



INFLUENCE OF EMOTIONAL AWARENESS ON COPING STRATEGIES AMONG CERTIFICATE STUDENTS AT THE UNIVERSITY OF IRINGA AND RUAHA CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY IN IRINGA MUNICIPALITY

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ABSTRACT :

The purpose of this study was to examine the influence of emotional awareness on coping strategies among certificate students at the University of Iringa and Ruaha Catholic University in Iringa Municipality, Tanzania. Specifically, the study assessed the level of emotional awareness among certificate students and examined how emotional awareness influences their coping strategies. The study employed a quantitative research approach guided by a cross-sectional research design. Data were collected from 221 certificate students from the University of Iringa and Ruaha Catholic University using structured questionnaires. Quantitative data were analysed using SPSS Version 31 through descriptive statistics, including frequencies and percentages. The findings showed that certificate students demonstrated different levels of emotional awareness and used various coping strategies to manage academic, social and personal difficulties. The findings further showed that emotional awareness was related to how students managed difficult situations and responded to different sources of stress. Some students also reported difficulties in seeking support from friends and classmates during difficult situations. The study concludes that emotional awareness is an important factor in students' coping strategies. The study recommends strengthening emotional awareness education, counselling services and student support programmes within higher learning institutions to improve students' coping strategies and emotional well-being.

Keywords: Emotional Awareness; Coping Strategies; Certificate Students; University Students; Emotional Well-being; Counselling.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

Emotional awareness is important in situations where individuals face pressure because understanding emotions can support better responses to difficult situations. Among university students, academic demands, examinations, relationships and other personal concerns may create stressful situations that require appropriate coping strategies. Coping strategies refer to the thoughts and actions used to manage stressful or difficult situations. Evidence from university students shows that emotional abilities are related to coping, well-being and psychological outcomes, with lower use of avoidant coping associated with higher emotional intelligence and better well-being (MacCann et al., 2022). In addition, a study involving 567 university students found that emotional intelligence was related to anxiety, stress and depression, with coping strategies partly explaining these relationships (Fernández-Berrocal et al., 2022). These findings provide a basis for examining emotional awareness as an important aspect of students' ability to cope with difficult experiences.

At the global level, student mental health and well-being have become important concerns in education because young people may experience emotional, social and academic pressures. The World Health Organization (WHO, 2025) reports that mental health conditions among young people can affect education, relationships and future opportunities, while developing coping, problem-solving and emotion-management skills is important for well-being. WHO also notes that stressful situations can affect daily functioning, including school activities and that people differ in the ways they cope with stress (WHO, 2025). Within higher education, research has also shown a relationship between emotional abilities and students' academic and psychological outcomes. For example, MacCann et al. (2022) found that university students with higher emotional intelligence used less avoidant coping, while Carthy et al. (2022) reported that emotional intelligence coaching helped university students manage academic stress more effectively. Similarly, a systematic review and meta-analysis found a significant relationship between emotional intelligence and academic performance among students (Alonso-Fernández et al., 2023). These findings suggest that understanding and managing emotions may be relevant to how students respond to academic and personal difficulties.

In Tanzania, certificate students in higher learning institutions also study in environments that require adjustment to academic demands, social relationships and personal responsibilities. However, the available evidence and international guidance indicate the importance of creating learning environments that support students' mental health and emotional well-being. The WHO (2025) guidance for the education sector recommends creating

safe and inclusive learning environments, reducing excessive academic pressures and providing psychosocial support for students and staff. Although existing studies have examined emotional intelligence and coping among university students, less attention can be given to the specific role of emotional awareness in coping strategies among certificate students in the Tanzanian higher education context. This creates a need to examine whether students' ability to recognize and understand their emotions is associated with the ways they cope with difficult situations. Therefore, this study focuses on the influence of emotional awareness on coping strategies among certificate students at the University of Iringa and Ruaha Catholic University in Iringa Municipality.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Certificate students may experience academic, social and personal pressures that require appropriate ways of coping with difficult situations. Emotional awareness can help students recognize and understand their emotions when facing such situations, which may influence how they respond to stress and other difficulties. Previous studies have linked emotional abilities with students' coping and psychological well-being, but limited attention has been given specifically to emotional awareness as a factor associated with coping strategies among certificate students. This creates a need to understand whether students' ability to recognize and understand their emotions is related to the ways they manage difficult situations.

At the University of Iringa (UoI) and Ruaha Catholic University (RUCU), certificate students come from different social, cultural and economic backgrounds and may experience academic workload, financial pressure, social relationships and adjustment to university life. These conditions may require students to use different coping strategies, including problem-solving, seeking support and other responses to difficult situations. Although guidance and counselling services are available in higher learning institutions, students may still differ in how they recognize their emotions and respond to stressful experiences. Understanding emotional awareness among these students is therefore important because differences in awareness of emotions may be associated with differences in coping strategies.

Despite the importance of emotional awareness in understanding students' responses to difficult situations, limited empirical evidence has been established on its influence on coping strategies among certificate students at the University of Iringa and Ruaha Catholic University in Iringa Municipality. Existing discussions often address emotional intelligence as a broad concept, while less attention is given to emotional awareness as a specific factor in students' coping strategies. This creates a knowledge gap regarding the extent to which emotional awareness influences the coping strategies used by certificate students in the two institutions. Therefore, this study examines the influence of emotional awareness on coping strategies among certificate students at the University of Iringa and Ruaha Catholic University in Iringa Municipality, Tanzania.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Emotional Intelligence Theory

This study was guided by the Emotional Intelligence Theory proposed by Daniel Goleman in 1995. The theory explains that emotional awareness involves recognising and understanding one's own emotions and how emotions influence thoughts and behaviour. Emotional awareness is important because recognising emotions can help individuals understand their responses to stressful situations and make appropriate decisions. The theory was relevant to this study because emotional awareness was the independent variable, while coping strategies were the dependent variable. Therefore, the theory provided a basis for examining how certificate students' ability to recognise and understand their emotions influences the ways they cope with academic, social and personal difficulties.

2.2 Empirical literature review

Studies have shown that emotional awareness and related emotional abilities are associated with the ways students cope with stressful situations. Park and Lee (2022), in a study of 420 university students in Seoul and Gyeonggi, found that emotional clarity was significantly related to stress coping strategies and mediated the relationship between insecure attachment and coping, suggesting that understanding and accepting emotions can support more appropriate responses to stress. Similarly, Ko and Choi (2022), using data from 320 university students, found that emotional clarity and problem-focused coping were important in explaining psychological well-being, indicating that clear understanding of emotions can be linked with constructive coping responses. Morales-Rodríguez and Pérez-Mármol (2019), who studied 258 university students in Spain, found significant relationships between emotional intelligence, coping strategies and self-efficacy, with problem-solving, emotional expression, cognitive restructuring and social withdrawal among the coping responses examined. Enns et al. (2018), in a cross-sectional study of 203 university students in helping disciplines, also examined the relationship between emotional intelligence, perceived stress and coping responses, showing the relevance of emotional abilities and coping in students' experiences of stress. In Tanzania, Shillingi and Mwakasangula (2023) found that university students in Morogoro used different coping strategies during the COVID-19 pandemic, with social support and social distancing significantly related to coping. Although these studies provide evidence that emotional understanding and coping are related among students, most examined emotional intelligence or emotional clarity rather than emotional awareness as a specific independent variable and the Tanzanian study did not examine emotional awareness. This leaves a gap for the current study to examine the influence of emotional awareness on coping strategies among certificate students at the University of Iringa and Ruaha Catholic University in Iringa Municipality.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Approach and Design

The study used a quantitative research approach. Quantitative methods were used to collect numerical information on emotional awareness and coping strategies among certificate students. The approach helped the researcher obtain measurable information from certificate students and summarize their responses using statistical procedures. The approach was appropriate because the study focused on assessing the level of emotional awareness and examining how emotional awareness influences coping strategies.

A cross-sectional research design was employed. Data were collected from certificate students at the University of Iringa (UoI) and Ruaha Catholic University (RUCU) at one point in time. The design helped the researcher obtain information on emotional awareness and coping strategies within the selected study population. The design was also suitable because the study was conducted within a limited period and involved a defined population of certificate students.

3.2 Study Area

The study was conducted at the University of Iringa (UoI) and Ruaha Catholic University (RUCU), located in Iringa Municipality, Tanzania. The two institutions were selected because they have certificate students who formed the target population of the study. The institutions provided an appropriate setting for examining emotional awareness and coping strategies among certificate students. The selection of the two institutions also enabled the study to obtain information from students enrolled in different certificate programmes.

3.3 Study Population and Sample

The study population consisted of 495 certificate students from the University of Iringa (UoI) and Ruaha Catholic University (RUCU). The students formed the target population because the study focused on emotional awareness and coping strategies among certificate students. The sample consisted of 221 certificate students. The sample size was determined using Slovin's formula at a 5% margin of error. The selected sample provided information required to assess the level of emotional awareness and examine its influence on coping strategies.

3.4 Sampling and Data Collection

Simple random sampling was used to select the 221 certificate students from the target population. A list of eligible certificate students was obtained from the selected institutions and students were selected randomly to give eligible students an equal opportunity to participate in the study. This technique helped reduce selection bias and provided a fair opportunity for students to participate.

Structured questionnaires were used to collect quantitative data from the 221 certificate students. The questionnaires contained questions related to emotional awareness and coping strategies. A five-point Likert scale was used to obtain respondents' views on the study variables. The questionnaires were administered to the selected respondents after obtaining the necessary permission from the respective institutions. Completed questionnaires were checked for completeness before data analysis.

3.5 Data Analysis

Quantitative data were analysed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) Version 31. Descriptive statistics, including frequencies and percentages, were used to summarize the responses obtained from the questionnaires. The analysis focused on the level of emotional awareness and coping strategies among certificate students. The findings were presented using tables and figures to facilitate interpretation. The analysis was organized according to the study objectives to ensure that the findings directly addressed emotional awareness and coping strategies.

4. DATA PRESENTATIONS AND DISCUSSIONS

4.1 Influence of Emotional Awareness on Coping Strategies

The first objective of this study was to examine the influence of emotional awareness on coping strategies among certificate students in selected higher learning institutions in Iringa Municipality. To achieve this objective, respondents were asked to provide their views on statements related to recognizing personal stress signals, identifying triggers of negative emotions and awareness of emotional responses in academic situations. The responses were analyzed using frequencies, percentages and mean scores to determine the extent to which emotional awareness influences coping strategies among students. The findings are presented in Table 4.1.

4.1.1 Recognition of Emotions during Stress and Problem-Solving

To examine the influence of emotional awareness on coping strategies, respondents were asked to indicate their level of agreement with the statement, "When I identify my emotions during stress, I try to solve the problem causing the stress" The statement was intended to determine whether awareness of emotions helps students focus on addressing challenges when they experience stress. The responses obtained from the respondents are presented in Table 4.1.

Table 4.1: Recognition of Emotions during Stress and Problem-Solving

Response	Frequency	Percent
Strongly Disagree	10	4.5
Disagree	10	4.5
Neutral	6	2.7
Agree	166	75.1
Strongly Agree	29	13.1
Total	221	100.0

Source: Field Data (2026)

Results in Table 4.1 show that 166 respondents (75.1%) agreed and 29 respondents (13.1%) strongly agreed that when they identify their emotions during stress, they try to solve the problem causing the stress. On the other hand, 10 respondents (4.5%) disagreed, 10 respondents (4.5%) strongly disagreed and 6 respondents (2.7%) were neutral. The findings indicate that most respondents believed that recognizing their emotions helps them take action to deal with stressful situations. Responses from the open-ended question showed that many students reported that awareness of their emotions helped them identify the source of stress, improve concentration on studies, manage time effectively, seek academic guidance and make better decisions when facing challenges. Respondents who disagreed reported that recognizing emotions alone did not always help them address stressful situations because some challenges remained difficult to handle even after they were identified. These findings suggest that emotional awareness contributes to the use of problem-solving coping strategies among university students.

4.1.2 Recognition of Personal Stress Signals and Seeking Support

Another aspect examined under emotional awareness was the extent to which recognizing personal stress signals influences students' willingness to seek support when facing challenges. Seeking support from friends, family members and counselors was considered an important coping strategy because it helps students obtain guidance, encouragement and assistance during difficult situations. Respondents were therefore asked to indicate their level of agreement with the statement, "Recognizing my emotions helps me seek support from friends, family and counselors" The responses are presented in Table 4.2.

Table 4.2 Recognition of Personal Stress Signals and Seeking Support

Response	Frequency	Percent
Strongly Disagree	167	75.6
Disagree	14	6.3
Neutral	8	3.6
Agree	32	14.5
Total	221	100.0

Source: Field Data (2026)

Results in Table 4.2 show that 167 respondents (75.6%) strongly disagreed and 14 respondents (6.3%) disagreed that recognizing their emotions helps them seek support from friends, family members and counselors. In contrast, 32 respondents (14.5%) agreed, while 8 respondents (3.6%) were neutral. The findings indicate that most respondents did not associate recognition of their emotions with seeking support as a way of coping with challenges. Responses from the open-ended question showed that many students preferred to handle their problems independently after recognizing their emotions rather than seeking assistance from other people. Some respondents reported concerns about privacy and fear of being misunderstood when sharing personal challenges. However, respondents who agreed indicated that awareness of their emotional condition encouraged them to consult trusted individuals when facing difficult situations. The findings suggest that although students are able to recognise their emotional states, this awareness does not necessarily translate into seeking support from others as a coping strategy.

4.1.3 Awareness of Emotional Responses and Positive Thinking

The study also examined whether awareness of emotional responses in stressful situations helps students maintain positive thinking when facing challenges. Positive thinking was considered an important coping strategy because it helps students remain hopeful and focused despite difficulties. Respondents were asked to indicate their level of agreement with the statement, "Being aware of my emotions allows me to think positively even in stressful situations" The responses are presented in Table 4.3.

Table 4.3. Awareness of Emotional Responses and Positive Thinking

Response	Frequency	Percent
Strongly Disagree	14	6.3
Disagree	131	59.3
Neutral	74	33.5
Agree	2	.9
Total	221	100.0

Source: Field Data (2026)

Results in Table 4.3 show that 131 respondents (59.3%) disagreed and 14 respondents (6.3%) strongly disagreed that being aware of their emotions allows them to think positively during stressful situations. 74 respondents (33.5%) were neutral, while only 2 respondents (0.9%) agreed with the statement. These findings indicate that most respondents did not believe that awareness of their emotions automatically leads to positive thinking when they experience stress.

Responses from the open-ended question revealed that many students reported that stressful situations often make it difficult to maintain positive thoughts even when they are aware of their emotional condition. Some respondents indicated through that awareness of emotions helped them understand their feelings, but it did not necessarily change their thoughts about the challenges they were facing. The findings suggest that a awareness of emotional responses alone may not be sufficient to promote positive thinking among certificate students during stressful situations.

4.1.4 Awareness of Emotional Responses and Avoidance behaviours

The study also examined whether awareness of emotional responses influences avoidance behaviours among certificate students when facing stressful situations. Avoidance behaviour was assessed because some students may choose to withdraw from challenges rather than deal with them directly. Respondents were asked to indicate their level of agreement with the statement, “When I fail to recognise my emotions, I sometimes avoid stressful situations” The responses are presented in Table 4.3.

Table 4.3: Awareness of Emotional Responses and Avoidance behaviours

Response	Frequency	Percent
Strongly Disagree	14	6.3
Disagree	129	58.4
Neutral	42	19.0
Agree	24	10.9
Strongly Agree	12	5.4
Total	221	100.0

Source: Field Data (2026)

Results in Table 4.3 show that 129 respondents (58.4%) disagreed and 14 respondents (6.3%) strongly disagreed that failure to recognise their emotions causes them to avoid stressful situations. In addition, 42 respondents (19.0%) were neutral, while 24 respondents (10.9%) agreed and 12 respondents (5.4%) strongly agreed with the statement. The findings indicate that most respondents did not believe that lack of awareness of their emotions leads them to withdraw from stressful situations.

Responses from the open-ended question showed that many students preferred to confront challenges even when they were not fully aware of their emotional condition. However, some respondents reported that difficulty in understanding their emotions reduced their confidence in dealing with stressful situations and increased their tendency to avoid certain challenges. These findings suggest that avoidance behaviour was not common among most respondents, indicating that many students remained willing to face stressful situations despite difficulties in recognizing their emotions.

4.1.5 Emotional Awareness and Decision-Making

The study also examined whether emotional awareness helps students make better decisions when facing difficult situations. Decision-making is important because students are often required to make choices when dealing with academic, social and personal challenges. Respondents were asked to indicate their level of agreement with the statement, “Understanding my emotions helps me make better decisions during difficult situations” The responses are presented in Table 4.4.

Table 4.4. Emotional Awareness and Decision-Making

Response	Frequency	Percent
Strongly Disagree	12	5.4
Disagree	24	10.9
Neutral	4	1.8
Agree	151	68.3
Strongly Agree	30	13.6
Total	221	100.0

Source: Field Data (2026)

Results in Table 4.4 show that 151 respondents (68.3%) agreed and 30 respondents (13.6%) strongly agreed that understanding their emotions helps them make better decisions during difficult situations. In contrast, 24 respondents (10.9%) disagreed, 12 respondents (5.4%) strongly disagreed and 4 respondents (1.8%) were neutral. These findings indicate that most respondents believed that awareness of their emotions contributes to better decision-making when facing challenges.

Responses from the open-ended question showed that many students reported that understanding their emotions helped them think carefully before taking action, evaluate available options and choose appropriate ways of dealing with challenges. A few respondents reported that emotions sometimes affected their judgment, making it difficult to make sound decisions during stressful situations. Overall, the findings suggest that awareness of emotional responses plays an important role in helping students make better decisions when coping with difficult situations.

4.1.6 Recognition of Stress Effects and Problem-Solving

The study further examined whether students were able to recognise when stress affected their emotions and whether this awareness supported effective coping. The ability to identify emotional changes caused by stress was considered important because it enables individuals to take appropriate action

before challenges become overwhelming. Respondents were asked to indicate their level of agreement with the statement, “I can easily identify when stress is affecting my emotions.” The responses are presented in Table 4.5.

Table 4.5: Recognition of Stress Effects and Problem-Solving

Response	Frequency	Percent
Strongly Disagree	10	4.5
Disagree	20	9.0
Neutral	4	1.8
Agree	129	58.4
Strongly Agree	58	26.2
Total	221	100.0

Source: Field Data (2026)

Results in Table 4.5 show that 129 respondents (58.4%) agreed and 58 respondents (26.2%) strongly agreed that they could easily identify when stress was affecting their emotions. In contrast, 20 respondents (9.0%) disagreed, 10 respondents (4.5%) strongly disagreed and 4 respondents (1.8%) were neutral. These findings indicate that most respondents were able to recognise emotional changes associated with stressful situations.

Responses from the open-ended question indicated that students who recognised the effects of stress on their emotions were better able to take steps to address challenges before they became severe. Respondents reported paying attention to emotional changes, adjusting study schedules, seeking relevant information and taking action to manage academic pressures. However, a few respondents indicated that stress sometimes developed gradually, making it difficult to recognise its effects immediately. The findings suggest that awareness of stress-related emotional changes contributes to effective coping among university students.

4.1.7 Emotional Awareness and Positive Responses to Challenges

The study also examined whether emotional awareness helps students respond positively when facing difficult situations. Positive responses to challenges are important because they help students remain focused on finding solutions instead of becoming discouraged by stressful circumstances. Respondents were asked to indicate their level of agreement with the statement, “Awareness of my emotions helps me respond calmly to challenges.” The responses are presented in Table 4.5.

Table 4.5 Emotional Awareness and Positive Responses to Challenges

Response	Frequency	Percent
Strongly Disagree	67	30.3
Disagree	124	56.1
Neutral	10	4.5
Agree	10	4.5
Strongly Agree	10	4.5
Total	221	100.0

Source: Field Data (2026)

Results in Table 4.5 show that 124 respondents (56.1%) disagreed and 67 respondents (30.3%) strongly disagreed that awareness of their emotions helps them respond calmly to challenges. Furthermore, 10 respondents (4.5%) were neutral, 10 respondents (4.5%) agreed and 10 respondents (4.5%) strongly agreed. These findings indicate that most respondents did not associate emotional awareness with calm responses when facing difficult situations. Responses from the open-ended question revealed that many students experienced emotional pressure during challenging situations even when they understood their emotional condition. Respondents reported that academic demands, personal concerns and uncertainty about outcomes often affected their ability to remain calm. Nevertheless, a few respondents indicated that emotional awareness helped them control impulsive reactions and approach challenges more carefully. These findings suggest that emotional awareness alone may not be sufficient to promote calm responses during stressful situations among university students.

4.2 Discussion of Findings

The findings show that emotional awareness influenced some coping strategies among certificate students, particularly problem-solving, decision-making and recognition of stress effects. Most respondents indicated that identifying their emotions during stress encouraged them to solve problems, while many also reported that understanding their emotions helped them make better decisions. These findings agree with MacCann et al. (2022), who found that emotional intelligence was associated with lower avoidant coping among university students. Similarly, Gutiérrez-Lozano et al. (2022) found a positive relationship between emotional intelligence and coping strategies among university students. However, the current findings also show that emotional awareness did not always lead to seeking support, positive thinking or calm responses to stressful situations. This suggests that recognizing emotions may support some coping strategies, but emotional awareness alone may not be sufficient to produce all forms of positive coping.

5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion

The study concludes that emotional awareness has an important but mixed influence on coping strategies among certificate students at the University of Iringa and Ruaha Catholic University. The findings indicate that emotional awareness supports problem-solving, decision-making and recognition of stress effects. However, emotional awareness did not consistently support seeking social support, positive thinking or calm responses to stressful situations. Therefore, emotional awareness is useful in coping with difficult situations, but awareness alone may not be sufficient to promote all forms of effective coping among certificate students. Pasted markdown

Recommendations

The study recommends that the University of Iringa and Ruaha Catholic University strengthen counselling and student support programmes that help certificate students develop emotional awareness and apply it in managing stressful situations. Counselling programmes should also emphasize practical coping skills such as problem-solving, decision-making, positive thinking and appropriate support seeking. Students should be encouraged to recognize their emotional responses early and use appropriate coping strategies when facing academic, social and personal difficulties. Further studies should examine other factors that may influence coping strategies among certificate students because emotional awareness alone did not explain all forms of coping found in the study.

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