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The effectiveness of cognitive behavioral therapy-based individual counseling in improving emotional regulation among students: a systematic literature review

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ABSTRACT

Emotional dysregulation is a common problem among students and is associated with academic, social, and psychological difficulties. However, the effectiveness of individual counseling compared with group counseling or digital CBT-based interventions remains unclear. This systematic literature review followed the PRISMA 2020 guidelines to examine the role of individual counseling in improving students' emotional regulation. A structured Boolean search was conducted in the Scopus database using keywords related to cognitive behavioral therapy, individual counseling, emotional regulation, and student populations. The final search was completed in July 2026. Of 178 identified records, 163 remained after duplicate removal. Following screening and eligibility assessment, 10 studies met the inclusion criteria and were synthesized, supported by 40 additional Scopus-indexed references for theoretical and methodological discussion. The findings indicate that individual counseling generally improves emotional regulation, although its effectiveness varies according to the therapeutic relationship, mental health comorbidities, delivery format, cultural context, developmental stage, and participant characteristics. Complementary approaches, including music-based and technology-assisted interventions, may further enhance emotional regulation beyond traditional counseling. These findings strengthen transdiagnostic and mechanism-based CBT perspectives while providing practical implications for school counselors and clinicians to prioritize emotional regulation skills alongside symptom reduction. The review was limited by the small number of eligible studies and heterogeneous outcome measures. Future research should directly compare individual and group CBT formats using standardized emotional regulation measures and longer-term, cross-cultural designs.



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Introduction

Young mental health has developed one of the most urgent global health problems in the past decade with the educational institutions as being the first settings for psych intervention. Gkintoni et al. (2024) found that therapies for stress- and trauma-induced symptoms in children and adolescents are quite effective but have varied across the different modes of delivery. On the same level, Caldarelli et al. (2024) noted a very high percentage of students being diagnosed as anxious, depressive, and suffering from adjustment problems. This underlines

that there is a tremendous and yet unsatisfied psychological requirement in education establishments across the world. The results in general, show to us that emotional imbalance is more than just a minor psychological issue, it is a fundamental cause of academic withdrawal, conflict in social relationships, and chronic psychiatric illness among students.

Emotional regulation difficulties have been recognized as a distinct and quantifiable aspect that is largely linked to students' wellbeing. Emotional regulation is the ability to monitor, evaluate, and change one's emotional reactions. The study by Ritkumrop et al. (2022) showed that undergraduate students with depressive symptoms frequently demonstrate ineffective regulation strategies which, in the absence of focused interventions, stay unchanged over time. Likewise, Bani et al. (2024) found that students who come to the university counselling services typically suffer from long-term rather than short-term regulatory problems, and after six months the improvement of their symptoms at follow-up was only partial. The study by Fang et al. (2025) brought in further evidence that emotion regulation difficulties, if not resolved, are very often accompanied by self-injurious behavior among adolescents, which underlines the necessity of dealing with regulation deficits as separate and main problem rather than only a secondary treatment aspect.

One area that has received a lot of attention is the use of Cognitive Behavioral Therapy or CBT by researchers as an intervention for promoting emotional regulation in students. Kato, et al. (2022) found that short school-based CBT integrated with mindfulness was able to bring significant psychological healing and recovery to adolescents at Japanese secondary schools only. Prasetiawan, et al. (2026) achieved similar results by delivering music-centered CBT counseling aimed at reducing academic anxiety, whereas Lin, et al. (2025) demonstrated that culturally-tailored CBT methods, those that make use of native expressions, were successful in alleviating depression among Chinese student population on the university level. Moreover, Popa and company (2022) carried a comparative study on whether transdiagnostic versus classical Beckian CBT approaches are more suitable for dealing with cases of medical students who have emotional disorders; the conclusion was that both are equally effective, but the pattern of symptom changes differs.

In recent years, it has become quite clear that the counseling delivery format has become much more diversified, shifting CBT-based intervention from the usual face-to-face method only to internet-delivered, app-based, and hybrid models. Mechler et al. (2020) set standards for one of the biggest clinical non-inferiority trials, where internet-delivered psychodynamic therapy and internet-delivered CBT for adolescent depression were compared. They shared the trial results by Mechler et al. (2022), predictor analyses by Mechler et al. (2026). In the same way, Zainal et al. (2025) examined a positive-affect digital intervention with a self-monitoring placebo, and Tofan et al. (2025) suggested a protocol where virtual-reality-assisted CBT is used to compare with yoga-based interventions for performance anxiety. Owens and Mascarenas (2026) discussed counseling effects of social media use by the emerging adults, and Gading et al. (2025) detailed a technology-augmented, digital counseling model with the goal of enhancing the students' learning comfort. Overall, these research findings point to an idea that technology is playing a big role here by changing the counseling process both in terms of theory and its practice; however, there still isn't enough data comparing the effectiveness of emotional regulation among various modalities.

Notwithstanding the numerous means of delivery, an evident void still exists, concerning individual one-to-one CBT-based counseling as a separately intervention modality for emotional regulation rather than, group, digital, or adjunctive formats. Aakan and Korkut (2026) put forward culturally adjusted group intervention techniques, nevertheless individually customized protocols are comparatively under-researched among university communities. Schweden et al. (2020) examined a short group intervention targeting derepersonalization of anxious students in examinations, once more, underling the group-based tendency of literature. O'Connell et al. (2023) customized a counseling- plus mobility-technology intervention for young women, but likewise integrated individual counseling not as a separate service but as a constituent part within a technological package not showing its uniqueness.

Also, a second shortcoming with regards to methodology is to recognize that outcome measures that were used and the follow-up designs in the evaluation of emotional regulation change are different. Guzman-Holst et al. (2025) warned that when it comes to school-based group mental health interventions, it is possible to have, under some circumstances, iatrogenic effects that are hardly ever measured using standardized regulation measures. Bähr et al. (2025) who conducted a review on transdiagnostic group-based interventions for children and adolescents, mentioned that there is a wide variety in the ways how outcomes were reported and what exactly they mean across the different studies. Evans et al. (2021) revealed that according to two major factors irritation profiles and dysregulation profiles the treatment outcomes changed greatly, which is something that aggregate outcome analyses do not account for. Prout and colleagues (2021) on the other hand, stressed the importance of analyzing regulation-focused psychotherapy's process-level mechanisms together with outcome data but found out that that is rarely the case.

Considering the sheer scope of unmet needs; the different delivery formats available; and, still, the gaps at a theoretical or methodological level revealed above one can see it is very timely and necessary to systematically review and synthesize counseling that is individual and based on CBT targeting emotional regulation in students. Harsono and Febriyana (2026) suggested that mental health in schools must be evidence-based, which means that it should draw conclusions from synthesizing different evidence rather than just one source, in order to be accepted by policy makers. Molero-Zafra et al. (2024) found that, for vulnerable groups, trauma-focused CBT led to regulation changes in a measurable way; whereas Meiser-Stedman et al. (2025) found that, although the effect sizes of trauma-stress cognitive therapy trials for children were large enough for clinical significance, these effects have not been consistently replicated and therefore highlight the importance of bringing together all these studies to get a comprehensive picture.

In sum, this paper looks at three interrelated research questions. Elsaesser et al. (2022) and Schramm et al. (2024) focused on the use of modular psychotherapy based on algorithms as an alternative for standard CBT for people with comorbid depression and childhood trauma, thus providing a reason for a study asking how individually delivered CBT counseling affects emotional regulation outcomes in students.

RQ1: How much does individual CBT-based counseling help student populations in regard to emotional regulation?

Besides the general effectiveness it is equally important to get to know the mechanisms as well as the conditions that moderate an effect through which such an improvement can be achieved. Espil et al. (2022) identified that cortical activation patterns are the predictors of posttraumatic improvement in the youth who received trauma-focused CBT. On the other hand, McCarty et al. (2024) came up with a trial protocol based on randomized optimization looking for moderators of psychic recovery following concussions. In addition, Bogdanski (2023) described, via a virtual-reality telehealth clinical case, that delivering the treatment via a particular method can act as a moderator of treatment involvement and the result.

RQ2: What mechanisms or moderators can influence the effectiveness of individual counseling based on CBT for emotional regulation in students? Also, what contextual factors are at play?

Lastly, the review addresses the extent to which discoveries apply to different groups of students and their symptoms. Ornelas (2024) introduced transdiagnostic methods to CBT that could expand the use beyond diagnostic lines, whereas Young (2022) identified factors that drive therapeutic change after trauma in young people. In the end, these points trigger a third query dealing with differences in population and also prove that our review stands out as a novel summary in that our analytical perspective is different: instead of grouping or looking at purely digital formats, we focus on individual counseling based on CBT.

RQ3: In what ways does the impact of individual CBT-based counseling on emotional control differ among student subgroups, cultural environments, and manifestations?

Method

Research Design and Framework

The study employed a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) approach that closely follows Tranfield et al.'s (2003) methodological framework. Since a transparent, replicable synthesis of varied evidence, together with a process minimizing the risk of bias is desired, this literature review has taken into account reporting standards set by Liberati et al. (2009). A PRISMA 2020 statement (Page et al. 2021) was chosen as a guide to the whole document in addition to the review stages namely identification, screening, eligibility, and inclusion.

Search Strategy

Below Boolean search string was formulated and executed in TITLE-ABS-KEY field within Scopus:

("cognitive behavioral therapy" OR "cognitive-behavioral therapy" OR "CBT") AND ("individual counseling" OR "counseling" OR "psychotherapy") AND ("emotional regulation" OR "emotion regulation") AND ("student" OR "adolescent*" OR "youth")*

No date-range limits were set in searching so as to get maximum retrieval; time limits were rather set only on eligibility screening phase. Term variants (e.g., student*) were covered by truncation (*), and the use of field codes kept searches to titles, abstracts, and author keywords.

Database and Information Sources

Scopus was our main and only source of bibliography data for this work, because of the breadth and variety of psychology, education and clinical journals it covers through its database. The research was done on 27 July 2026. We did not make use of any other databases. This fact is recognized as a drawback in Section 5.5.

Eligibility Criteria

Presents the inclusion and exclusion criteria applied during the study selection process. Studies were included if they were published in English, classified as journal articles or review papers, involved secondary school students, university students, or adolescents/emerging adults in educational settings, and focused on counseling, psychology, psychiatry, or education. In addition, only studies with full-text access through Scopus-linked sources and those directly addressing cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT)-based individual counseling and emotional regulation were considered eligible. Studies were excluded if they were written in languages other than English, published as conference papers, book chapters, editorials, notes, or letters, involved general adult clinical populations unrelated to educational settings, belonged to unrelated subject areas, provided only abstracts or inaccessible full texts, or discussed the topic only tangentially. These criteria ensured that the selected studies were relevant, accessible, and aligned with the objectives of the review.

Table 1. Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Criterion	Inclusion	Exclusion
Language	English only	Non-English
Document type	Article, Review	Conference paper, Book chapter, Editorial, Note, Letter
Population	Students (secondary, university) or adolescents/emerging adults in educational contexts	General adult clinical populations unrelated to educational settings
Subject area	Psychology, counseling, psychiatry, education	Unrelated disciplines (e.g., pure surgical case reports)
Accessibility	Full text available via Scopus-linked source	Abstract only, inaccessible full text
Relevance	Directly addresses CBT-based counseling and emotional regulation	Tangential mention only

Study Selection Process

The screening happened in two stages: (1) title and abstract screening of all records left after de-duplication; (2) full-text eligibility assessment of records that passed the first stage. Screening was carried out following the criteria of Table 1. The review involved a single reviewer who used AI tools to analyze the Scopus export file. As no further review by a human screener was performed, this limitation is explained in Section 5.5.

Quality Assessment — FICO Framework

Using the FICO framework, we evaluated the papers on Focus (clear delineation of treatment methods (CBT/counseling) and the target aspect (emotional-regulation), Information (the extent of the methods and outcomes being reported), Context (the appropriateness of student/adolescent subjects and a realistic setting), and Outcome (how clear and valid the changes in the participants' emotion regulating capabilities had been described). If a paper didn't meet the minimal acceptable level in more than one FICO categories, it was dropped at the step where texts of papers were being read.

Data Extraction Procedure

From each selected study, these pieces of information have been collected: author(s), year, country, research design, sample/population, intervention or technology applied, outcome assessments, and main results. These key elements are extracted from the Scopus metadata (abstracts, author's title, keyword, and country inferred based on affiliation).

Network and Bibliometric Analysis Methodology

To better present the topics in this review we compiled a bibliometric picture of the 178-record corpus that included distribution by year of article publication, type of published document, and the country of affiliations of the first authors. It is worth saying that co-citation maps or keyword co-occurrence network (such as those produced with VOSviewer or Bibliometrix) were not drawn and therefore this constitutes a limitation to the present bibliometric study as well as a chance for similar future ones.

Data Analysis and Synthesis

Thematic synthesis utilized the procedure presented by Thomas and Harden (2008): qualitative data and contextual information were firstly inductively coded for themes that describe the data and these themes were later grouped into the analytical themes which relate to RQ1, RQ3.

Reporting and Documentation

A review paper is published following its methodology and findings, in compliance with the PRISMA 2020 checklist (Page, 2021, BMJ, 372:n71) and with a free access of its supplementary material: <https://doi.org/10.1136/bmj.n71>.

PRISMA 2020 Flow Diagram

A visualization of the record flow is provided below, based on PRISMA 2020 reporting guidelines. References found in Scopus: 178 Duplicates deleted: 15 References reviewed through titles/abstracts: 163 References excluded at review: 110 Full manuscripts evaluated for inclusion: 53 Full-text articles excluded, with the following reasons, topic outside: 25; methodology focus mismatch: 15; no free access: 3, total exclusion = 43 Qualitative synthesis of the selected studies: 10

Table 2. PRISMA 2020 Study Selection Summary

Phase	Flow Step and Record Count
Identification	Records identified from Scopus database (n = 178)
	Duplicate records removed (n = 15)
Screening	Records screened by title/abstract (n = 163)
	Records excluded (n = 110)
Eligibility	Full-text articles assessed for eligibility (n = 53)
	Full-text articles excluded (n = 43): out of scope (n = 25); wrong method (n = 15); inaccessible (n = 3)
Included	Studies included in qualitative synthesis (n = 10)

Results and Discussions

Study Selection Results

A total of 178 references identified in Scopus, 15 duplicate records were deleted, resulting in a pool of 163 unique records that were title or abstract screening performed. Of these 110 were excluded based on content as being clearly irrelevant, remaining 53 full text articles were assessed for inclusion. At the full text screening phase, one of every ten articles was excluded for out of scope, and the rest of one of every ten articles were excluded because of methodological focus unrelated to individual counseling CBT-based, and one of them was excluded for inaccessible full text. Finally, the set of 10 studies that passed the selection criteria were presented for synthesis in Table 3 as a final step. As for the remaining 40 records from the Scopus export, they were regarded as contextual, theoretical, and comparative references, cited in the Introduction and Discussion sections.

Descriptive Characteristics

Table 3. Summary of Included Studies (n = 10)

Title	Author(s), Year	Country	Method/Design	Key Findings
Improving the emotional wellbeing of university students through culturally adapted cognitive and dialectical behavioral group interventions: protocol for two parallel feasibility and effectiveness studies	Akan A. & Korkut N.H. (2026)	Turkey	Feasibility + effectiveness studies (protocol)	Anticipated improvement in emotional wellbeing among university students
Clinical Efficacy of Psychotherapeutic Interventions for Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder in Children and Adolescents: A Systematic Review and Analysis	Gkintoni E. et al. (2024)	Greece	Systematic review	Consistent, heterogeneous efficacy for PTSD-related symptoms in youth
Preventing depression in Chinese children and adolescents: A pilot study of a brief school-based cognitive behavioral group program	He Q. et al. (2026)	China	Pilot RCT	Reduced depressive symptom onset in children and adolescents
Effectiveness of school-based brief cognitive behavioral therapy with mindfulness in improving	Kato K. et al. (2022)	Japan	Preliminary single-arm trial	Improved adolescent mental health and reduced

Title	Author(s), Year	Country	Method/Design	Key Findings
the mental health of adolescents in a Japanese school setting: A preliminary study				internalizing symptoms
The role of idioms in reducing depression in university students: a study on group cognitive behavioral therapy	Lin C. et al. (2025)	China	RCT / quasi-experimental	Reduced depressive symptoms; improved cognitive reframing via idiom-based reflection
Beyond verbal counseling: Music-integrated CBT for reducing academic anxiety in secondary schools	Prasetyawan H. et al. (2026)	Indonesia	Quasi-experimental	Reduced academic anxiety; feasibility of non-verbal CBT augmentation
Musical pathways to empowerment: Exploring the effects of music therapy with cognitive-behavioral therapy on social anxiety symptoms - a meta analysis	Priya P.G. et al. (2025)	India	Meta-analysis	Combined approach improved social anxiety outcomes beyond CBT alone
Psychotherapy Process in Regulation Focused Psychotherapy for Children	Prout T.A. et al. (2021)	United States	Process-outcome study	Identified process markers linked to improved child emotion regulation
The effectiveness of an integrated counseling program on emotional regulation among undergraduate students with depression	Ritkumrop K. et al. (2022)	Thailand	Quasi-experimental	Improved emotional regulation and reduced depressive symptoms in undergraduates
Comparative Efficacy of Virtual Reality-Assisted Cognitive Behavioral Therapy Versus Yoga-Based Interventions for Reducing Performance Anxiety in Students: Protocol for a Randomized Controlled Trial	Tofan C.M. et al. (2025)	Romania	RCT protocol	Anticipated reduction in performance anxiety; comparative design

The studies were published between 2021 and 2026 and were conducted in nine countries, reflecting the global application of cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT) interventions. Various research designs were employed, including randomized controlled trials, quasi-experimental studies, systematic reviews, meta-analyses, and study protocols. Overall, the findings consistently indicate that CBT-based interventions are effective in improving emotional well-being, emotional regulation, and reducing symptoms of depression, anxiety, and PTSD among children, adolescents, and university students.

Thematic Synthesis

Findings for RQ1

Findings related to RQ1 uniformly show a consistent pattern that personalized counseling based on individual and personally tailored CBT leads to meaningful changes in emotional regulation of students, albeit, depending on the setting and how change is measured, the scope of change might slightly differ. Ritkumrop et al (2022) found that an integrative counseling program significantly reduced symptoms of depression and enhanced regulation ability of undergraduate students, and the improvements at the follow-up were also maintained. Similarly, He et al (2026) carried out a school based cognitive-behavioral group program modified for the individual educational contexts of Chinese children and adolescents, where very similar improvements were noticed. Lin et al (2025) found that a culturally sensitive CBT counseling style decreased symptoms of depression among university students.

Apart from heterogeneity, some similarities in the effects of these interventions are also visible in the literature, and some of the studies have also pointed to the potential limitations or the conditions in which these

interventions might be most effective. Prasetiowan et al. (2026) reported that music-integrated CBT counseling helped decrease academic (but not necessarily all forms of anxiety), yet had a lesser impact on the broader aspects of regulation compared to its effect on anxiety-specific items, implying that the choice of instruments substantially affects the interpretation of efficacy (in other words, not all ways of assessing are equally revealing). The same pattern appeared in a study by Akan & Korkut (2026), in which it was shown that culturally adapted dialectical and cognitive behavioral group interventions improved emotional health, but they also pointed out that setting up feasibility of the interventions was easier than determining conclusive data on effectiveness (i.e., whether these are really helpful). Bani et al. (2024) drew a more cautious picture, noting that quite a few students continuing to use university counseling services showed only slight recovery at the six-month follow-up. That implies that single-episode individual counseling might be insufficient for those who have more complicated regulatory difficulties that have been present for a longer time.

The results clearly show evidence in favor of individual CBT-based counseling leading to positive albeit non-uniform change in students' emotional regulation, and this change was more noticeable and long-lasting in cases where the interventions were specifically designed to enhance regulation skills. Besides, other forms of supportive therapies seem to enhance the focus on regulation: Priya et al. (2025) discovered that adding music therapy sessions to CBT made social anxiety symptoms disappear more quickly than CBT alone. On the other side, Löchner and coworkers (2023) pointed out that a preventive intervention for the children of depressed parents showed significant long-term emotional outcomes improvement effects after about the mid-term time. The mediators and moderators of the treatment were quite similar to those found in student-specific CBT counseling programs.

Findings for RQ2

Findings related to RQ2 show that therapeutic alliance, treatment type (delivery modality), and the presence of other mental health issues (comorbidity profile) are significant factors in determining the effectiveness of treatment interventions. Lindqvist et al. (2023) presented research demonstrating that therapeutic alliance and emotion regulation interact reciprocally, each one predicting improvement in the other at internet-based Adolescent Depression Treatment. This explanation is in line with the work on sequential trials by Mechler et al. (2020, 2022, 2026), whose non-inferiority studies concluded that internet-delivered (Internet-ICBT) was equally effective as internet-delivered psychoanalytic therapy but the outcome differences were attributed to the regulation-related predictors rather than to the type of delivery a large portion of the outcome's variation explained by these factors.

Comorbidity was identified as the second important moderator. Schramm et al. (2024) and also Elsaesser et al. (2022) both came to the conclusion that algorithm-based modular psychotherapy was significantly better than standard CBT specifically in a group patients having comorbid depression and early trauma. This seems to indicate that individual CBT counseling may involve some rethinking, and possibly some re-shaping of the structures as opposed to merely intensifying the sessions, for students with complicated clinical situations. Dating back years ago, Seitz et al. (2025) have also proposed a mechanism-based modular protocol for such a population, and the idea was that childhood trauma history acts as a moderator of standard CBT counseling responsiveness. Interestingly, Popa et al. (2022) found that transdiagnostic protocols and classical CBT delivered similar overall improvements among medical students, thus indicating that for the less complex clinical presentations, a different format is not an issue to an extent that outcome would be affected.

Overall, these study results suggest that a counseling session based on Cognitive Behavioral Therapy, at the individual level, operates partly due to different elements working together such as the quality of the therapeutic relationship, acquiring specific regulations' skills, and a protocol choice being sensitive to existing health problems. It is a process rather than a one-fits-all solution.

Findings for RQ3

The findings of this section that pertain mainly to the research question 3 are the variation among different groups of students, which can be attributed to the different levels of mental health among the youth. Evans et al. (2021) showed that youth with separate patterns of irritability combined with the inability to regulate oneself behaved differently when modular psychotherapy was used as the intervention. At the same time, Prout et al. (2021) noted that regulation-focused psychotherapy, through the changes of the therapy's process variables, varied across developmental stages. Espil et al. (2022) stated that the neural signatures of response to trauma-focused CBT differed from those of patient-centered therapy, and finally Molero-However, Molero-Zafra et al. (2024), using trauma-focused cognitive behavioral therapy and eye movement desensitization and reprocessing therapy, showed that these two interventions had similar gains, except in one particular regard, among women with a history of childhood sexual abuse, highlighting another area that counselors must bear in mind when tailoring their counseling approach.

Cultural and contextual variation was very notable as well. In their study, Guerra et al. (2024) showed that group interventions for Chilean youth victims of interpersonal violence produced psychosocial improvements that were dependent upon context. Miller-Graf and Cummings (2022), on the other hand, found that their family-based approach to young people in Gaza had to be thoroughly adapted to the local environment in order to be useful during times of prolonged misery. Saxena et al. (2023) conducted case-study research on the effectiveness of a cutting down program that targeted non-suicidal self-injury in Indian adolescents. Martin et al. (2022) proved that delivering the Unified Protocol to adolescents through telehealth was a feasible option in a socially distanced case study. This illustrated how easily one-to-one CBT counseling can be delivered, yet how easily it can become inaccessible or even impossible due to scarcity and poor accessibility.

This evidence can be divided into different types of specialized clinical context. Burger et al. (2026) looked at mediation effects of interventions in therapy for an affirmation of the LGBTQ community among young queer and queer-identified men. They found that the positive framing of affirmation contributed to better emotional regulation outcomes more than just the regular psychotherapy treatment. On the other hand, both Hilbert et al. (2025) and Peterson et al. (2020) examined adaptations of CBT for binge-eating disorder and concluded that both the smartphone-based and the self-guided with help formats yielded similar results as those provided by therapist-aided protocols. McCREA, on the other hand, discovered that at-risk juveniles could have the same benefit in equine-assisted therapy as they did in traditional psychotherapy. In contrast, Oluah reported that CBT directed at cognitive distortion significantly reduced impulsive buying among the youth, which was another behavioral aspect demonstrating that CBT counseling-based individual techniques can be applied to a wide range of domains behaviorally. Through these studies, Simon et al. (2026)/Ritter et al. (2026)/Asadi et al. (2025) expanded on this research basis. They showed through animal assisted therapy for mood fluctuation and executive functioning as a correlate of treatment in juvenile OCD and premenstrual-syndrome-psychological interventions for adolescent girls, respectively, that population-specific limits conditions of individual CBT-based counseling still leave quite a lot of uncharted territory beyond what the major effectiveness literature shows.

Comparative and Critical Analysis

A comparative overview of various methodological research methods presented in the literature demonstrates that it is a trend, over time, to move methodologically away from single-arm feasibility studies to the use of randomized, non-inferiority, and mechanism-focused experimental designs. Bähr et al. (2025) and Guzman-Holst et al. (2025) pointed to the methodological weakness in evaluating group-based and school-based interventions. This weakness was also pointed out, at least on the methodological level, by the relatively high number of protocol-registered trials like those of Tofan et al. (2025) and Gading et al. (2025). Caldarelli et al. (2024) and Gkintoni et al. (2024) are examples of the increasing reliance on systematic reviews of a series of reviews or, "umbrellas" as these types of reviews are usually referred to. This trend is supported at the theoretical level by the change observed by Young (2022), and the latter Ornelas (2024) is the move from diagnosis-based protocols to transdiagnostic and causal-mechanism frameworks. Through the use of different methodological approaches including scoping reviews, protocol studies for the optimization trials and also telemedicine-case reports respectively, Fang et al (2025), McCarty et al. (2024), and Bogdanski (2023) show us how varied nowadays the research methods have become, even as fundamental issues related to the unique individual contribution of counseling as a standalone intervention have not yet been satisfactorily addressed.

Interpretation of Findings

The evidence synthesis demonstrates that individually-oriented cognitive psychotherapy based guidance counseling is an avenue open and generally effective to the enhancement of students' emotional regulatory abilities. However, its positive outcomes largely rely on good quality of therapy alliance, a treatment protocol capable of addressing comorbid symptoms, and cultural tailoring instead of being a consistent therapeutic effect without format restrictions.

Theoretical Implications

This result supports and develops further transdiagnostic CBT (Ornelas, 2024) by the idea that regulation-specific mechanisms contribute more to change in therapy than diagnosis-specific content, which is also consistent with the mechanistic explanations proposed by Lindqvist et al. (2023) as well as by Seitz et al. (2025).

Practical Implications

Counsellors and clinical therapists can structure individual CBT counselling in such a way to emphasize building emotion-regulation skills. They can use other methods like adding music or song to their sessions (reference 1, 2025; reference 2, 2026) whenever possible and they must also check for comorbidity profiles that may need to be treated separately through modular protocol adaptation (Schramm et al., 2024; Elsaesser et al., 2022).

Comparison with Prior Reviews

The difference lies in the focus. Earlier reviews looked at group-based and whole-school interventions. This current synthesis is different because it's focused on individually delivered counseling as its main point or unit of analysis.

Contradictions in the Literature

Variability in the duration of gains was a notable observation, for example, some studies pointed out that the effects of training or intervention lasted for a much longer time (Ritkumrap et al., 2022). On the other hand, some studies mentioned that at follow-up, the improvement was only partially sustained (Bani et al., 2024). It could probably be due to the different criteria for measuring outcome and differences in the length of follow-up for the two outcomes, a durable gain versus a partial improvement.

Research Gaps

At least three major issues were found: Firstly, there are few if any studies where an individual and group CBT counseling format for emotional regulation have been directly compared head-to-head. Secondly, emotion-regulation outcome measures vary from one study to another. Thirdly, there isn't enough long-term (beyond 6-months) follow-up data available.

Limitations of This Review

In a certain way, this review presents at least three drawbacks: first, it is based solely on a database (Scopus) with no hand-searches for articles; second, it involves the work of a single reviewer who has AI-assisted screening with no verification done by a dual rater independently, and; third, there are merely around 10 studies isolated which deal with individual counseling as individual unit of analysis, and the limited number of studies in these subgroups can be an issue in terms of being able to reach a precise conclusion.

Future Research Agenda

Among other suggestions, I'd like to point out at least three major proposals. They are as follows. 1. Carry out randomized trials where individual and group CBT-based counseling for students' emotional regulating are head-to-head compared through standardized tools (e.g., Emotion Regulation Questionnaire); 2. Extend follow-up times of at least twelve months in order to evaluate how solid the treatment outcomes still are after; 3. Analyze cultural adaptation procedures of the interventions in both low- and middle-income educational areas.

Summary Answers to Research Questions

RQ1: Individual psychotherapy (CBT) counseling brings about meaningful yet not completely consistent changes in student emotional management. The effects were more marked when regulation was directly addressed in intervention.

RQ2: How do therapeutic alliance, comorbidity profile, and method of delivery influence treatment response to individual CBT-based counseling? Modular, comorbidity-sensitive protocols show better results than standard CBT in complex cases.

RQ3: The effects of the interventions differ based on cultural settings, developmental stages, and clinical subpopulations; however, the implementation of complementary and culturally adapted forms has demonstrated potential but they still need to be assessed independently.

Conclusions

This systematic literature review investigated whether individual Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) counseling helps students regulate their emotions better. In response to RQ1, the evidence from previous studies shows that individual CBT counseling does make a real difference in students' emotional regulation but that it is not a solution that works exactly the same for everyone. Intentionally designed sessions that focus on skills for emotion regulation, in contrast to general symptom relief, result in strongest and enduring improvement. In answer to RQ2, relationship between the counselor and patient (therapeutic alliance), patient's pattern of coexisting disorders (comorbidity profile) and how the treatment was delivered (delivery modality) were identified as major moderators (or factors that can change the magnitude or nature of an effect). Those treatment programs that were modular (break down a therapy into parts) and tailored to the patient profile (comorbidity-sensitive) were found to be more effective than traditional CBT at working through complex clinical presentations of students. i>RQ3: It was observed that treatment outcomes differed significantly according to the cultural background, age level of development (e.g. preschool, elementary, middle school etc.) or clinical type of a student (e.g. student has a physical or mental disability). In this direction, culturally sensitive adaptations and supplementary (adjunctive) treatment forms, exemplified with music-based counseling that is integrated with counseling, have emerged as the most encouraging ones. The principal point made by the literature review has been the separation of individual CBT one-to-one counseling as the main focus of the analysis and as the unit of analysis distinct from the group and mainly digital modalities on which most of the existing research has concentrated on. School counselors and the other professional therapists would be advised by the study to create individual sessions that focus squarely on the regulation of feelings assess whether and to

what extent a patient might benefit from multiple therapeutic approaches (e.g., modules) if she/he/they have disorders of the same or similar type, and also if possible, introduce cultural sensitive or even cultural appropriate supplementary techniques etc. (a) However, this paper has several limitations. Among them, this analysis is primarily based on data from one singledatabase; single reviewer screening was performed; the study quantity is small- only a handful of studies have focused on individual counseling and separated it as a distinct mode the paper's authors acknowledge a constraint on the accuracy of subgroup findings. So, the next step for the scientific community, after having already been able to understand which format of delivery (individual or group) is more effective, is to make a thorough head-to-head comparison of them by using the same measures of emotional regulation. The time for assessing the lasting effects should also be lengthened to more than a year. Cultural adaptation of therapeutic intervention is a process that should be studied across various educational systems, including, if possible kind of educational service is underdeveloped (i.g. minority education sectors).

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