

A Mixed Methods Approach to Understanding the Relation between Childhood Stressors and Perceived Self-Regulatory Abilities of Former Foster Care Youth in College

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Introduction

Abstract

Youth formerly in foster care are often at an increased risk for negative physical and psychological educational outcomes. They may experience stressors, or adverse childhood experiences (ACEs), such as maltreatment, neglect, or abuse that can further hinder their future success. Yet, there may still be a population of former foster care youth who are able to successfully self-regulate their learning despite the stressors they may have experienced in childhood. The main objective of the current mixed-method study is to explore the relationship between childhood stressors, and self-regulatory abilities of former foster care youth currently in college. Data was gathered using the Self-Regulation of Learning Self-Report Scale (SRL-SRS), Adverse Childhood Experiences Questionnaire (ACE-Q), and semi-structured interviews.

Aims of the Research

- ❖ Understand the lived experiences that inform how students’ who were formerly in foster care successfully self-regulate their learning in college
- ❖ Understand how former foster care youth can be successful in learning despite adverse childhood experiences they may have faced.

Research Questions

- ❖ How can students who have been in foster care self regulate in college?
- ❖ How do former foster care students with varying levels of childhood stressors report how they self-regulate their academic tasks in college?

Research Design

A mixed-methods design was used to examine how former foster care youth can still successfully self-regulate their learning despite previous stressors. Participants completed a Qualtrics survey comprised of demographic items, SRL-SRS, and ACE-Q. Additionally, participants who were purposefully selected based off their survey answers were invited to participate in a semi-structured interview.



References

Method

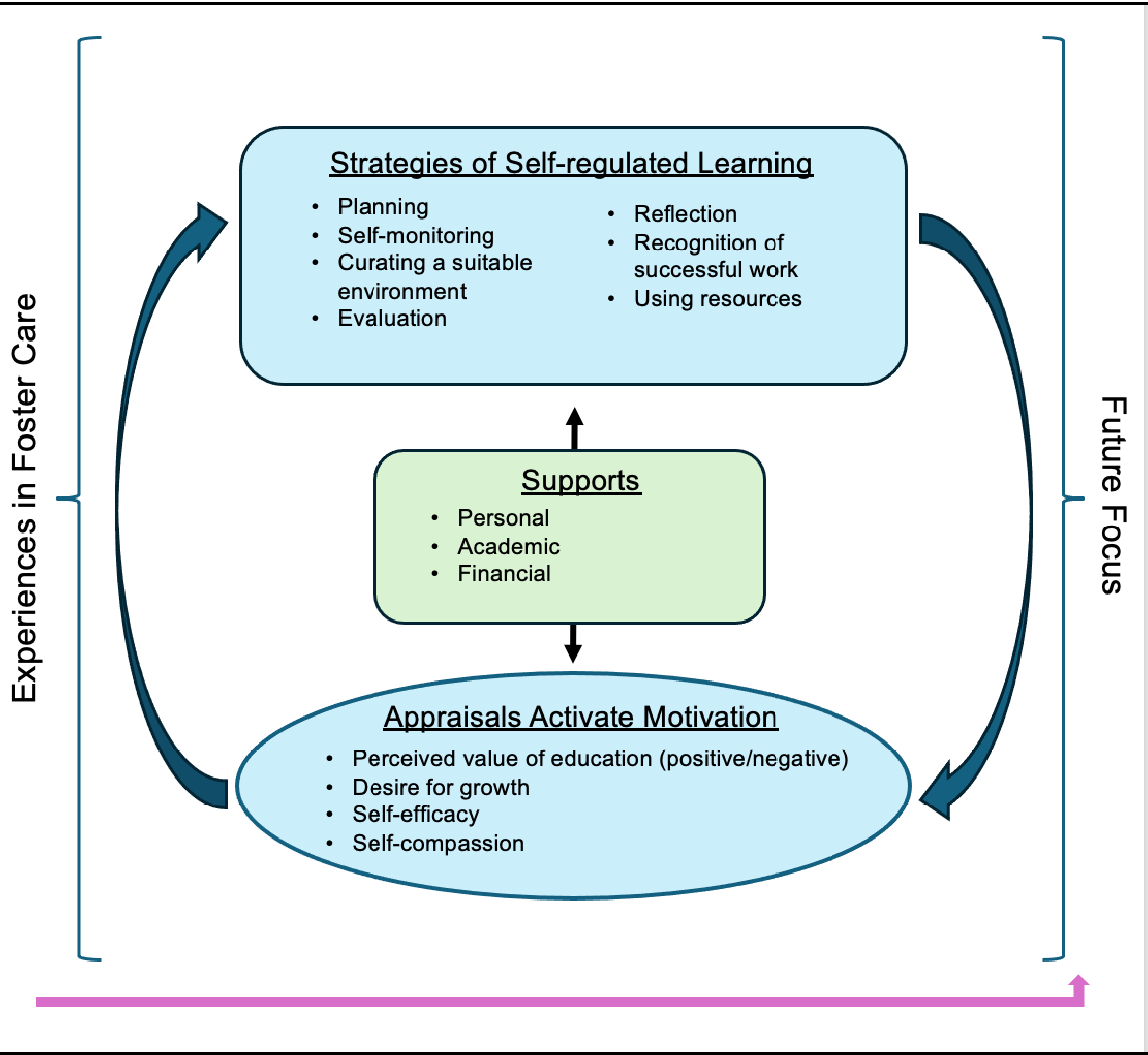
Participants

Participants (n=5) were recruited using specific criteria: 18 years or older, formerly in foster care, and a current university/college undergraduate in Florida. Students were primarily recruited through contacting Positive Pathways campus liaisons, a program unique to former foster care students in Florida. Students not formerly in foster care were excluded from the study.

Data Collection and Analysis

Data obtained from the Qualtrics survey were used to identify profiles of interest. By completing the survey and signing their name/email, participants agreed to be invited for an interview. Interviews were conducted over Zoom or phone at the preference of the participants. Interviews did not last longer than an hour, and no more than 10 participants were invited to interview. Following the interviews, transcripts were cleaned and anonymized, using pseudonyms to protect participant identity. Transcripts were analyzed by hand using open and axial coding, and a codebook was created.

Grounded Theory Model



Findings

Conclusions

The grounded theory model explains what drives the motivation of students with a history in foster care. Experiences in foster care serve as the base of students’ motivation – reminders of that experience persist over time, informing their future focus. Those previously in foster care may be reminded of their childhood, and desire to cultivate a future that is the opposite. Students’ future focus is then what drives their motivation. Within experiences in foster care and future focus is the cycle of motivation. Students’ appraisal of a task influences the strategies they use to regulate their learning, which in turn reinforces their appraisals. Supports not only influence strategies used to self-regulate learning but also influence the way students appraise academic situations. A major support unique to those in Florida with a foster care history is waived tuition until the age of 28. As the cycle continues, motivation is activated by appraisals and subsequent implementation of regulatory strategies. This cycle suggests that being in foster care is not necessarily a negative, but rather, a catalyst for future success.

Discussion

A methodological strength of the mixed-methods design is the use of purposive sampling. Selecting participants based on specific characteristics allows for the sample to best match the research objectives. At the same time, the lack of randomization limit the generalizability of the results to a broader population. As a result, there may be a threat to the external validity of the quantitative portion of the study. Further, the lack of prolonged engagement may pose a risk to the credibility of the study.

Implications & Future Directions

Findings from this study may directly benefit those who work with students with a history in foster care, such as administrators, professors, and program staff at colleges/universities. Additionally, findings may be useful to those who support youth in foster care at the welfare level, such as foster parents, caseworkers, and guardian ad litem.

Future directions include using a larger sample size as well as recruiting participants outside the state of Florida. Future directions could also include evaluation of programs in place in colleges & universities designed to support students with a history in foster care.