KMAN PUBLISHING INSTITUTE
Journal Website

Article history:
Received 26 December 2025
Revised 07 April 2026
Accepted 16 April 2026
Initial Published 20 April 2026
Final Publication 10 June 2026

Journal of Adolescent and Youth Psychological Studies

Volume 7, Issue 6, pp 1-10

E-ISSN: 2981-2526

The Relationship Between Schema Modes, Psychological Flexibility, and Alexithymia with Subjective Well-Being Among Students in Qazvin

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A r t i c l e I n f o

Article type:
Original Research

How to cite this article:
Naghash Souratgar, K., Mahmoud Alilou, M., & Hashemi Nosratabad, T. (2026). The Relationship Between Schema Modes, Psychological Flexibility, and Alexithymia with Subjective Well-Being Among Students in Qazvin. *Journal of Adolescent and Youth Psychological Studies, 7*(6), 1-10. http://dx.doi.org/10.61838/kman.jayps.5266

A B S T R A C T

Objective: The present study aimed to investigate the relationship between schema modes, psychological flexibility, and alexithymia with subjective well-being among university students in Qazvin.

Methods and Materials: This study was a fundamental, descriptive-correlational research conducted among students of Imam Khomeini International University during the 2022–2023 academic year. A total of 305 participants were selected using multistage cluster random sampling. Data were collected using the Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS), the Positive and Negative Affect Schedule (PANAS), the Schema Mode Questionnaire, the Psychological Flexibility Questionnaire, and the Toronto Alexithymia Scale (TAS-20). After obtaining informed consent, questionnaires were administered, and data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation coefficients, and multiple regression analysis via SPSS.

Findings: The results indicated that maladaptive schema modes (child modes, maladaptive parent modes, and maladaptive coping modes) were significantly negatively correlated with life satisfaction and positive affect and positively correlated with negative affect ($p < .01$). In contrast, adaptive schema modes showed significant positive correlations with life satisfaction and positive affect and negative correlations with negative affect ($p < .01$). Psychological flexibility was positively associated with life satisfaction ($\beta = 0.19$, $p < .001$) and positive affect ($\beta = 0.42$, $p < .001$), and negatively associated with negative affect ($\beta = -0.23$, $p < .001$). Alexithymia demonstrated significant negative relationships with life satisfaction ($\beta = -0.35$, $p < .001$) and positive affect ($\beta = -0.38$, $p < .001$), and a positive relationship with negative affect ($\beta = 0.39$, $p < .001$). Regression analyses further revealed that schema modes accounted for the largest proportion of variance in subjective well-being components, followed by alexithymia and psychological flexibility.

Conclusion: The findings suggest that maladaptive schema modes and alexithymia are significant risk factors for reduced subjective well-being, whereas adaptive schema modes and psychological flexibility function as protective factors.

Keywords: *Subjective Well-Being, Schema Modes, Psychological Flexibility, Alexithymia, University Students*

1. Introduction

Subjective well-being has emerged as a central construct in contemporary psychological research, reflecting individuals' cognitive and affective evaluations of their lives, including life satisfaction, positive affect, and negative affect. It is widely recognized as a key indicator of mental health, adaptive functioning, and overall quality of life, particularly among university students who are navigating complex developmental, academic, and social challenges (Mateen, 2025). In higher education contexts, students are frequently exposed to stressors such as academic pressure, identity formation, and future uncertainty, which may significantly influence their emotional experiences and life evaluations. Consequently, identifying the psychological factors that contribute to or hinder subjective well-being has become a priority for both researchers and practitioners aiming to promote mental health and prevent maladjustment in student populations (Arslan, 2024; Khosravi Pour et al., 2024).

Among the psychological variables associated with well-being, schema modes or schematic mindsets have received increasing attention within the framework of schema therapy. Schema modes represent moment-to-moment emotional states and coping responses that arise from early maladaptive schemas, reflecting deeply rooted cognitive-emotional patterns shaped by early life experiences. These modes encompass both adaptive and maladaptive functioning, including vulnerable child, punitive parent, detached protector, and healthy adult modes, each influencing how individuals perceive themselves, others, and their environment (Khodabandelow et al., 2017; Moien & Farahani Far, 2024). Empirical evidence suggests that maladaptive schema modes are strongly associated with emotional dysregulation, psychopathology, and reduced well-being, whereas adaptive modes, particularly the healthy adult mode, are linked to resilience, emotional balance, and life satisfaction (Faghih et al., 2024; Mohseni & Bibak, 2023). These findings highlight the importance of schema-based cognitive-emotional structures in shaping individuals' subjective experiences and underscore the relevance of schema modes in predicting well-being outcomes.

In parallel, psychological flexibility has been identified as a crucial determinant of mental health and well-being. Rooted in acceptance and commitment theory, psychological flexibility refers to the ability to remain in contact with the present moment while accepting internal experiences and engaging in goal-directed behavior aligned with personal values. This construct enables individuals to adaptively manage stress, regulate emotions, and maintain functioning despite adverse conditions (Ong et al., 2024). A growing body of research has demonstrated that higher levels of psychological flexibility are associated with greater life satisfaction, enhanced positive affect, and lower levels of psychological distress (Arslan, 2024; Wielgus et al., 2020). Moreover, psychological flexibility has been shown to mediate the relationship between various psychological processes and well-being, including coping strategies, cognitive emotion regulation, and meaning in life (Kiye & Çiçek Habeş, 2024; Maral et al., 2024). Conversely, psychological inflexibility, characterized by experiential avoidance and cognitive rigidity, is consistently linked to anxiety, depression, and diminished well-being (Ong et al., 2024). These findings suggest that psychological flexibility serves as a protective factor that enhances individuals' capacity to navigate challenges and sustain well-being.

Another critical variable in understanding subjective well-being is alexithymia, a multidimensional construct characterized by difficulties in identifying and describing emotions, as well as a tendency toward externally oriented thinking. Individuals with high levels of alexithymia often struggle to process emotional information effectively, leading to impaired emotional awareness, reduced interpersonal functioning, and increased vulnerability to psychological distress (Henry, 2006). Research has consistently demonstrated that alexithymia is negatively associated with subjective well-being and positively related to various forms of psychopathology, including depression, anxiety, and somatic complaints (Ding et al., 2022; Ziadni et al., 2021). In addition, alexithymia has been linked to maladaptive coping strategies and poor communication skills, further exacerbating its impact on mental health and social functioning (Dalokay & Aydin, 2023). Recent studies have also emphasized the role of alexithymia in mediating the effects of early relational experiences and attachment patterns on well-being, highlighting its position as a key mechanism in emotional processing and psychological adjustment (Kahya & Uluç, 2023; Zandi et al., 2024).

The interplay between schema modes, psychological flexibility, and alexithymia provides a comprehensive framework for understanding subjective well-being. From a theoretical perspective, maladaptive schema modes may contribute to psychological inflexibility and alexithymic tendencies by reinforcing rigid cognitive patterns and limiting emotional awareness. For instance, individuals dominated by maladaptive modes such as the vulnerable

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E-ISSN: 2981-2526

child or punitive parent may exhibit heightened emotional distress and reduced capacity for adaptive coping, thereby decreasing their overall well-being (Faghih et al., 2024). At the same time, psychological flexibility may buffer the negative effects of maladaptive schemas by promoting acceptance, cognitive defusion, and value-based action, which facilitate emotional regulation and enhance well-being (İme, 2025). Similarly, alexithymia may exacerbate the impact of maladaptive schemas by impairing emotional processing, leading to increased negative affect and reduced life satisfaction (Sabkzei et al., 2023). This integrated perspective underscores the importance of examining these variables simultaneously to gain a more nuanced understanding of well-being.

Empirical studies have increasingly supported the interconnected nature of these constructs. For example, research has shown that individuals with higher psychological flexibility tend to report lower levels of alexithymia and greater emotional awareness, which in turn contribute to improved well-being outcomes (Arslan, 2024; Kiye & Çiçek Habeş, 2024). Similarly, studies have indicated that maladaptive schema modes are associated with increased emotional dysregulation and reduced psychological flexibility, suggesting that schema-based interventions may enhance well-being by targeting both cognitive and emotional processes (Mohseni & Bibak, 2023; Moien & Farahani Far, 2024). Furthermore, structural models have demonstrated that emotional processing variables, including alexithymia, mediate the relationship between early experiences and well-being, highlighting the complex pathways through which these constructs interact (Zandi et al., 2024). These findings collectively emphasize the need for integrative models that account for cognitive schemas, emotional processing, and adaptive functioning in predicting subjective well-being.

Despite the growing body of literature, several gaps remain in the understanding of these relationships, particularly in non-Western contexts and student populations. Cultural factors may influence the expression of schema modes, emotional processing, and psychological flexibility, thereby affecting their associations with well-being. Moreover, most existing studies have examined these variables in isolation, limiting the ability to capture their combined and interactive effects. In the context of Iranian university students, where sociocultural dynamics, academic pressures, and developmental challenges intersect, there is a need for comprehensive investigations that integrate these constructs to better understand their role in shaping subjective well-being (Khosravi Pour et al., 2024). Addressing these gaps can provide valuable insights for designing culturally sensitive interventions aimed at enhancing students' mental health and quality of life.

Given the theoretical and empirical significance of schema modes, psychological flexibility, and alexithymia in relation to subjective well-being, the present study seeks to examine the relationships among these variables in a sample of university students in Qazvin. By adopting a correlational design and integrating multiple psychological constructs, this research aims to contribute to the existing literature by providing a more holistic understanding of the factors influencing well-being in this population. Therefore, the aim of this study is to investigate the relationship between schema modes, psychological flexibility, and alexithymia with subjective well-being among university students in Qazvin.

2. Methods and Materials

2.1. Study Design and Participants

The present study was fundamental in terms of its objective and employed a descriptive correlational design. The statistical population consisted of all students enrolled during the 2022–2023 academic year at Imam Khomeini International University in Qazvin, with an approximate population size of 7,930 individuals. From this population, a sample of 305 participants was selected using a multistage cluster random sampling method, which was deemed appropriate based on the number of variables under investigation. The sampling procedure was carried out in several stages: initially, four faculties—Architecture and Urban Planning, Engineering and Technology, Humanities, and Social Sciences—were randomly selected. Subsequently, two academic groups were randomly chosen from each faculty, followed by the selection of one class from each group. All students present in the selected classes were included as the final sample. This sampling strategy ensured adequate representation across different academic disciplines while maintaining randomness and reducing sampling bias.

2.2. Measures

Subjective well-being was assessed using two widely established instruments: the Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS) developed by Diener et al. (1985) and the Positive and Negative Affect Schedule (PANAS) developed by

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Watson, Clark, and Tellegen (1988). The SWLS consists of five items designed to measure the cognitive dimension of subjective well-being. Participants respond to each item using a seven-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree, yielding a total score between 5 and 35, with higher scores indicating greater life satisfaction. The psychometric properties of this scale have been consistently supported, including strong convergent and discriminant validity, as well as reliability coefficients reported around 0.85. The Persian adaptation of the scale has also demonstrated acceptable internal consistency, with Cronbach's alpha coefficients ranging from 0.78 to 0.84 in various Iranian samples, and 0.84 in the present study. The PANAS, on the other hand, measures the affective dimension of subjective well-being through 20 items that assess positive and negative affect. Each item is rated on a five-point Likert scale reflecting the extent to which individuals experience specific emotions. The scale is composed of two ten-item subscales: positive affect (e.g., interested, excited, enthusiastic) and negative affect (e.g., distressed, upset, nervous). Scores for each subscale are calculated by summing the relevant items. Prior research has confirmed the two-factor structure of the PANAS across different cultural contexts, including Iranian samples, with Cronbach's alpha coefficients typically ranging between 0.76 and 0.81. In the present study, the overall reliability of the scale was 0.76, with coefficients of 0.89 for positive affect and 0.86 for negative affect.

Schema modes were measured using the Schema Mode Questionnaire developed by Young et al. (2008), which consists of 124 items designed to assess 14 distinct schema modes, including vulnerable child, angry child, impulsive child, punitive parent, demanding parent, detached protector, and healthy adult, among others. Responses are recorded on a six-point Likert scale ranging from "never" to "always." The questionnaire captures four overarching domains: child modes, adaptive modes, maladaptive coping modes, and maladaptive parent modes. Scores for each mode are obtained by summing the responses to the corresponding items, and higher scores indicate greater dominance of that schema mode in an individual's cognitive-emotional processing. The instrument has demonstrated strong psychometric properties, with reported validity around 0.87 and overall reliability exceeding 0.95, while subscale reliabilities are typically above 0.83. In the present study, the overall Cronbach's alpha coefficient was 0.94, with all subscales showing acceptable reliability coefficients above 0.60.

Psychological flexibility was assessed using a personalized Psychological Flexibility Questionnaire developed by Akbari et al. (2021), which includes 15 items distributed across three dimensions: avoidance, acceptance, and utilization. The questionnaire is designed to evaluate the extent to which individuals pursue personally meaningful goals despite experiencing psychological distress. Participants are first asked to identify an important personal goal, and all subsequent items are answered in relation to that goal, ensuring contextual relevance. Responses are rated on a nine-point Likert scale, with higher total scores indicating greater psychological flexibility. The avoidance subscale includes reverse-scored items that assess the tendency to evade difficult emotions, while the acceptance and utilization subscales measure adaptive engagement with emotional experiences. The total score ranges from 15 to 135. Previous studies have confirmed the content, face, and criterion validity of the instrument, with Cronbach's alpha coefficients exceeding 0.70. In the present study, the overall reliability was 0.83, with subscale coefficients of 0.87 for avoidance, 0.75 for acceptance, and 0.69 for utilization.

Alexithymia was measured using the Toronto Alexithymia Scale (TAS-20), developed by Bagby, Parker, and Taylor (1994). This self-report instrument consists of 20 items assessing three core dimensions: difficulty identifying feelings (DIF), difficulty describing feelings (DDF), and externally oriented thinking (EOT). Participants respond on a five-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. Certain items are reverse scored to control for response bias. The DIF subscale evaluates the individual's ability to recognize and differentiate emotional states from bodily sensations, the DDF subscale measures the ability to verbalize emotions, and the EOT subscale assesses the tendency to focus on external events rather than internal emotional experiences. Higher scores indicate greater levels of alexithymia. The TAS-20 has demonstrated robust psychometric properties across numerous studies, including in Persian samples, where Cronbach's alpha coefficients have been reported as 0.85 for the total scale and between 0.72 and 0.82 for subscales. In the present study, the overall reliability coefficient was 0.85, with values of 0.87 for difficulty identifying feelings, 0.72 for difficulty describing feelings, and 0.57 for externally oriented thinking.

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2.3. *Data Analysis*

Data collection was conducted after obtaining informed consent from participants, ensuring confidentiality and voluntary participation. Participants were informed about the objectives of the study, and any ambiguities during questionnaire completion were clarified by the researcher. Following data collection, statistical analyses were performed using appropriate descriptive and inferential statistical methods. Descriptive statistics, including means and standard deviations, were calculated to summarize the data. Inferential analyses were conducted using correlation coefficients to examine the relationships among schema modes, psychological flexibility, alexithymia, and subjective well-being. Additionally, multiple regression analysis was employed to determine the predictive power of the independent variables on subjective well-being. All analyses were conducted using standard statistical software, and assumptions such as normality and linearity were assessed prior to conducting inferential tests to ensure the validity of the results.

3. Findings and Results

The demographic characteristics of the participants indicated that the sample consisted of 305 university students, of whom 184 (60.33%) were female and 121 (39.67%) were male. In terms of age distribution, the majority of participants (235 individuals, 77.04%) were between 18 and 22 years old, followed by 49 individuals (16.06%) in the 23 to 26 age range, and 21 individuals (6.90%) aged above 26 years. Regarding educational level, most participants were undergraduate students (276 individuals, 90.40%), while 29 participants (9.60%) were enrolled in master's degree programs. In terms of faculty affiliation, 99 participants (32.50%) were from the Faculty of Engineering and Technology, 79 participants (25.90%) from the Faculty of Architecture and Urban Planning, 75 participants (24.60%) from the Faculty of Social Sciences, and 52 participants (17.00%) from the Faculty of Humanities, indicating a relatively diverse representation across academic disciplines.

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics of Subjective Well-Being, Schema Modes, Psychological Flexibility, and Alexithymia

Variables	Components	Median	Mode	Mean	Standard Deviation	Maximum	Minimum
Subjective Well-Being	Life Satisfaction	19.00	22.00	18.14	6.57	34.00	5.00
	Positive Affect	34.00	32.00	33.49	7.08	50.00	10.00
	Negative Affect	25.00	24.00	26.15	7.47	50.00	10.00
Schema Modes	Child Modes	105.00	102.00	109.08	31.50	222.00	49.00
	Adaptive Modes	74.00	70.00	74.26	12.91	109.00	36.00
	Maladaptive Coping Modes	105.00	111.00	105.19	20.75	158.00	53.00
	Maladaptive Parent Modes	51.00	44.00	52.02	13.62	107.00	27.00
Psychological Flexibility	Avoidance	25.00	30.00	24.30	6.61	35.00	6.00
	Acceptance	24.00	20.00	23.38	4.91	35.00	5.00
	Utilization	21.00	21.00	20.83	4.93	35.00	5.00
	Total	69.00	75.00	68.52	12.51	105.00	30.00
Alexithymia	Difficulty Identifying Feelings	26.00	20.00	19.55	6.95	35.00	7.00
	Difficulty Describing Feelings	12.00	12.00	11.36	3.60	20.00	4.00
	Externally Oriented Thinking	23.00	22.00	22.92	4.91	38.00	11.00
	Total	37.00	55.00	53.84	12.60	85.00	26.00

The descriptive statistics presented in Table 1 indicate that among the components of subjective well-being, positive affect had the highest mean (M = 33.49, SD = 7.08), followed by negative affect (M = 26.15, SD = 7.47), while life satisfaction showed a comparatively lower mean (M = 18.14, SD = 6.57). In the domain of schema modes, child modes exhibited the highest mean score (M = 109.08, SD = 31.50), suggesting a relatively strong presence of early maladaptive emotional patterns, whereas adaptive modes demonstrated a moderate level (M = 74.26, SD = 12.91). Maladaptive coping modes and maladaptive parent modes also showed notable mean values (M = 105.19, SD = 20.75; M = 52.02, SD = 13.62, respectively). Regarding psychological flexibility, the total score (M = 68.52, SD = 12.51) indicates a moderate level of flexibility among participants, with avoidance (M = 24.30, SD = 6.61) being slightly higher than acceptance (M = 23.38, SD = 4.91) and utilization (M = 20.83, SD = 4.93). In terms of alexithymia, the total score (M = 53.84, SD = 12.60) reflects a moderate tendency toward difficulties in emotional processing, with

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externally oriented thinking showing the highest mean (M = 22.92, SD = 4.91), followed by difficulty identifying feelings (M = 19.55, SD = 6.95) and difficulty describing feelings (M = 11.36, SD = 3.60). Overall, the data suggest variability across constructs, with notable dispersion particularly in schema modes and emotional processing variables.

The examination of regression assumptions indicated that all prerequisite conditions were satisfactorily met for conducting inferential analyses. Specifically, the normality of data distribution was confirmed, as all skewness and kurtosis coefficients for subjective well-being, schema modes, psychological flexibility, alexithymia, and their respective components fell within the acceptable range of −2 to +2, demonstrating approximate normal distribution. Furthermore, the assessment of multicollinearity among predictor variables showed no evidence of problematic intercorrelations, as tolerance values were sufficiently high (approaching 1) and variance inflation factor (VIF) values remained well below the critical thresholds of 5 and 10, indicating the absence of linear dependency among predictors. In addition, the independence of observations was verified using the Durbin–Watson statistic, with all obtained values ranging between 1.80 and 2.12 across models, which falls within the acceptable range of 1.5 to 2.5, thereby confirming that residuals were uncorrelated. Collectively, these findings demonstrate that the assumptions of normality, independence of errors, and absence of multicollinearity were adequately satisfied, supporting the validity of subsequent regression analyses.

Table 2

Correlation Matrix Between Subjective Well-Being and Predictor Variables (Schema Modes, Psychological Flexibility, and Alexithymia)

Variables	Life Satisfaction	Positive Affect	Negative Affect
Child Modes	-0.389**	-0.371**	0.602**
Maladaptive Parent Modes	-0.327**	-0.223**	0.565**
Maladaptive Coping Modes	-0.276**	-0.253**	0.441**
Adaptive Modes	0.477**	0.606**	-0.378**
Psychological Flexibility	0.190**	0.420**	-0.230**
Alexithymia	-0.354**	-0.389**	0.396**

The correlation results presented in Table 2 reveal a coherent and theoretically consistent pattern of relationships between subjective well-being and the predictor variables. Specifically, maladaptive schema modes—including child modes, maladaptive parent modes, and maladaptive coping modes—demonstrated significant negative correlations with life satisfaction (r = -0.389, -0.327, and -0.276, respectively; $p < .01$) and positive affect (r = -0.371, -0.223, and -0.253, respectively; $p < .01$), while showing significant positive correlations with negative affect (r = 0.602, 0.565, and 0.441, respectively; $p < .01$). In contrast, adaptive schema modes were positively associated with life satisfaction (r = 0.477, $p < .01$) and positive affect (r = 0.606, $p < .01$), and negatively related to negative affect (r = -0.378, $p < .01$), indicating their protective role in psychological functioning. Psychological flexibility also exhibited significant positive correlations with life satisfaction (r = 0.190, $p < .01$) and positive affect (r = 0.420, $p < .01$), along with a negative correlation with negative affect (r = -0.230, $p < .01$), suggesting its facilitative role in enhancing well-being. Conversely, alexithymia showed a detrimental pattern, with significant negative correlations with life satisfaction (r = -0.354, $p < .01$) and positive affect (r = -0.389, $p < .01$), and a positive correlation with negative affect (r = 0.396, $p < .01$). Overall, these findings indicate that maladaptive cognitive-emotional patterns and deficits in emotional awareness are associated with poorer subjective well-being, whereas adaptive schema functioning and psychological flexibility contribute to higher well-being outcomes.

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Table 3

Summary of Regression Analyses Predicting Subjective Well-Being (Life Satisfaction, Positive Affect, and Negative Affect) Based on Schema Modes, Psychological Flexibility, and Alexithymia

Criterion Variable	Predictor Variable	R	R^2	F	Sig.	β	t	Sig.
Life Satisfaction	Adaptive Modes	0.477	0.228	89.437	0.001	0.380	7.010	0.001
	Child Modes	0.520	0.270	55.941	0.001	-0.228	-4.190	0.001
	Psychological Flexibility	0.194	0.038	11.845	0.001	0.190	3.440	0.001
	Alexithymia	0.354	0.125	43.375	0.001	-0.350	-6.586	0.001
Positive Affect	Adaptive Modes	0.606	0.367	175.687	0.001	0.540	10.950	0.001
	Child Modes	0.619	0.383	93.586	0.001	-0.138	-2.763	0.006
	Psychological Flexibility	0.427	0.182	67.435	0.001	0.420	8.210	0.001
	Alexithymia	0.389	0.151	53.912	0.001	-0.380	-7.342	0.001
Negative Affect	Child Modes	0.602	0.363	172.599	0.001	0.430	5.090	0.001
	Maladaptive Parent Modes	0.628	0.394	98.280	0.001	0.320	4.750	0.001
	Adaptive Modes	0.645	0.416	71.535	0.001	-0.140	-2.860	0.005
	Maladaptive Coping Modes	0.652	0.426	55.562	0.001	-0.171	-2.209	0.028
	Psychological Flexibility	0.236	0.056	17.942	0.001	-0.230	-4.230	0.001
	Alexithymia	0.396	0.157	56.264	0.001	0.390	7.501	0.001

The results of the regression analyses presented in Table 3 demonstrate that schema modes, psychological flexibility, and alexithymia significantly predict different components of subjective well-being. For life satisfaction, adaptive modes emerged as a strong positive predictor ($\beta = 0.380$, $p < .001$), while child modes ($\beta = -0.228$, $p < .001$) and alexithymia ($\beta = -0.350$, $p < .001$) were significant negative predictors; psychological flexibility also contributed positively, though with a smaller effect size ($\beta = 0.190$, $p < .001$). In predicting positive affect, adaptive modes showed the strongest positive influence ($\beta = 0.540$, $p < .001$), followed by psychological flexibility ($\beta = 0.420$, $p < .001$), whereas child modes ($\beta = -0.138$, $p = .006$) and alexithymia ($\beta = -0.380$, $p < .001$) were negatively associated. Regarding negative affect, child modes ($\beta = 0.430$, $p < .001$), maladaptive parent modes ($\beta = 0.320$, $p < .001$), and alexithymia ($\beta = 0.390$, $p < .001$) significantly increased negative affect, while adaptive modes ($\beta = -0.140$, $p = .005$), maladaptive coping modes ($\beta = -0.171$, $p = .028$), and psychological flexibility ($\beta = -0.230$, $p < .001$) were associated with reductions in negative affect. The coefficients of determination (R^2) indicate that schema modes account for a substantial proportion of variance in subjective well-being components (up to 42.6% for negative affect), whereas psychological flexibility and alexithymia explain smaller but still significant portions of variance. Overall, the findings highlight the prominent role of schema-related cognitive-emotional structures, alongside psychological flexibility and emotional processing deficits, in shaping individuals' subjective well-being.

4. Discussion

The present study aimed to examine the relationships between schema modes, psychological flexibility, alexithymia, and subjective well-being among university students, and the findings revealed a coherent and theoretically meaningful pattern. The correlational results indicated that maladaptive schema modes, including child modes, maladaptive parent modes, and maladaptive coping modes, were negatively associated with life satisfaction and positive affect, while showing positive associations with negative affect. In contrast, adaptive schema modes were positively related to life satisfaction and positive affect and negatively related to negative affect. These findings were further supported by regression analyses, which demonstrated that adaptive modes significantly and positively predicted life satisfaction and positive affect, whereas maladaptive schema modes, particularly child modes and maladaptive parent modes, significantly predicted higher levels of negative affect. These results are consistent with schema theory, which posits that early maladaptive schemas and their associated modes shape emotional responses and cognitive appraisals, thereby influencing overall well-being (Khodabandelow et al., 2017; Moien & Farahani Far, 2024). Previous studies have similarly shown that maladaptive schema modes are linked to emotional dysregulation and psychological distress, while adaptive modes contribute to resilience and emotional stability (Faghih et al., 2024; Mohseni & Bibak, 2023). The strong predictive role of child modes in increasing negative

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E-ISSN: 2981-2526

affect observed in this study aligns with evidence suggesting that vulnerability and emotional reactivity embedded in these modes can intensify negative emotional experiences and reduce well-being (Sabkzei et al., 2023).

Another important finding of the present study was the significant role of psychological flexibility in predicting subjective well-being. Psychological flexibility was positively associated with life satisfaction and positive affect and negatively associated with negative affect, indicating its protective role in emotional functioning. Regression analyses further confirmed that psychological flexibility significantly predicted all three components of subjective well-being, although its explanatory power was smaller compared to schema modes. These findings are in line with theoretical frameworks emphasizing the role of psychological flexibility in promoting adaptive coping, emotional regulation, and value-based behavior (Ong et al., 2024). Empirical studies have consistently demonstrated that individuals with higher psychological flexibility report greater levels of well-being, better stress management, and lower levels of psychological distress (Arslan, 2024; Wielgus et al., 2020). Moreover, psychological flexibility has been identified as a key mediator in the relationship between various psychological processes and well-being, including coping strategies and cognitive emotion regulation (Kiye & Çiçek Habeş, 2024; Maral et al., 2024). The present findings extend this body of research by confirming the beneficial role of psychological flexibility in a student population, suggesting that the ability to accept and utilize emotional experiences while pursuing meaningful goals contributes significantly to enhanced well-being.

The results also highlighted the detrimental role of alexithymia in subjective well-being. Alexithymia was negatively associated with life satisfaction and positive affect and positively associated with negative affect, indicating that difficulties in identifying and expressing emotions are linked to poorer well-being outcomes. Regression analyses further showed that alexithymia significantly predicted all components of subjective well-being, with particularly strong negative effects on life satisfaction and positive affect. These findings are consistent with the conceptualization of alexithymia as a deficit in emotional awareness and processing, which can impair emotional regulation and interpersonal functioning (Henry, 2006). Previous research has consistently demonstrated that alexithymia is associated with increased psychological distress, lower well-being, and maladaptive coping strategies (Ding et al., 2022; Ziadni et al., 2021). Furthermore, alexithymia has been linked to difficulties in communication and reduced emotional connectedness, which may further exacerbate its negative impact on well-being (Dalokay & Aydin, 2023). The present findings also align with studies indicating that alexithymia may mediate the relationship between early experiences and well-being, suggesting that emotional processing deficits play a central role in psychological adjustment (Kahya & Uluç, 2023; Zandi et al., 2024).

When considering the combined findings, it becomes evident that schema modes, psychological flexibility, and alexithymia interact in complex ways to influence subjective well-being. Maladaptive schema modes may contribute to psychological inflexibility and alexithymic tendencies by reinforcing rigid cognitive patterns and limiting emotional awareness, thereby increasing vulnerability to negative affect and reducing life satisfaction. Conversely, adaptive schema modes and psychological flexibility may serve as protective factors that enhance emotional regulation and promote positive affect. This integrated perspective is supported by recent research demonstrating that psychological flexibility and emotional awareness can buffer the negative effects of maladaptive cognitive patterns on well-being (Arslan, 2024; İme, 2025). Additionally, studies have shown that cognitive flexibility and emotional regulation processes are closely linked and jointly contribute to psychological well-being (Khosravi Pour et al., 2024; Kiye & Çiçek Habeş, 2024). The present study contributes to this literature by providing empirical evidence for the simultaneous influence of these variables, highlighting the importance of addressing both cognitive schemas and emotional processing mechanisms in understanding and promoting well-being.

5. Conclusion

The findings of this study underscore the importance of interventions targeting schema modes, psychological flexibility, and alexithymia in enhancing subjective well-being among students. Schema therapy approaches that focus on modifying maladaptive schemas and strengthening adaptive modes may be particularly effective in reducing negative affect and improving life satisfaction (Mohseni & Bibak, 2023; Moien & Farahani Far, 2024). Similarly, interventions based on acceptance and commitment therapy (ACT), which aim to enhance psychological flexibility, have been shown to improve well-being by promoting acceptance, mindfulness, and value-based action (Ong et al., 2024;

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Wielgus et al., 2020). Additionally, interventions designed to improve emotional awareness and expression, such as emotional skills training and communication-based therapies, may help reduce alexithymia and its negative impact on well-being (Dalokay & Aydin, 2023). The integration of these approaches may provide a comprehensive framework for promoting mental health and well-being in student populations.

6. Limitations & Suggestions

Despite the valuable contributions of this study, several limitations should be acknowledged. First, the use of a correlational design limits the ability to draw causal inferences regarding the relationships among variables. Second, the reliance on self-report measures may introduce response biases, such as social desirability and subjective interpretation of items. Third, the sample was limited to students from a single university, which may restrict the generalizability of the findings to other populations and cultural contexts. Fourth, although multiple variables were examined, other relevant factors influencing well-being, such as personality traits, social support, and environmental stressors, were not included in the analysis. Finally, the cross-sectional nature of the study does not allow for the examination of changes over time or the directionality of relationships.

Future research should address these limitations by employing longitudinal and experimental designs to better understand the causal relationships among schema modes, psychological flexibility, alexithymia, and subjective well-being. Expanding the sample to include students from different universities and cultural backgrounds would enhance the generalizability of findings. Additionally, future studies could incorporate other relevant variables, such as personality traits, coping strategies, and social support, to develop more comprehensive models of well-being. The use of mixed-method approaches, combining quantitative and qualitative data, may also provide deeper insights into individuals' lived experiences and the mechanisms underlying these relationships. Furthermore, intervention-based studies could be conducted to examine the effectiveness of integrated therapeutic approaches targeting these variables in improving well-being.

In terms of practical implications, the findings suggest that educational institutions and mental health practitioners should prioritize programs aimed at enhancing students' psychological flexibility, emotional awareness, and adaptive cognitive patterns. Workshops and training programs focusing on emotional regulation, mindfulness, and value-based goal setting may help students develop greater resilience and well-being. Counseling services can incorporate schema-based and acceptance-based therapeutic techniques to address maladaptive patterns and promote adaptive functioning. Additionally, promoting awareness about emotional processing and communication skills may help reduce alexithymia and improve interpersonal relationships. Overall, a comprehensive and integrative approach that addresses cognitive, emotional, and behavioral aspects of functioning is essential for fostering subjective well-being among university students.

Acknowledgments

We would like to express our appreciation and gratitude to all those who cooperated in carrying out this study.

Declaration of Interest

The authors of this article declared no conflict of interest.

Ethical Considerations

The study protocol adhered to the principles outlined in the Helsinki Declaration, which provides guidelines for ethical research involving human participants.

Transparency of Data

In accordance with the principles of transparency and open research, we declare that all data and materials used in this study are available upon request.

Funding

This research was carried out independently with personal funding and without the financial support of any governmental or private institution or organization.

Authors' Contributions

All authors equally contributed to this article.

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E-ISSN: 2981-2526