
Optimizing emotional regulation through digital journaling for improved psychological well-being in generation Z

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Abstract

This research examined the optimization of emotional regulation through digital journaling to enhance psychological well-being in Generation Z. The research employed an experimental method with a non-equivalent control group design. The sample consisted of 30 people in the experimental group and 30 people in the control group. The data collection instrument was the Emotion Regulation Questionnaire (ERQ) scale and the Ryff Psychological Well-being Scale. The treatment employed was digital journaling using the Canva application, and the hypothesis testing method used was the t-test. The research results showed an increase in emotional regulation in the experimental group, which was correlated with the participants' level of psychological well-being. There were differences in the levels of emotional regulation and psychological well-being between the experimental and control groups.

Keywords

Digital, emotion regulation, journaling, psychological well-being

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Introduction

Generation Z, or commonly referred to as Gen Z, is the generation born between 1997 and 2012. This generation was born into a world of rapid technological advancements. Gen Z has advantages, especially in the field of technology. The acceleration of this technology has enabled Gen Z to learn from various sources, thereby forcing them into a creative generation. This technological advancement also makes Gen Z very vulnerable to mental disorders. Many mental health cases, including Gen Z teenagers dealing with stress and depression that can lead to suicide, are caused by feelings of insecurity, family problems, love, friendships, and social media use.

The majority of Generation Z who experience mental disorders are in high school, with 35% experiencing unspecified schizophrenia, 29% experiencing paranoid schizophrenia, and others experiencing depression and other mental disorders. This occurs due to the search for identity and role confusion (Abdulah et al., 2023). Social media is one of the causes of mental health disorders in Generation Z, such as stress, FOMO (Fear of Missing Out), or feelings of anxiety that arise when someone feels left behind in activities, experiences, or fun moments that they see from other people's posts (Triastuti et al., 2025). Generation Z suffers from mental health disorders due to the taboo surrounding mental health issues, which hinders the implementation of preventative measures. Individuals with poor mental health will naturally struggle to control their emotions and will find it challenging to think positively about themselves. This difficulty in self-control and emotions is caused by individuals' lack of knowledge about how to manage emotions effectively, thus contributing to a more positive self-image.

Excellent mental health enables a person to be confident, make informed decisions, act positively, and think optimistically, thereby improving psychological well-being (Thahir et al., 2023). Healthy mental health starts with proper emotional regulation. Emotional regulation is the ability to evaluate and adjust reactions to specific behaviors in a manner that is appropriate to the current situation (Rusmaladewi et al., 2020). Aspects of emotional regulation include choosing situations where one can express feelings openly to others, changing situations by doing other positive activities to divert emotions, giving attention with the ability to change emotions felt into positive behavior, the ability to change thoughts from negative to positive, and the ability to hide negative emotions (Rahmansyah & Affandi, 2023). To maximize their emotional regulation, individuals require training and support. Behavioral indicators of satisfactory emotional regulation include the ability to control both negative and positive emotions, the capacity to manage stressful situations, and the ability to consciously and automatically regulate emotions (Widyadari & Fitriani, 2023). If this activity can be done, then emotional regulation has been successful. One way to practice emotional regulation is by journaling.

Psychological well-being is crucial because it can protect individuals from negative experiences, foster positive emotions, contribute to overall life satisfaction, and mitigate the risk of depression (Batubara et al., 2024). Emotional intelligence is essential for building lasting psychological well-being. Buşu (2020) stated that emotional intelligence encompasses the ability to control oneself, perseverance, enthusiasm, motivation, managing emotions and moods,

empathy, avoiding frustration, building favorable social relationships, resolving conflicts, and possessing leadership qualities. If emotional intelligence can be achieved, it will align with the achievement of psychological well-being (Sari & Desiningrum, 2016). Emotional intelligence can be achieved through an individual's ability to regulate their emotions. According to Halperin and Pliskin (2015), emotional regulation refers to an individual's ability to manage their emotions effectively, enabling them to face life's challenges and tensions. Emotional regulation encompasses three key aspects: the ability to manage positive and negative emotions effectively, the capacity to respond to emotions quickly, and the ability to cope with situations beyond one's control (Dian et al., 2022). Effective emotional regulation enables individuals to think positively in their lives and make informed decisions, ensuring that these choices align with good psychological well-being.

Good psychological well-being can be characterized by the ability to accept oneself, regulate emotions, be adaptable and independent, and have a sense of purpose in life (Rismawati & Wilantika, 2023). Effective emotional regulation requires practice, one method of achieving this journaling. This research aimed to help Generation Z effectively manage their emotions, thereby enhancing their psychological well-being and ultimately improving the quality of human resources (HR). This research was conducted because many Generation Z members experience mental health issues, which can even lead to suicide. One reason is their lack of understanding of how to regulate their emotions and achieve psychological well-being, leading to stress, depression, and suicide. Therefore, this research aims to optimize emotional regulation through digital journaling to enhance psychological well-being, leading to stress, depression, and suicide. Therefore, this research aims to optimize emotional regulation through journaling to enhance psychological well-being among Generation Z. The primary objective of this research was to investigate the impact of journaling on emotional regulation and the subsequent improvement in psychological well-being.

Literature Review

Emotional regulation

Kappas (2011) stated that emotional regulation is an individual process that involves forming emotions and knowing how to express them. Gross (2015) also stated that emotional regulation is the ability to evaluate and change emotional reactions to behave in a certain way that is appropriate to the current situation. According to Balk et al. (2023), the definition of emotional regulation is the ability to remain calm in the face of pressure. Based on the opinions above, emotional regulation refers to a person's ability to manage emotions and respond appropriately to them.

Emotional regulation is essential because it influences how individuals adapt to stressful or changing environments. Individuals who can effectively regulate their emotions tend to maintain social harmony, make more informed decisions, and experience greater psychological well-being. This process involves awareness, understanding, and the modulation of emotions to align with desired goals and situational demands.

Additionally, emotional regulation plays a crucial role in maintaining mental health and fostering healthy interpersonal relationships (Agu & Nwankwo, 2019). Inadequate emotion

regulation is often associated with anxiety, depression, and impulsive behavior. By learning to manage their emotional responses, individuals can develop resilience, enhance their communication skills, and better cope with the challenges of everyday life.

Aspects of emotional regulation

Gross and Jazaieri (2014) stated that there are three aspects of emotional regulation, namely: (1) emotion monitoring. Emotional monitoring is fundamental to regulating emotions because it helps achieve other aspects. Emotional monitoring is an individual's ability to understand and be aware of the processes that occur within themselves, including their feelings, thoughts, and the context behind their actions. (2) Emotions evaluation: The ability that can make an individual see an event experienced from the positive side and can make someone take the goodness/wisdom behind the event that occurred (Rusmaladewi et al., 2020). Aspects of emotional regulation include the ability to monitor and evaluate emotions.

Emotional monitoring lays the foundation for self-awareness, enabling individuals to identify emotional triggers and recognize their emotional patterns. This awareness enables people to anticipate emotional responses and choose constructive coping strategies. It also supports emotional intelligence, fostering empathy and better social interactions.

Meanwhile, emotional evaluation helps transform potentially harmful emotions into opportunities for growth and learning (Harley et al., 2017). By reflecting on their experiences and reinterpreting them in a positive light, individuals can develop a sense of purpose and optimism. This process contributes to psychological flexibility, reducing the intensity of negative emotions while enhancing well-being and adaptive functioning.

Psychological well-being

Psychological well-being is a variable that reflects an individual's psychological health through positive functioning, which includes the ability to accept oneself, relate positively to others, maintain independence, master one's environment, set life goals, and pursue personal development (Batubara et al., 2024). Psychological well-being refers to an individual's ability to be psychologically prosperous, encompassing the capacity to accept oneself form healthy relationships with others.

Psychological well-being is closely tied to one's overall life satisfaction and emotional balance (Sirgy, 2012). It allows individuals to experience fulfilment through self-growth, meaningful relationships, and purposeful living. High psychological well-being also enhances resilience, helping people cope effectively with difficulties and maintain a sense of stability even under pressure.

Furthermore, psychological well-being serves as a protective factor against mental health problems such as depression and stress. Individuals with strong well-being are more likely to demonstrate gratitude, optimism, and a positive outlook on life. Cultivating this state requires continuous self-reflection and a balance between personal aspirations, relationships, and environmental mastery.

Aspects of psychological well-being

The aspects of psychological well-being are the ability to accept oneself, positive relationships with others, independence, environmental mastery, life goals, and personal development (Batubara et al., 2024). These dimensions interact dynamically to form a holistic picture of an individual's psychological health. Self-acceptance and autonomy enable individuals to embrace their strengths and weaknesses while making independent life decisions. Positive relationships offer emotional support and a sense of belonging, which are crucial for maintaining psychological well-being (Liu et al., 2025). Environmental mastery, meanwhile, reflects a person's ability to shape or adapt to their surroundings to achieve life satisfaction.

Life goals and personal growth represent the motivational aspects of psychological well-being. Having clear purposes allows individuals direction and meaning in life, while continuous self-development ensures ongoing fulfilment. Together, these components form a resilient psychological framework that supports happiness, adaptability, and long-term life satisfaction.

Methodology

This research employed an experimental method with a nonequivalent control group design (Hartono, 2019). The population in this research consisted of students in the Guidance and Counseling Study Program at STKIP Budidaya. The sampling process was conducted by first selecting 60 students who fell into the low-moderate category based on the variables of emotional regulation and psychological well-being. After that, the 60 chosen students were split into two groups. The sampling technique in this research was purposive sampling, a non-random sampling method in which the researcher selected specific individuals who matched the research objectives. There are two key considerations in determining the sample using this method: non-random sampling and identifying specific sample characteristics that align with the research objectives (Lenaini, 2021). The specific characteristics of the sample in this research are (1) active students enrolled in the Guidance and Counseling Study Program, (2) students currently in semesters 2 and 4, (3) individuals born between 1997 and 2021, and (4) those exhibiting a medium-low level of emotional regulation. Based on these characteristics, 60 samples were identified that met these special criteria, with 30 samples assigned to the experimental group and 30 samples to the control group.

The data collection instrument in this research consisted of an emotional regulation scale and a psychological well-being scale. Emotional regulation in this research was measured using the Emotion Regulation Questionnaire (ERQ), developed by James J. Gross and Oliver P. John (2003), which consists of 10 items that measure two strategies of emotional regulation: cognitive reappraisal and expressive suppression. This scale consists of 7 alternative answer choices starting from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). The reliability coefficient on the emotional regulation scale is $\alpha = 0.951$. The Psychological Well-Being Scale was measured using the Ryff Psychological Well-Being Scale (PWB), which has been adapted into Indonesian by Rachmayani and Ramdhani (2014). This subscale includes: 1. Autonomy, 2. Environmental Mastery, 3. Personal Growth, 4. Positive Relationships, 5. Purpose in Life, 6. Self-Acceptance:

with a total of 42 scale items. This scale consists of 6 answer choices, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 6 (strongly agree). The scale reliability coefficient is $\alpha = 0.9$. The data analysis technique used to test the hypothesis in this research was the T-test.

Students were given an emotional regulation scale in the form of a pretest to determine their level of emotional regulation. After obtaining low to moderate results, the participants were then divided into two groups: namely, 30 people in the experimental group and 30 people in the control group. The control group and the experimental group were given a pretest on the psychological well-being scale. Then, the experimental group received treatment in the form of digital journaling materials. The experimental group of students was observed for a week to document their digital journal entries, whereas the control group received no treatment. After one week, the experimental group and the control group were administered a posttest, consisting of an emotional regulation scale and a psychological well-being scale, to see the improvement in their emotional regulation and psychological well-being. The data analysis technique used to test the hypothesis in this research included the T-test and descriptive statistics, as analyzed using IBM SPSS version 25.

Findings

The findings suggest that digital journaling has a significant impact on improving emotional regulation among Generation Z participants. The use of digital tools, such as Canva, enables a more engaging and interactive journaling process, allowing individuals to express their emotions creatively. This digital medium helps reduce emotional suppression, encourages reflection, and promotes adaptive coping strategies that directly enhance emotional regulation capacities.

Another important finding is that writing in a journal regularly helps people manage their emotions and view themselves in a more positive light. Participants who engaged in digital journaling demonstrated increased awareness of their emotional states and exhibited more balanced emotional responses. This suggests that journaling serves as a therapeutic tool for emotional clarity, providing a structured platform for introspection and ultimately leading to enhanced emotional intelligence and self-acceptance.

The research also showed that digital journaling makes people more mentally strong. Participants who utilized journaling as part of their emotional regulation training displayed higher levels of optimism, adaptability, and perseverance in the face of challenges. Documenting emotions enables individuals to externalize and reframe negative experiences, thereby reducing psychological stress and enhancing mental resilience.

Finally, the results indicate that digital journaling could help Generation Z avoid mental health problems. The integration of technology in emotional management strategies aligns with the digital-native characteristics of this generation, making interventions more accessible and appealing. By leveraging digital journaling, educators and counsellors can develop sustainable programs that foster emotional awareness, psychological well-being, and overall mental health improvement. Based on the descriptive test, the following results were found.

Table 2. *Group statistics*

Group		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Emotional regulation	Control group	30	134.87	16.502	16.502
	Experimental group	30	145.70	12.717	12.717
Psychological well-being	Control group	30	32.50	5.015	5.015
	Experimental group	30	39.30	6.412	6.412

According to the descriptive statistical data above, each group consisted of 30 samples (N=30). There is a significant difference between the control group and the experimental group that received the digital journaling intervention. The emotional regulation variable in the experimental group showed a higher mean value (145.70) compared to the control group, which had a mean of 134.87. This mean difference of around 10.83 points indicates an increase in the experimental group in terms of implementing digital journaling compared to the control group. Similarly, for the psychological well-being variable, the experimental group, which used digital journaling and experienced an increase in emotional regulation, also had a higher mean (39.30) compared to the control group, whose mean was 32.50. This mean difference of around 6.80 points also indicates an increase in the experimental group compared to the control group. Furthermore, to confirm the results, a T-test was carried out, with the following results.

Table 3. *T-test*

		Independent sample test						
		T-test for equality of means					95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
		t	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Lower	Upper
Emotional regulation	Equal variances assumed	-2.848	58	.006	-10.833	3.804	-18.447	3.219
	Equal variances not assumed	-2.848	54.464	.006	-10.833	3.804	-18.458	3.209
Psychological well-being	Equal variances assumed	-4.575	58	.000	-6.800	1.486	-9.775	3.825
	Equal variances not assumed	-4.575	54.821	.000	-6.800	1.486	-9.779	3.821

The significance value of Levene's test for the equality of variance of the emotional regulation variable is 0.571, which is greater than 0.05. This indicates that the variance between the

control and experimental groups is homogeneous, meaning it is the same across both groups. Based on the table above, the Sig. (2-tailed) value is 0.006, which is greater than 0.05 in emotional regulation. According to the hypothesis testing criteria in the independent sample t-test, the results obtained indicate significant differences in the average emotional regulation between the control and experimental groups before and after the introduction of digital journalism.

Furthermore, the average difference between the control and experimental groups is calculated as $(145.70 - 134.87) = -1.605$. This value shows the average difference in emotional regulation between the two groups. Then, in the "Psychological Well-being Variable" column, the significance level is reported. The value of Levene's test for equality of variance is 0.093, which is greater than 0.05, indicating that the variance between the control and experimental groups is homogeneous, or the same (Gravetter & Wallnau, 2013).

Therefore, in this section, the Sig. (2-tailed) value is $0.000 < 0.05$. Based on the hypothesis testing criteria for the Independent Sample T-Test, this result indicates a significant difference in the average level of psychological well-being between the control and experimental groups. Thus, there is a difference in psychological well-being between the experimental and control groups before and after the implementation of digital journaling. Furthermore, the average difference between the control and experimental groups is calculated as $(32.50 - 39.30) = -6.80$. This value represents the difference in the average psychological well-being scores between the two groups.

Discussion

The data demonstrated that digital journaling led to an improvement in emotional regulation, which in turn led to an improvement in psychological well-being. This suggests that the better a person's emotional regulation, the higher their psychological well-being. Digital journaling is an effective method for enhancing emotional regulation and, consequently, improving psychological well-being in Generation Z.

This journaling method is one of the most widely used methods for releasing emotions and trauma, thus having a positive impact on mental health. Through this journaling method, it is hoped that Generation Z can recognize, accept, and validate their emotions, thereby healing themselves and becoming more positive individuals. This digital journaling method encourages individuals to write, thus releasing their emotions. The written expression of intense emotions can help individuals organize their thoughts and gain emotional clarity, which in turn reduces anxiety levels and psychological burden (Alim et al., 2025).

Journaling techniques assist individuals in regulating emotions and stress by offering a written medium for articulating thoughts and feelings. This activity helps reduce blood pressure, improve liver function, and enhance overall mental well-being. Through journaling training, individuals can develop deeper self-awareness, gain a better handle on their emotions, and discover new perspectives on problem-solving (Antonopoulou, 2024). Additionally, expressive writing has several goals, namely: a) changing attitudes and behavior, increasing creativity, memory, motivation, and various relationships between health and behavior; b) helping reduce the use of drugs containing chemicals; c) reducing the intensity of going to the

doctor or therapy; and d) improving social relationships with the community (Ardini et al., 2023).

Generation Z is a generation that is very close to technology; they use their gadgets more often than they write on paper. This is one of the factors underlying the research using the digital journaling method through the Canva application. By using Canva, Generation Z is more interested because they can design journals according to their wishes, combining images and art. Haertl and Ero-Phillips (2019) stated that writing by drawing can be a beneficial activity for everyone, as it allows us to directly express our emotions through this medium, which can aid in self-exploration and improve mental health. Writing also helps us understand our identities and those of others (Paramita & Tjandrawibawa, 2021). This digital journaling method is visually appealing and can be a cathartic way to release emotions. Lee and Lin (2020) suggested that using illustrations or visual elements in journals is crucial for supporting self-expression. Psychologically, engaging images or illustrations can enhance positive feelings, such as happiness, which can have a comforting effect on readers (Arini & Karnita, 2025).

The results of this research also found an increase in psychological well-being in the experimental group, who had experienced improved emotional regulation after receiving digital journaling training. Psychological well-being is closely related to emotional regulation; the better an individual's ability to regulate emotions, the better their psychological well-being. Individuals who can effectively regulate their emotions will find it easier to accept their abilities without insecurity, thereby fostering positive relationships with others. The more emotionally mature an individual is, the more able they are to be independent, adapt, determine their life goals, and actualize themselves, because emotionally mature individuals are better equipped to consider all aspects related to their decisions and achieve life goals.

This research aligns with Gunawan and Bintari (2021), who found that individuals who engage in cognitive reappraisal more frequently, such as expressing their emotions and adjusting their thought patterns to elicit more positive emotions, also experience increased psychological well-being. Another similar research, conducted by Savitri (2019), found that, in addition to FOMO (Fear of Missing Out), emotional regulation also influences the psychological well-being of early adult social media users. This research indicated that the better an individual's emotional regulation, the better their psychological well-being (Balzarotti et al., 2016). Another research linking emotional regulation and psychological well-being was conducted by Duri et al. (2021). They found that emotional regulation can influence psychological well-being because a person's ability to regulate their emotions is sometimes influenced by their thinking skills, which can be improved during individual development at certain stages. Several factors influence emotional regulation, including age and gender. Age is influential because the older an individual is, the better their ability to regulate their emotions. Gender influences emotional regulation because, in terms of how women and men manage their emotions, women tend to be more skilled at expressing anger and pride. In contrast, men tend to be better at expressing fear, sadness, and anxiety (Duri et al., 2024).

Conclusion

This research concludes that digital journaling is an effective approach to enhancing emotional regulation, which subsequently improves psychological well-being among members

of Generation Z. By utilizing digital platforms, such as Canva, participants can express their emotions creatively, engage in self-reflection, and develop greater emotional awareness. Through this process, individuals learn to manage their emotions constructively, reduce emotional suppression, and adopt adaptive coping strategies that contribute to mental resilience.

The statistical analysis revealed a substantial disparity between the experimental and control groups in terms of emotional regulation and psychological well-being. These results suggest that better emotional regulation is strongly linked to improved mental health. Therefore, for Generation Z, deeply connected to technology, digital journaling serves as an innovative, practical, and engaging intervention. By integrating digital tools into emotional management strategies, this method effectively supports mental health, fosters self-understanding, and enhances overall psychological well-being.

Based on the research findings, several recommendations are proposed:

- for educators and counsellors
Guidance and counselling institutions are encouraged to incorporate digital journaling activities as a part of emotional management training or classroom interventions. Regular monitoring and follow-up programs should be implemented to help students consistently engage in journaling practices that strengthen their emotional regulation and resilience.
- for generation z and generation alpha
Digital journaling should be promoted as an enjoyable and reflective method for managing emotions in everyday life. The use of creative platforms, such as Canva, enables individuals to personalize their journaling experience through visuals, text, and design, making emotional expression more meaningful and engaging.
- for future researchers
Future research is recommended to apply digital journaling to different populations or investigate its influence on other psychological variables, such as academic motivation, self-efficacy, or stress reduction. Longitudinal research designs could also provide valuable insights into the long-term effects of digital journaling on emotional regulation and psychological well-being.

Disclosure Statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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