

Emotion Regulation Strategies and Academic Resilience in First-Generation University Students

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Abstract— *First-generation university students often navigate academic transitions without the informal guidance available to peers with college-educated parents, potentially increasing reliance on individual emotion regulation strategies to manage academic stress and setbacks. This study examines the relationship between specific emotion regulation strategies and academic resilience among first-generation undergraduate students across their first two years of study. Using a longitudinal survey design combined with academic performance records, we assess how strategies including cognitive reappraisal, expressive suppression, and active problem-focused coping relate to persistence through academically challenging periods such as failed assessments or probationary status. Findings indicate that cognitive reappraisal was consistently associated with stronger academic resilience, while expressive suppression showed a weak negative association that became more pronounced among students reporting limited peer support networks. Problem-focused coping strategies were most protective when paired with awareness of available institutional support resources, suggesting that regulation strategy effectiveness depends partly on students' knowledge of support infrastructure rather than strategy choice alone. These findings support targeted resilience-building interventions for first-generation students that combine emotion regulation skill development with explicit orientation to institutional support systems, rather than treating these as separate intervention domains.*

Index Terms— *emotion regulation, academic resilience, first-generation students, higher education, coping strategies*

I. INTRODUCTION

First-generation university students frequently navigate academic transitions without the informal guidance available to peers whose parents attended college, a gap that may increase reliance on individual coping and emotion regulation strategies during academic setbacks [1]. Academic resilience, the capacity to persist through failed assessments or probationary periods, has been linked to emotion regulation capacity in broader student populations [2].

Cognitive reappraisal and expressive suppression represent contrasting regulation strategies with divergent associations to wellbeing outcomes in prior research, yet their specific relevance to academic persistence among first-generation students remains underexamined [3]. Institutional support awareness may further moderate the effectiveness of problem-focused coping strategies [4].

This study examines the relationship between emotion regulation strategies and academic resilience among first-

generation undergraduates across their first two years, using longitudinal survey data combined with academic performance records.

II. RELATED WORK

The process model of emotion regulation distinguishes antecedent-focused strategies such as cognitive reappraisal from response-focused strategies such as expressive suppression, with reappraisal generally associated with more favorable psychological outcomes across general populations. Research specific to first-generation students has focused primarily on financial and cultural capital barriers, with comparatively less attention to individual-level emotion regulation processes during academically challenging periods. Complementary evidence from adjacent literature further situates these dynamics within the broader field [5]. Related methodological precedents also inform the analytical choices adopted here [6].

III. METHODOLOGY

A longitudinal survey design tracked emotion regulation strategy use among first-generation undergraduates across four semesters, linked to institutional academic performance records including course failures and probationary status.

A. Resilience Trajectory Analysis

Academic resilience was operationalized as successful continuation following a documented setback event, and multi-level regression models tested associations between regulation strategy scores and resilience outcomes, incorporating peer support network measures and institutional support resource awareness as moderating variables.

IV. RESULTS

Table 1 summarizes resilience associations for each regulation strategy, stratified by institutional support awareness level.

Problem-focused coping showed the largest resilience association specifically among students reporting high awareness of institutional support resources.

V. DISCUSSION

Cognitive reappraisal's consistent positive association with resilience aligns with broader emotion regulation literature, while the amplification of expressive suppression's negative

Table 1. Regulation strategy association with academic resilience

Strategy	Overall Association	High Support Awareness	Low Support Awareness
Cognitive reappraisal	Strong positive	Strong positive	Moderate positive
Expressive suppression	Weak negative	Weak negative	Moderate negative
Problem-focused coping	Moderate positive	Strong positive	Weak positive

effect among students with limited peer support suggests that social context shapes the psychological cost of suppression. The dependence of problem-focused coping's benefit on support resource awareness indicates that regulation strategy effectiveness cannot be understood independently of students' knowledge of available institutional infrastructure, pointing toward combined intervention approaches rather than emotion regulation training alone.

VI. CONCLUSION

Resilience-building interventions for first-generation students should integrate emotion regulation skill development with explicit orientation to institutional support systems rather than treating these as separate intervention domains. Future research should test combined intervention designs against single-component alternatives to establish relative effectiveness.

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