self-awareness, and strategies to reduce alexithymia levels, through the university's counseling unit.

However, the study's limitations restrict the generalization of its results: it was conducted on a sample from Najran University in southern Saudi Arabia, making it difficult to generalize to other universities due to cultural differences; it focused solely on undergraduate students, so results cannot be extended to postgraduate students because of differences in emotional and cognitive maturity and practical experience; and it employed a descriptive approach, limiting conclusions to correlational relationships rather than causal ones.

In light of these limitations, the study recommends conducting experimental research on the impact of self-awareness and emotional regulation on alexithymia levels and expanding research to include diverse samples from Saudi universities at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels.

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