Emotional Intelligence and Suicidal Ideation of Undergraduate in Akwa Ibom State

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Abstract
This study investigated the relationship between Emotional Intelligence and suicidal Ideation of undergraduate students in Akwa Ibom State. The relationship between emotional intelligence and suicidal ideation of emotional awareness, emotional regulation and empathy of Undergraduate Students in Akwa Ibom State. Diagnostic research design was adopted for the study. The population of the study comprised of 10456 year two undergraduates in federal universities in Akwa Ibom State. Capsuling sampling techniques using Taro Yamane formula for sample size determination was used in selecting 680 year two undergraduate students for the study. Data was collected using a research questionnaire instrument named, "Emotional Intelligence and Suicidal Ideation Questionnaire" (EISIQ). It was validated by three experts. The reliability coefficient of the instrument was 0.89, determined using Cronbach Alpha Statistics. Pearson Product Moment Correlation was used to answer research questions and regression statistics was used to test null hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance. The findings revealed that higher emotional intelligence significantly reduces suicidal ideations. There is a strong need to incorporate emotional intelligence training into the university curriculum to equip students with skills that reduce vulnerability to suicidal thoughts. It is concluded that low emotional intelligence drives suicidal thoughts in students. Recommendations were made of others that student affairs division of universities should implement workshops and training sessions that help students identify, understand, and reflect on their emotions. Counselling centers and student support services should offer interventions that teach coping strategies, stress management, and techniques for regulating intense emotions. Student affairs division of universities should implement screening tools to identify students at risk due to low emotional intelligence.

Keywords: Emotional Intelligence, suicidal Ideation, undergraduate students

Introduction

Suicidal ideation stems from the word "suicide", which is the act of intentionally causing one's own death, while suicidal ideation refers to thinking about being ending one`s own life. It is the presence of thoughts, wishes, or considerations about death by one's own actions. Suicidal ideation includes a spectrum, ranging from fleeting thoughts about not wanting to live to more persistent thinking about suicide. According to Eyisi *et al.* (2025),

suicide ideation, defined as persistent thoughts of taking one's own life, represents a global mental health crisis, particularly among young adults and university students. Suicidal ideation is a profound public health concern that affects individuals of all ages, and undergraduate students are particularly vulnerable. Suicidal ideation is a complex phenomenon characterized by thoughts or preoccupations about suicide. Suicidal ideation among undergraduate students has become an increasing public health concern globally and is gaining attention in Nigeria due to its growing prevalence (Aroyewun *et al*., 2022).

Emotional intelligence (EI) is the ability to perceive emotions, to access and generate emotions so as to assist thought, to understand emotions and emotional meanings, and to reflectively regulate emotions in ways that promote emotional and intellectual growth. Emotional intelligence (EI) is a psychosocial variable that refers to an individual's ability to perceive, understand, and manage their own emotions, as well as the emotions of others. Emotional intelligence (EI) is defined as a combination of the following abilities, emotional awareness (that is, understanding and recognizing one's emotions and feelings), emotional understanding (that is, understanding the causes and consequences of one's emotions), emotional regulation (that is, the ability to modulate one's emotional response), and emotional management (that is, understanding and managing other's emotions) (Makni, *et al* (2022). According to Inuaeyen *et al.* (2024), a framework created by Goleman explains emotional intelligence through five elements, self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills.

Emotional awareness is the refined capacity to accurately perceive, recognize, and interpret emotions, both in oneself and in others. This skill extends beyond simply noticing feelings, it involves understanding where they come from, how intense they are, and how they influence thoughts and actions. It is the foundational capacity to recognize, identify, and accurately label one's own emotions as they occur. Emotional awareness is also regarded as the capacity to attune to one's internal state, accurately identify specific emotions (such as distinguishing between frustration and disappointment or between excitement and anxiety), and comprehend the subtle nuances of emotional experiences. According to Modo (2018), Guidance and counselling is specialized field of training designed to help people to be properly aware of themselves and be fulfilled in life. Emotional awareness acts as a crucial building block for emotional regulation and effective coping strategies, enabling individuals to manage negative emotions, seek support, and foster psychological well-being, ultimately lowering the risk of suicidal ideation (Ciarrochi *et al.*, 2018).

Emotional regulation denotes the capacity to monitor, appraise, and modulate one's emotional responses in ways that are contextually appropriate, adaptive, and oriented toward goal attainment. It involves both conscious and automatic processes through which individuals influence the emotions they experience, the timing of those emotions, and the manner in

which they are subjectively felt and outwardly expressed. Emotional regulation focuses on individuals' ability to manage and respond to their emotions adaptively, influencing their resilience in the face of stressors and challenges (Okon, 2018). It also refers to individuals' capacity to adaptively manage and respond to their emotions, which directly influences their resilience when facing various challenges.

Empathy is the capacity to understand and meaningfully engage with the thoughts, feelings, and experiences of another individual from their unique perspective, while maintaining a clear sense of one's own identity. It involves walking alongside someone in their experience, not as a shadow, but as a companion who remembers their own path too. Empathy is the capacity to recognize and understand the emotional states of others, as well as to vicariously partake in those affective experiences (Moree, 2023). Also, empathy is defined as the ability to understand and share the feelings of others, contribute to stronger interpersonal connections and better social support networks (Moreno-Poyato *et al*, 2021). Empathy is closely associated with compassion, yet it conceptually and developmentally precedes it, serving as a foundational condition for its emergence. In contrast to attributes such as intelligence and physical attractiveness, which are largely influenced by genetic endowment, empathy is a capacity acquired through learning and socialization.

The researcher's interest in studying suicidal ideation, parenting practices, and emotional intelligence among Akwa Ibom State undergraduates stemmed from a combination of professional exposure, personal observation, and academic concern about the growing mental health issues facing young people in higher education. The educational atmosphere in Nigeria, and especially in Akwa Ibom State, is becoming more and more marked by fierce academic competition, financial difficulties, pressures to adjust socially, and uncertain job prospects. Despite being universally unpleasant, these stresses seem to have varying effects on pupils, which led the researcher to wonder why some people handle these challenges with fortitude while others suffer from severe psychological discomfort, including suicidal ideation.

Statement of the Problem

Suicidal ideation among young people has emerged as a pressing global public health concern, with profound implications for individual wellbeing, family systems, and societal development. Within the Nigerian context, recent years have witnessed a disturbing increase in reported cases of student suicide and suicidal behaviour across tertiary institutions, prompting a need for research that can illuminate the underlying factors contributing to this trend and to inform evidence-based prevention strategies. Undergraduate students represent a particularly vulnerable population for the experience of suicidal ideation. The transition to university life coincides with a critical developmental period marked by identity exploration, emotional intensification, and increased autonomy, yet it also exposes young people to novel

stressors including academic pressure, financial hardship, social adjustment challenges, and uncertainty about future employment. For many students, these demands overwhelm their coping resources, precipitating feelings of hopelessness, worthlessness, and a perceived inability to escape psychological pain, cognitive and emotional states consistently linked to suicidal thinking. Despite the severity of this issue, relatively limited empirical attention has been directed toward understanding the specific constellation of factors that predict suicidal ideation among Nigerian undergraduates, particularly within the unique sociocultural context of Akwa Ibom State. Therefore, this study is designed to address this critical gap by investigating the relationship between parenting styles, emotional intelligence, and suicidal ideation of undergraduates in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria.

Objectives of the Study

This study investigated the relationship between emotional intelligence and suicidal ideation of undergraduate in Akwa Ibom State. Specifically, the study sought to:

1. examine the relationship between emotional awareness and suicidal ideation of undergraduate students in Akwa Ibom State.
2. examine the relationship between emotional regulation and suicidal ideation of undergraduate students in Akwa Ibom State.
3. determine the relationship between empathy and suicidal ideation of undergraduate students in Akwa Ibom State.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided this study:

i. What is the relationship between emotional awareness and suicidal ideation of undergraduate students?
ii. What is the relationship between emotional regulation and suicidal ideation of undergraduate students?
iii. What is the relationship between empathy and suicidal ideation of undergraduate students?

Research Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were tested in the study

H_{01}: There is no significant relationship between emotional awareness on suicidal ideation of undergraduate students.

H_{02}: There is no significant relationship between emotional regulations on suicidal ideation of undergraduate students.

H_{03}: There is no significant relationship between empathy on suicidal ideation of undergraduate students.

Methodology

This study adopted diagnostic research design because it helps the researcher find out the main causes and conditions behind a problem. In this case, it will be used to understand how emotional intelligence and parenting styles are linked to suicidal thoughts of undergraduate students. The design makes it possible to see whether low emotional intelligence or certain parenting styles increase the risk of suicidal ideation, and whether parenting styles play a role in strengthening or weakening this relationship (Fletcher *et al.*, 2014). Using this approach with a large number of students also makse the results more reliable, easier to generalize, and more useful for creating strategies that can help prevent suicidal thoughts in universities. The area of this study is Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. Akwa Ibom state is located in the coastal southern part of the country lying between latitudes 4°32' N and 5°33' N, and longitude7°25'E (Central Intelligence Agency, 2020).

The population of the study comprised 102456 male and female undergraduate students in selected tertiary institutions students enrolled in higher education in Akwa Ibom State, during 2024/2025 academic session. The institution were selected based on their population strength (Information unit of university of Uyo, 2025). The sample size of the study comprised 680 male and female undergraduate students in Akwa Ibom State, drawn from the population enrolled in institutions of higher education in Akwa Ibom State. Taro Yamane formula was used to determine the minimum sample size and later upgraded to 680. Thereafter, proportionate allocation using capsule sampling technique was adopted. In capsule sampling technique is a non-probability sampling method. In this method, the researcher divides the population into capsules (small groups or units that share common characteristics, e.g., Departments, Classes, or Clusters). Then, a sample is selected from each capsule to ensure representation of the entire population based on the (Udofia, 2016). In this research two tertiary institutions were distributed based on their strength. Simple random sampling was used in each tertiary institution. Two faculties were randomly selected from each institution (public universities). Within each faculty, capsule sampling will be used to select three departments.

A researcher-designed questionnaire titled "emotional intelligence, parenting styles and suicidal ideation tendency Questionnaire (EIPSSTQ) "was used for data collection. The instrument was divided into two sections. Section A contained demographic variables of the respondents such as age and gender. Section B contained items generated in line with objectives of the study based on four points modified rating scale ranging from 4-"A" - Always, "R" - Rarely, "S" –Sometimes and "N" - Never. The instrument was face validated to determine its clarity, relevance, and appropriateness for the study. For this purpose, the draft

instrument was reviewed by three experts from the Department of Guidance and Counselling and the Department of Psychological Foundations of Education, Faculty of Education, University of Uyo. These experts were asked to carefully evaluate each item on the instrument and provide feedback on its clarity, alignment with the study objectives, and overall suitability. Their observations and recommendations were duly considered and incorporated into the final version of the instrument to strengthen its validity.

The reliability of the instrument was assessed using the internal consistency method. It was administered to 30 year-two students from public university in Akwa Ibom State who are not part of the main study but share similar characteristics with the target sample. The responses were analyzed using Cronbach's Alpha to determine the degree of consistency. A reliability coefficient of 0.60 or above was considered acceptable, indicating that the instrument is reliable for the study. The data collection was conducted by four research assistants. Prior to administering the instrument, formal approval was obtained from the Heads of Departments in the selected public tertiary institutions. These would involve presenting a letter of introduction issued by the researcher's institution, requesting permission to carry out the study and to involve Year Two students from the relevant departments. Once approval is granted, the instrument was administered in a group setting to the selected Year Two students within their respective departments. The entire data collection exercise was span within a week, allowing sufficient time for the researcher and the assistants to cover all the sampled institutions across Akwa Ibom State.

Data collected in this study was analyzed using Pearson Product Moment Correlation and Simple Linear regression to answer the research questions and to test the null hypotheses at 0.05 levels of significance. The hypotheses were tested at .05 level of significance.

Decision rule

Value r	Level of closeness
0.00 – 0.199	Very weak relationship
0.20 – 0.399	weak relationship
0.40 – 0.599	average relationship
0.60 – 0.799	strong relationship
0.80 – 1.00	Very strong relationship

Results

Research Questions 1: What is the relationship between emotional awareness and suicidal ideation of undergraduate students?

Table 1: Pearson Product moment correlation(r) of the relationship of emotional awareness and suicidal ideation of undergraduate students

Variance	n	r	Remarks
Emotional awareness	680	-0.66	negative and strong relationship
Suicidal ideation			

Source: Researchers Computation

From data in Table 1, the r value is -0.66 which indicates negative and strong relationship. Therefore, the relationship of emotional awareness and suicidal ideation of undergraduate students is negative and strong. Hence, when the level of emotional awareness increases, suicidal ideation decreases among undergraduate students.

Research Questions 2: What is the relationship between emotional regulation and suicidal ideation of undergraduate students?

Table 2: Summary of Pearson Product moment correlation (r) of the relationship of emotional regulation and suicidal ideation of undergraduate students

Variance	n	r	Remarks
Emotional regulation	680	-0.68	negative and strong relationship
Suicidal ideation			

Source: Researchers Computation

From data in Table 4.2, the r value is -0.68which indicates negative and strong relationship. Therefore, the relationship of emotional regulation and suicidal ideation of undergraduate students is negative and strong. Hence, when the level of emotional regulation increases, suicidal ideation decreases among undergraduate students.

Research Questions 3: What is the relationship between empathy and suicidal ideation of undergraduate students?

Table 3: summary of Pearson Product moment correlation(r) of the relationship of empathy and suicidal ideation of undergraduate students

Variance	n	r	Remarks
Empathy	680	-0.62	negative and strong relationship
Suicidal ideation			

Source: Researchers Computation

From data in Table 3, the r value is -0.62which indicates negative and strong relationship. Therefore,, the relationship of empathy and suicidal ideation of undergraduate students is negative and strong. Hence, when the level of empathy increases, suicidal ideation increases slightly among undergraduate students.

Research Hypothesis 1: There is no significant relationship between emotional awareness and suicidal ideation of undergraduate students.

Table 4: summary of Pearson Product moment correlation(r) of the relationship of emotional awareness and suicidal ideation of undergraduate students

Variance	n	r	p value	Decision
Emotional awareness	680	-0.7	.000	Reject Ho
Suicidal ideation				

. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed). **Source:** Researchers Computation

From data shown on Table 4, the r value of -0.7 is significant at p .000 which is less than .05. Hence, the Null Hypothesis is rejected. Therefore, there is significant relationship between emotional awareness and suicidal ideation of undergraduate students.

Research Hypothesis 2: There is no significant relationship between emotional regulation on suicidal ideation of undergraduate students?

Table 5: The significant of the Pearson Product moment correlation (r) of the relationship of emotional regulation and suicidal ideation of undergraduate students

Variance	n	r	p value	Decision
Emotional regulation	680	-0.7	.000	Reject Ho
Suicidal ideation				

. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Source: Researchers Computation

From data shown on Table 5, the r value of -0.7 is significant at p .000 which is less than .05. Hence, the Null Hypothesis is rejected. Therefore, there is significant relationship between emotional regulation and suicidal ideation of undergraduate students.

Research Hypothesis 3: There is no significant relationship between empathy and suicidal ideation of undergraduate students?

Table 6: The significant of the Pearson Product moment correlation (r) of the relationship of empathy and suicidal ideation of undergraduate students

Variance	n	r	p value	Decision
Empathy	680	-0.62	.000	Reject Ho
Suicidal ideation				

. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed). **Source:** Researchers Computation

From data shown on Table 6, the r value of -0.62 is significant at p .000 which is less than .05. Hence, the Null Hypothesis is rejected. Therefore, there is significant relationship between Empathy and suicidal ideation of undergraduate students.

Discussion of Findings

Emotional awareness has strong negative and significant relationship with suicidal ideation of undergraduate students. This shows that where there is a strong emotional awareness, there is decrease in suicidal ideation of the students, hence to reduce suicidal ideation it is advisable to increase emotional awareness. This supports the work of Wang *et al.* (2022) who examined the predictive relationship between baseline emotional awareness in Beijing, China, and found out that lower initial emotional awareness significantly predicted higher suicidal ideation over time. The finding also agrees with Gaebel *et al.* (2021) who conducted a study on reduced emotional awareness and suicidal ideation in Berlin, Germany and found out that low emotional awareness significantly predicted suicidal ideation. The finding was also in line with the study of Bjelland *et al.* (2021) which examined emotional awareness and regulation deficits of adolescents with suicidal behaviour in Oslo, Norway. The finding that emotional awareness demonstrates a strong, negative, and significant relationship with suicidal ideation of undergraduate students represents a critical contribution to understanding the psychological mechanisms that protect young adults from suicidal thinking. The nature of emotional awareness as a protective mechanism warrants careful consideration. Emotional awareness constitutes the foundational component of emotional intelligence, representing the capacity to recognize and label affective experiences as they occur within the

stream of consciousness. This ability to tune into one's internal states, to distinguish between subtle variations in emotional experience, and to understand the origins and implications of feelings provides individuals with crucial information about their psychological condition. Students who possess high levels of emotional awareness are equipped to detect early signs of psychological distress before such distress escalates to overwhelming proportions. They can recognize when sadness is deepening into hopelessness, when anxiety is crystallizing into panic, or when frustration is accumulating into despair.

Emotional regulation has strong, negative and significant relationship with suicidal ideation of undergraduate students. This indicates that higher levels of emotional regulation are associated with lower levels of suicidal ideation of students, therefore, promoting awareness and development of emotional regulation skills may serve as an effective strategy for reducing suicidal ideation. This finding is consistent with those of Bauer-Wu *et al.* (2023), whose study, "Latent Profiles of Emotional Dysregulation and Their Association with Suicidal Ideation," conducted in Chicago, concluded that variability in emotional regulation difficulties is strongly associated with suicide risk and underscored the necessity of individualized intervention approaches. The present findings are consistent with those of Magalhães *et al.* (2021), whose study conducted in Lisbon demonstrated that greater difficulties in emotion regulation significantly predicted elevated psychopathological symptoms and suicidal ideation. Similarly, these results align with Hatkevich *et al.* (2019), who investigated emotion regulation difficulties and suicidal ideation and attempts of adolescent psychiatric inpatients in Boston, concluding that restricted access to effective emotion regulation strategies, impulse control deficits, and the presence of mood disorders were key contributing factors. The finding that emotional regulation demonstrates a strong, negative, and significant relationship with suicidal ideation of undergraduate students constitutes a pivotal contribution to understanding the psychological processes that protect young adults from suicidal thinking. Emotional regulation, defined as the capacity to monitor, evaluate, and modify emotional responses in ways that are adaptive and goal-directed, emerges as a powerful protective factor against the development of thoughts about ending one's life. The strength of this relationship, its negative direction, and its statistical significance collectively indicate that as emotional regulation capacity increases, suicidal ideation decreases in a consistent and meaningful pattern that cannot be attributed to chance. This finding carries profound implications for theoretical frameworks, clinical assessment, preventive intervention, and institutional policy within higher education settings, where the prevalence of suicidal ideation of students has reached alarming proportions across both developed and developing nations.

Empathy demonstrated a strong, negative, and statistically significant association with suicidal ideation of undergraduate students, indicating that higher levels of empathic capacity

correspond with reduced suicidal thoughts. This suggests that strengthening empathy may represent a valuable approach to mitigating suicidal ideation. These findings are consistent with Shi *et al.* (2025), who reported a negative relationship between empathy and suicidal ideation of young adults in China. Similar support emerges from Scocco *et al.* (2020), whose cross-sectional study in Italy found an inverse relationship between empathy and suicidal ideation of adult psychiatric patients, although individuals exhibiting elevated personal distress, a self-focused dimension of empathy, showed greater susceptibility to such thoughts. The results also align with Lazzaro *et al.* (2017), who identified empathy as a protective factor against suicidal ideation in United States. In contrast, Batson *et al.* (2015), in research conducted in Spain, offered a nuanced perspective, concluding that while empathy promotes prosocial behaviour, excessive empathic distress may heighten emotional strain and indirectly increase vulnerability to suicidal ideation. The finding reveals a subtle but powerful psychological dynamic. Empathy, the capacity to understand and share another person's emotional state, functions as a social and cognitive stabilizer. When undergraduates possess strong empathic abilities, they are more likely to form meaningful interpersonal bonds, interpret others' intentions accurately, and feel embedded within a network of mutual concern. That sense of connectedness operates as a protective psychological shield against suicidal ideation, which often thrives in perceived isolation, alienation, or emotional invalidation.

Conclusion

It is concluded that low emotional intelligence drive suicidal thoughts in this population. To mitigate this, universities should integrate emotional intelligence training, and provide accessible mental health support. These measures will substantially lower suicidal ideations and enhance students' psychological well-being.

Recommendations

The following recommendations were made based on the findings of this study that:

1. Student affairs division of universities should implement workshops and training sessions that help students identify, understand, and reflect on their emotions.
2. Counselling centers and student support services should offer interventions that teach coping strategies, stress management, and techniques for regulating intense emotions.
4. Student affairs division of universities should implement screening tools to identify students at risk due to low emotional intelligence, social skills deficits, or adverse parenting experiences, ensuring timely counseling, mentorship, and support networks.

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