

# **The Study of Emotional Problems, Self-Emotional Regulation Problems, and How the Positive Psychology and Collaborative Learning Approach can be Implemented in Enhancing Self-Emotional Regulation Ability of Chinese Students**

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## **Abstract**

The objectives of this research were 1) to study Chinese university students' emotional problems and self-emotional regulation problems and 2) to study how the positive psychology theory and collaborative learning approach can be implemented to enhance university students' self-emotional regulation ability. The research involved 100 freshmen from five majors at Guangxi University of Science and Technology, China, along with four experts. Data were collected through structured interviews validated by five experts and analyzed using content analysis. The findings reveal that students commonly experience emotional problems such as confusion about the future, anxiety, social anxiety, self-blame or guilt, low self-esteem, frustration, depression, and irritability. The personal problems that students faced were that they were not good at regulating negative emotions in terms of situation modification, attention deployment, and choosing positive strategies. Students also faced teacher-related problems, such as teacher-centered methods of theoretical lecturing and a lack of opportunities to practice emotional regulation in the classroom. Some students also reported that they were reluctant to participate for fear of ridicule from the teacher. It also revealed that students faced general problems such as being unsociable, introverted, and easily losing control. The study suggests that integrating positive psychology theory and collaborative learning approach can significantly enhance students' self-emotional regulation ability. Key factors include fostering positive relationships with teachers and peers, focusing on strengths rather than weaknesses, and promoting personal growth. A safe and positive classroom environment, along with engaging activities such as group discussions, role-plays, jigsaw exercises, communication games, and Q&A sessions, can effectively enhance students' ability to regulate their emotions.

**Keywords:** Positive Psychology Theory ; Collaborative Learning Approach ; Emotional Problems; Self-emotional Regulation Problems ; Self-emotional Regulation Ability

## Introduction

Emotions play a pivotal role in shaping our perception of the world and how we interact within it. Individuals with strong self-emotional regulation ability showed greater activity in brain regions associated with positive emotional regulation. Ong et al. (2006: 730) found that individuals with strong self-emotional regulation abilities are more resilient in the face of stress and adversity. They are better able to cope with negative events and recover more quickly from them. According to Heller et al. (1995: 327), individuals with poor self-emotional regulation ability are more likely to experience symptoms of anxiety and depression, as well as other mental health problems. The findings from these studies underscore the critical role that the ability to self-regulate their emotions plays in overall well-being and mental health, suggesting that its development can empower individuals to better manage stress, negative emotions, and adversity, ultimately leading to improved mental health and life satisfaction. It is important to everyone.

For students, the ability to regulate emotional responses is of paramount importance as they navigate the multifaceted challenges of academic and social environments. Students who score high on measures of emotional regulation have better academic achievement and are more engaged in their learning than those with lower scores (Davis et al., 2008: 942). Building upon the framework of emotional intelligence (EI) proposed by Salovey and Sluyter (1997) and Brackett et al. (2006: 780) investigated how the ability to regulate emotions impacts social behavior, highlighting that emotional regulation is positively correlated with social competence in children and adolescents (Simpson et al., 2007: 355). This ability allows students to effectively manage interpersonal conflicts and foster positive relationships with peers. According to Okado and Bierman (2015: 735), emotional regulation ability has been linked to a reduction in externalizing behavior problems among students, where those struggling with emotional regulation are more prone to disruptive and aggressive behavior, whereas those proficient in emotional regulation can better manage their conduct and avoid negative outcomes. As highlighted by Ciarrochi et al. (2020), emotional regulation ability also positively correlates with resilience in adolescents, equipping students with the tools needed to cope with stress, overcome adversity, and bounce back from setbacks. In summary, self-emotional regulation ability is a vital skill for students, impacting their academic success, social interactions, and overall well-being.

Furthermore, Han's (2023: 34) research found that university students exhibited a lower average score in effectively regulating negative emotions and heightened demand for psychological services related to emotional regulation, such as how to regulate negative emotions brought on by interpersonal conflicts, academic stress, and employment stress, with 43.15% seeking such services. These students displayed an increased propensity for conflicts, even physical altercations, over trivial matters, highlighting their inadequate self-emotional regulation ability.

The primary root cause of this deficiency can be attributed to several factors, with the outdated instructional models prevalent in universities emerging as a prominent issue. Traditional instructional models, as discussed by Pei (2019: 95) and Pi (2021: 152), predominantly involve one-way communication, and minimal teacher-student interaction, inhibiting teachers from addressing individual students' emotional needs. Consequently, it has become increasingly challenging for Chinese university students to enhance their self-emotional regulation ability through these conventional instructional models.

## Research Objectives

1. To investigate students' emotional problems and self-emotional regulation problems
2. To study how positive psychology theory and collaborative learning approach can be implemented to enhance students' self-emotional regulation ability

## Research Methodology

### Population and Sample

The population of this study consisted of freshmen at Guangxi University of Science and Technology (GUST), China, and experts in positive psychology theory and collaborative learning approach. The data was collected from the following sources: 1. Students. 100 students from five faculties were selected through a simple random sampling. These students were freshmen. Freshmen students were selected for the study because when they just came to the university, they faced more emotional problems and had difficulty in solving the situation. This study was done to see how to help them. 2. Experts. Four experts were selected from the field of psychology and education through a purposive sampling technique. These experts have researched emotional regulation or the application of positive psychology and/or collaborative learning. The students provided information related to emotional problems and self-emotional regulation problems, while the experts provided theoretical and practical information related to the principles and important features of positive psychology theory and collaborative learning, the role of teachers and students, and learning activities.

### Research Tools

Structured interview guides were used to study students' emotional problems, self-emotional regulation problems, and how positive psychology theory and collaborative learning approach can be implemented to enhance students' self-emotional regulation ability. The researcher developed two sets of structured interviews specifically for students and experts. The interview guide for students consisted of five items that investigated students' emotional problems, views on self-emotional regulation, and their self-emotional regulation problems. The experts' interviews focused on the positive psychology theory and collaborative learning principles and important features, the role of teachers and students, and learning activities that can be used to enhance students' self-emotional regulation ability. The experts' interview guide consisted of 3 items. Both sets of structured interviews were validated by five experts to ensure content validity, clarity, and appropriateness of language use.

### Data Collection

This study utilized a descriptive research methodology.

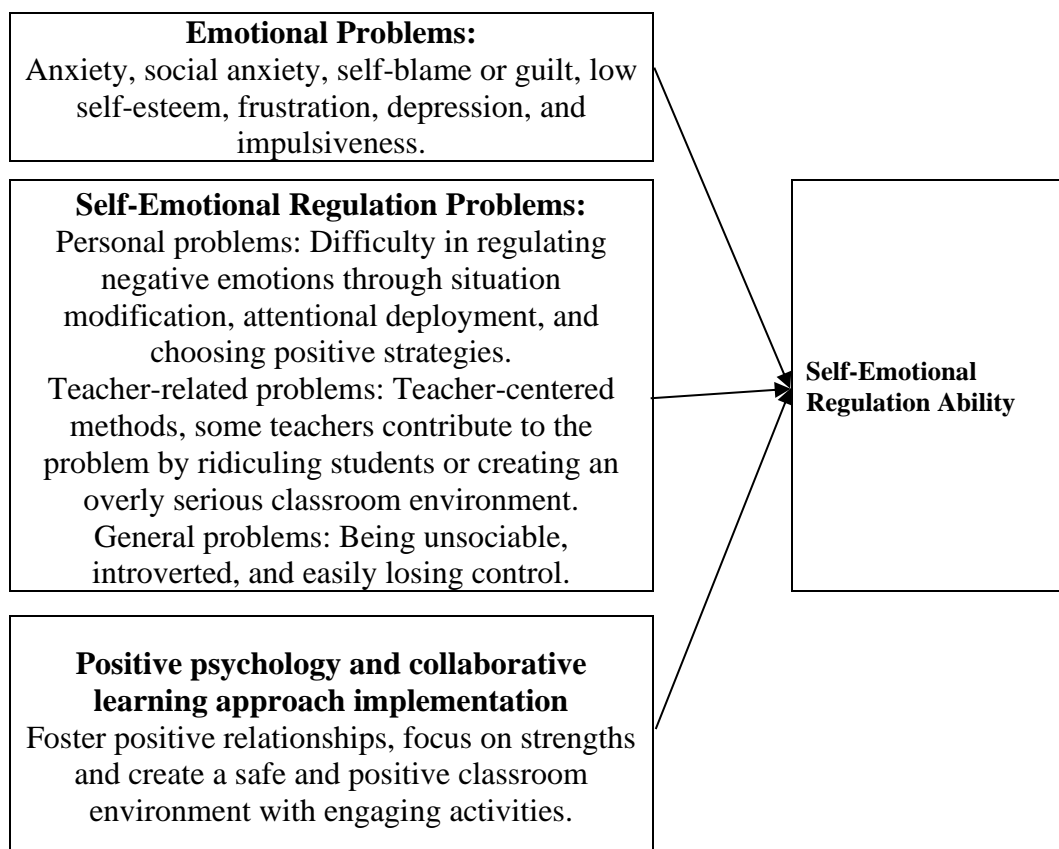
The researcher had to interview 100 freshmen individually and in groups to collect information about the students' emotional problems and self-emotional regulation problems. The students were from the faculty of medicine, management, mechanics, arts, and chemical engineering of Guangxi University of Science and Technology. 4 experts (university lecturers who have at least a doctoral degree and have conducted research on the use of positive psychology theory or the collaborative learning approach to enhance self-emotional regulation ability or related research) were interviewed to get theoretical information on positive psychology and collaborative principles and important features, role of teachers and students,

and learning activities to enhance self-emotional regulation ability for Chinese university students.

#### Data Analysis

Content analysis was used to analyze data related to students' emotional problems, self-emotional regulation problems, and information on how positive psychology theory and collaborative learning approach can be implemented to enhance students' self-emotional regulation ability.

### Research Conceptual framework



**Figure 1** Research Conceptual framework

## Research Results

1. The findings of the study on students' emotional problems, self-emotional regulation problems, and how positive psychology theory and collaborative learning approach can be implemented to enhance students' self-emotional regulation ability are presented below:

1.1 The findings of the study on students' emotional problems revealed that students mainly face the following problems.

These problems were: confusion about life due to a lack of goals and planning for the future, anxiety about studies, exams, or competitions, social anxiety due to a lack of social skills and inability to manage interpersonal relationships, and self-blame or guilt due to the formation of bad habits such as indulgence in online games. In addition, low self-esteem, frustration, depression and impulsive and irritable tendency to get into conflict with others are also emotional problems for students.

1.2 The findings of the study on students' self-emotional regulation problems show that students face both personal and non-personal problems.

In terms of personal problems, the problems faced by students included the fact that when they experienced negative emotions, they tended to stay in the situation that generated them, were not able to deploy their attention effectively, and were not good at choosing positive strategies to regulate negative emotions. In terms of non-personal problems, the findings revealed that the problems faced by students include teacher-centered teaching methods. Teachers tend to use lecture methods to teach theoretical knowledge, and students do not have the opportunity to practice self-emotional regulation in class. When students make mistakes in answering questions in class, some teachers ridicule the students and therefore students are reluctant to speak in class. Some students reported that the teachers were very serious in class, or the theoretical knowledge presented was difficult to understand, and students did not grasp the knowledge in class and did not know how to apply it after class. Findings on general problems included the prevalence of students being unsociable, introverted, and easily out of control.

2. The findings of studying how positive psychology theory and collaborative learning approach are implemented to enhance students' self-emotional regulation ability from experts are presented as follows:

The findings of studying positive psychology theory and collaborative learning principles and important features that can be implemented to enhance students' self-emotional regulation ability from experts revealed that positive psychology promotes a positive mindset as vital and that it should involve creating a positive and safe learning environment, fostering positive interpersonal relationships and connections between students and their teachers and peers, providing strengths-based feedback and appreciation, employing strengths-based approaches that help encourage students to identify and use positive self-evaluations, and emphasizing personal growth and development.

Collaborative learning involves active student participation and interaction. The steps of collaborative learning include student task assignment and explanation, grouping, collaborative task completion process, practice reporting after task completion, task assessment, and positive feedback. The findings of the study showed that the principle of collaborative learning is that students actively communicate, discuss, and share ideas with their peers, teachers, and other experts under the guidance and encouragement of the teacher. They

received peer support in groups, collaborated to solve problems, developed positive thinking and self-reflection, and thus enhanced self-emotional regulation.

## Discussion

The findings of studying students' emotional problems, self-emotional regulation problems, and how positive psychology theory and collaborative learning approach can be implemented to enhance self-emotional regulation ability for university students in China are presented as follows:

1. The findings of studying students' emotional problems and self-emotional regulation problems

The findings of students' emotional problems revealed that they face eight major emotional problems, while the survey of students' self-emotional regulation problems revealed that students faced personal problems, teacher-related problems, and general problems as described below:

The findings revealed that students primarily encounter several emotional problems: confusion about life stemming from a lack of goals and future planning, anxiety related to academic performance, exams, or competitions, and social anxiety due to inadequate social skills and difficulties in managing interpersonal relationships. Additionally, students experience self-blame or guilt resulting from the formation of bad habits, such as excessive online gaming. Other notable emotional problems include low self-esteem, frustration, depression, and a tendency towards impulsive and irritable behavior, often leading to conflicts with others. This finding is consistent with the results of Gao's (2024: 163) study on the emotional problems of university students, which found that university students have emotional problems in terms of high mood fluctuation, destructive behaviors, negative attitudes, low self-esteem, etc., which are mainly due to complex family relationships, stress in school life, changes in the social environment, individual character defects, negative upbringing experiences, and poorer personal competence.

The findings of the study on students' self-emotional regulation problems were as follows:

The findings revealed that personal problems faced by students included not being adept at modifying the situation after experiencing negative emotions, difficulties in effectively deploying attention, and the emotional regulation strategies chosen were not always positive.

The findings of studying students' self-emotional regulation problems concerning teachers showed that teachers focused more on imparting theoretical knowledge and less on interacting with students in classroom teaching, thus providing limited or no opportunities for students to practice self-emotional regulation. The survey also showed that some teachers' attitudes towards students affected students' willingness to participate in classroom activities. For example, inappropriate comments, ridicule, or negativity were made by some teachers to students when they answered questions incorrectly, thus discouraging students from speaking in class. Some teachers were very serious in class and had a monotonous teaching style, resulting in students failing to grasp knowledge in class and not knowing how to apply it afterward. A study of general problems revealed that students tend to be unsociable, introverted, reluctant to communicate with others, and struggle to control their emotions.

All these problems can be attributed to a teacher-centered approach, where teachers focus on teaching theory rather than teaching students how to practice emotional regulation. They assign reading tasks, complete post-class exercises, and psychometric quizzes, and lack interesting and interactive activities for students to practice their emotional regulation. The learning atmosphere is not relaxed because students would get negative feedback from the teacher when they do not perform well in class. Students never learn to modify situations, deploy their attention, or choose positive regulation strategies, and they don't have the opportunity to discuss and interact with their peers in class. This result is consistent with the findings of Hu (2021: 126) on the problems of instructional methods in university students' mental health education courses, which found that the courses were dominated by the teacher's lecture method, and there was too little communication and interaction with the students, and the students' true inner thoughts were seldom understood by the teacher, who only taught some very shallow knowledge from the books, which was not obvious in practical utility.

2. The findings of studying how positive psychology theory and collaborative learning approach can be implemented to enhance students' self-emotional regulation ability

The findings of the study on how positive psychology theory and collaborative learning approach can be implemented to enhance students' self-emotional regulation ability are as follows:

The findings of a study by experts on how positive psychology theory and collaborative learning approach can be implemented to enhance students' self-emotional regulation ability revealed that students need to build positive relationships with their teachers and peers, focus more on their strengths than their weaknesses, and value their personal growth and development. The findings also showed that group discussions, role-playing, jigsaw activities, communication games, and question-and-answer exercises could enhance students' self-emotional regulation ability.

The findings of the research on the importance of positive psychology theory and collaborative learning approach suggest that by applying positive psychology theory to enhance students' self-emotional regulation ability, teachers must create a safe and positive environment for students, organize positive and interesting activities, and give positive feedback to students to motivate them to participate in the activities and allow them to perform positively in the activities. Students need positive relationships with teachers and peers for support and affirmation. Students should focus more on their strengths than their weaknesses and value personal growth and development.

For the collaborative learning approach aspect, the interviews revealed that the collaborative learning approach involves active interaction and dialogue between people working towards the same goal. Teachers should observe and track student activities, explain tasks, group and assign students, practice and present tasks, and give feedback on progress. Students should have the opportunity to engage in interesting learning activities in small groups that lead to a sense of participation and affirmation. The results of the interviews also showed that group dialogue, role-playing, jigsaw activities, communication games, group discussions, and question-and-answer exercises could enhance students' self-emotional regulation ability.

The results provided by the experts are consistent with the principles of positive psychology (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000: 5) and the cooperative learning approach (Johnson & Johnson, 2008: 29), which state that positive social interactions in a positive environment, with a focus on positive development and strengths, can help to enhance self-emotional regulation ability.

## **Conclusion**

1. Emotional and Self-Regulation Problems: The study identifies key emotional issues among students, such as anxiety, social anxiety, self-blame or guilt, low self-esteem, frustration, depression, and impulsiveness. Students also struggle with regulating their negative emotions due to poor situation modification, attention deployment, and ineffective strategies. Additionally, students often struggle with being introverted, disagreeable, and easily losing control.

2. Teacher-Related Issues: Teacher-centered instructional methods, characterized by one-way lectures and limited interactive opportunities, hinder students' ability to regulate emotions. Some teachers contribute to the problem by ridiculing students or creating an overly serious classroom environment, discouraging participation.

3. Positive Psychology and Collaborative Learning: To address these issues, implementing positive psychology and collaborative learning approaches is recommended. It is essential to foster positive relationships with teachers and peers, provide support and affirmation, and focus on students' strengths and personal growth. Creating a safe, engaging environment through activities like group discussions, role-plays, jigsaw exercises, communication games, and Q&A sessions can significantly enhance students' self-emotional regulation ability and overall well-being.

## **Recommendations**

### **1. Theoretical Recommendation**

Future research should develop an instructional model that combines positive psychology and collaborative learning to enhance students' self-emotional regulation ability. The model should address regional and contextual differences to ensure it is both generalizable and practical.

### **2. Policy Recommendations:**

2.1 Teacher Training Programs: Create specialized training for teachers to effectively incorporate positive psychology and collaborative learning into their teaching practices.

2.2 Research Funding: Invest in research to evaluate the effectiveness of these approaches in improving students' self-emotional regulation, which will help refine educational policies and practices.

### **3. Practical Recommendations:**

3.1 Self-Emotional Regulation Exercises: Implement activities that foster student engagement and interaction to enhance self-emotional regulation ability.

3.2 Teacher Training: Train teachers to select and use interactive learning activities, create a positive classroom environment, and provide constructive feedback. Focus on developing strategies that address personal and teacher-related issues to enhance students' emotional well-being and academic performance.

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