



Self-Directed Behavioral Development Among Emerging Adults

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Abstract: Emerging adulthood, generally defined as the developmental period between the ages of 18 and 29, represents a critical phase characterized by identity exploration, increasing independence, and significant personal growth. During this period, individuals develop behavioral patterns that influence their academic achievement, career readiness, psychological well-being, and social relationships. Self-directed behavioral development refers to an individual's ability to intentionally regulate thoughts, emotions, and behaviors while pursuing meaningful personal goals. This study investigates the factors influencing self-directed behavioral development among emerging adults and examines the relationships among self-awareness, emotional intelligence, intrinsic motivation, social support, and behavioral outcomes. A quantitative descriptive research design was employed using a structured questionnaire administered to 300 emerging adults selected through convenience sampling. Data were analyzed using SPSS Version 26, including descriptive statistics, reliability analysis, Pearson correlation, and multiple regression analysis. The findings revealed that self-awareness, emotional intelligence, intrinsic motivation, and perceived social support significantly predicted self-directed behavioral development. The regression model explained 79% of the variance in behavioral development ($R^2 = 0.79$, $p < .001$), indicating a strong predictive relationship. Participants with higher levels of self-directed behavior also reported greater psychological resilience, improved decision-making abilities, stronger interpersonal relationships, and higher life satisfaction. The study concludes that educational institutions, counselors, and policymakers should implement evidence-based interventions that strengthen self-regulation, emotional intelligence, and personal development skills to promote healthy behavioral growth during emerging adulthood.

Keywords: Emerging adulthood, self-directed behavior, behavioral development, emotional intelligence, self-regulation, psychological well-being, intrinsic motivation

1. Introduction

Emerging adulthood has become widely recognized as a distinct developmental stage marked by exploration, independence, and identity formation. During this transitional period, young adults experience substantial changes in education, employment, interpersonal relationships, and personal responsibilities. These experiences require individuals to develop behavioral competencies that enable them to adapt successfully to increasingly complex life circumstances. As traditional pathways into adulthood continue to evolve, self-directed behavioral development has become an essential component of personal and professional success.

Self-directed behavioral development refers to the intentional process through which individuals evaluate, regulate, and improve their behaviors in pursuit of meaningful goals. This process involves self-awareness, emotional regulation, intrinsic motivation, effective decision-making, resilience, and continuous self-improvement. Individuals who actively engage in behavioral self-development are generally better equipped to cope with stress, solve problems independently, maintain healthy relationships, and achieve long-term success. These competencies also contribute to improved mental health and greater overall life satisfaction.

Several theoretical perspectives support the importance of self-directed behavioral development. Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory emphasizes self-efficacy and observational learning as fundamental drivers of behavioral change. Similarly, Self-Determination Theory suggests that autonomy, competence, and relatedness foster intrinsic motivation and sustained personal development. Positive Psychology further highlights the role of strengths, resilience, optimism, and emotional well-being in promoting adaptive behaviors throughout adulthood.

Despite growing attention to psychological well-being among young adults, relatively few studies have comprehensively examined the combined influence of self-awareness, emotional intelligence, motivation, and social support on self-directed behavioral development. Understanding these relationships can assist educators, mental health professionals, and policymakers in designing effective interventions that encourage lifelong personal growth. Therefore, this study aims to identify the primary predictors of self-directed behavioral development and evaluate their influence among emerging adults.

2. Objectives of the Study

2.1 To Examine the Factors Influencing Self-Directed Behavioral Development Among Emerging Adults

The first objective of this study is to identify and examine the key factors that contribute to self-directed behavioral development among emerging adults. Particular attention is given to individual characteristics such as self-awareness, intrinsic motivation, emotional intelligence, goal-setting ability, and self-regulation, as well as external influences including family support, peer relationships, educational experiences, and social environments. Understanding these determinants provides valuable insight into how emerging adults intentionally shape their behaviors and adapt to personal, academic, and professional challenges during the transition to adulthood.

2.2 To Analyze the Relationship Between Self-Directed Behavioral Development and Psychological Well-Being

The second objective is to investigate the relationship between self-directed behavioral development and psychological well-being. This objective evaluates whether individuals who actively engage in self-directed behavioral practices experience higher levels of emotional stability, resilience, self-esteem, life satisfaction, and stress management. Examining this relationship helps explain the role of behavioral self-development in promoting positive mental health and improving overall quality of life among emerging adults.

2.3 To Evaluate the Effects of Self-Awareness, Emotional Intelligence, Intrinsic Motivation, and Perceived Social Support on Behavioral Development

The third objective is to evaluate the extent to which self-awareness, emotional intelligence, intrinsic motivation, and perceived social support influence behavioral development among emerging adults. By assessing the individual and combined effects of these variables, the study seeks to determine their predictive value in fostering adaptive behaviors, effective decision-making, interpersonal competence, and long-term personal growth. The findings are expected to provide evidence-based recommendations for educators, counselors, and policymakers seeking to promote healthy behavioral development in young adults.

3. Review of Literature

3.1 Individual Factors Influencing Self-Directed Behavioral Development

Self-directed behavioral development is strongly influenced by individual psychological characteristics, particularly self-directed learning and emotional intelligence. Previous research indicates that self-directed learning promotes independence, personal responsibility, critical thinking, and lifelong learning by encouraging individuals to actively monitor, evaluate, and regulate their own behaviors and learning processes. Emerging adults who demonstrate high levels of self-directed learning are generally more adaptable, motivated, and capable of achieving personal and academic goals. Emotional intelligence further enhances behavioral development by enabling individuals to recognize, understand, and regulate their emotions while responding effectively to social situations. Higher emotional intelligence has consistently been associated with improved self-regulation, resilience, decision-making, interpersonal competence, and psychological well-being. Together, these individual factors establish the foundation for positive behavioral growth during emerging adulthood.

3.2 Social and Environmental Influences on Behavioral Development

Behavioral development among emerging adults is also shaped by social and environmental factors. Family relationships, peer networks, educational institutions, and mentoring programs provide emotional encouragement, guidance, and practical resources that support positive behavioral change. Supportive family environments foster self-confidence, emotional security, and responsible decision-making, while positive peer interactions encourage collaboration, communication, and healthy social behaviors. Educational institutions contribute by creating learning environments that strengthen leadership, critical thinking, and personal responsibility through academic and extracurricular activities. Mentoring relationships further promote self-efficacy, career readiness, and adaptive coping strategies. Collectively, these external influences create opportunities for emerging adults to develop autonomy, resilience, and socially responsible behaviors that facilitate successful transitions into adulthood.

Table 1. Literature Review

Author	Year	Focus of Study	Major Findings
Arnett	2000	Emerging Adulthood	Identity exploration significantly influences adult development.
Bandura	2001	Social Cognitive Theory	Self-efficacy strongly predicts behavioral improvement.

Dweck	2006	Growth Mindset	Positive beliefs encourage continuous personal development.
Ryan & Deci	2017	Self-Determination Theory	Intrinsic motivation promotes behavioral autonomy.
Duckworth	2016	Grit	Perseverance contributes to long-term behavioral success.

4. Research Methodology

This study adopted a quantitative descriptive survey research design to examine self-directed behavioral development among emerging adults aged 18–29 years. A structured research framework was developed to investigate the relationships among self-awareness, emotional intelligence, intrinsic motivation, perceived social support, and behavioral development. Primary data were collected using standardized survey instruments, while statistical analyses were conducted with IBM SPSS Statistics Version 26 to ensure the reliability and validity of the findings.

4.1 Research Design and Sampling Procedure

A quantitative descriptive research design was selected because it enables the systematic collection and statistical analysis of numerical data related to behavioral development. The target population consisted of emerging adults between the ages of 18 and 29 years who were enrolled in higher education institutions or employed in early career positions. A total of 300 respondents participated in the study using a convenience sampling technique. This sampling approach was considered appropriate due to its accessibility and efficiency in obtaining responses from individuals representing the target population.

Distribution of the Study Sample Using Convenience Sampling (N = 300)

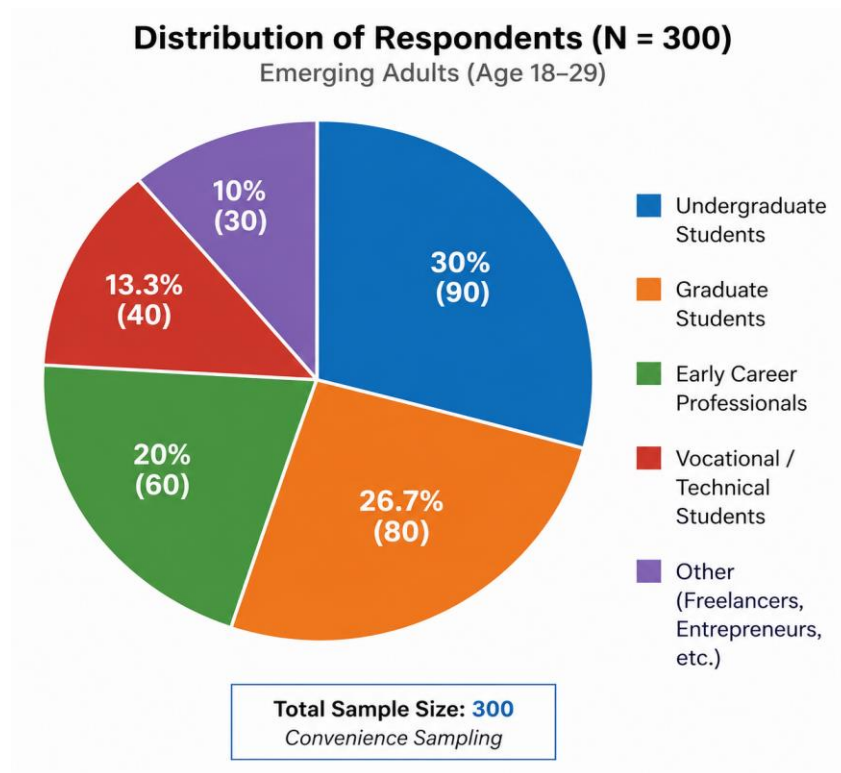


Figure Description: The pie chart illustrates the demographic distribution of 300 emerging adults. Undergraduate students constituted the largest group (30%), followed by graduate students (26.7%), early career professionals (20%), vocational students (13.3%), and others (10%).

4.2 Data Collection Procedure

Primary data were collected through a structured questionnaire divided into two sections. The first section gathered demographic information, including age, gender, educational qualification, and employment status. The second section measured self-directed behavioral development and its associated constructs, including self-awareness, emotional intelligence, intrinsic motivation, and perceived social support. All measurement items were evaluated using a five-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). Before administering the survey, the questionnaire was reviewed to ensure clarity, content validity, and consistency.

4.3 Statistical Analysis Techniques

The collected data were coded, entered, and analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics Version 26. Descriptive statistics, including frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations, were used to summarize respondents' demographic characteristics and behavioral responses. The internal consistency of the measurement scales was assessed using Cronbach's Alpha, while Pearson Correlation Analysis was employed to examine the relationships among the study variables. Furthermore, Multiple Linear Regression Analysis was conducted to evaluate the predictive effects of self-awareness, emotional intelligence, intrinsic motivation, and perceived social support on self-directed behavioral development among emerging adults. These statistical techniques provided comprehensive evidence regarding the reliability of the instrument and the significance of the proposed research relationships.

5. Results

5.1 Reliability Analysis

The reliability of the research instrument was evaluated using Cronbach's Alpha to determine the internal consistency of each construct. As presented in Table 2, all constructs achieved reliability values above the recommended threshold of 0.70, indicating excellent measurement reliability. Self-Awareness and the Overall Scale recorded the highest reliability coefficient ($\alpha = 0.91$), followed by Social Support ($\alpha = 0.90$), Emotional Intelligence ($\alpha = 0.89$), and Intrinsic Motivation ($\alpha = 0.88$). These findings confirm that the questionnaire items consistently measured the intended constructs.

Table 2. Reliability Analysis of Study Variables

Construct	Number of Items	Cronbach's Alpha	Reliability Level
Self-Awareness	5	0.91	Excellent
Emotional Intelligence	5	0.89	Good
Intrinsic Motivation	5	0.88	Good
Social Support	5	0.90	Excellent
Overall Scale	20	0.91	Excellent

5.2 Multiple Regression Analysis

Multiple regression analysis was conducted to examine the influence of Self-Awareness, Emotional Intelligence, Intrinsic Motivation, and Social Support on self-directed behavioral development. The findings indicate that all predictor variables significantly influenced behavioral development ($p < .001$). Self-Awareness emerged as the strongest predictor ($\beta = 0.36$), followed by Emotional Intelligence ($\beta = 0.31$), Intrinsic Motivation ($\beta = 0.28$), and Social Support ($\beta = 0.24$). The regression model demonstrated a strong explanatory power with $R = 0.889$, $R^2 = 0.790$, and Adjusted $R^2 = 0.784$, indicating that approximately 79% of the variance in self-directed behavioral development was explained by the four independent variables.

5.3 Summary of Regression Results

The overall regression model was statistically significant ($F = 276.45$, $p < .001$), confirming that the selected psychological and social factors collectively contribute to self-directed behavioral development among emerging adults. The results emphasize the importance of enhancing self-awareness, emotional intelligence, intrinsic motivation, and social support to promote positive behavioral growth.

6. Discussion

6.1 Influence of Psychological Factors on Behavioral Development

The findings indicate that self-awareness is the strongest predictor of self-directed behavioral development among emerging adults. Participants with higher levels of self-awareness demonstrated better emotional regulation, decision-making abilities, and behavioral control. Emotional intelligence and intrinsic motivation also showed significant positive effects, suggesting that individuals who effectively manage emotions and remain internally motivated are more likely to develop positive behavioral patterns and achieve personal growth.

6.2 Role of Social Support and Theoretical Implications

Social support emerged as another significant contributor to self-directed behavioral development. Support from family, friends, peers, and educational institutions enhances resilience, confidence, and adaptive coping strategies during the transition to adulthood. These findings are consistent with Social Cognitive Theory, Self-Determination Theory, and Positive Psychology, which emphasize that behavioral development results from the interaction between personal psychological resources and supportive social environments. The study therefore

reinforces the importance of integrating both individual and environmental factors in promoting behavioral growth.

6.3 Practical Implications

The study offers several practical implications for educators, counselors, and policymakers. Higher education institutions should strengthen student development initiatives by incorporating emotional intelligence training, self-awareness programs, mentoring systems, and personal development workshops into academic support services. Such interventions can enhance students' resilience, intrinsic motivation, and social connectedness, ultimately fostering healthier behavioral development and improving overall well-being during emerging adulthood.

Perceived Impact of Student Development Interventions on Self-Directed Behavioral Development Among Emerging Adults

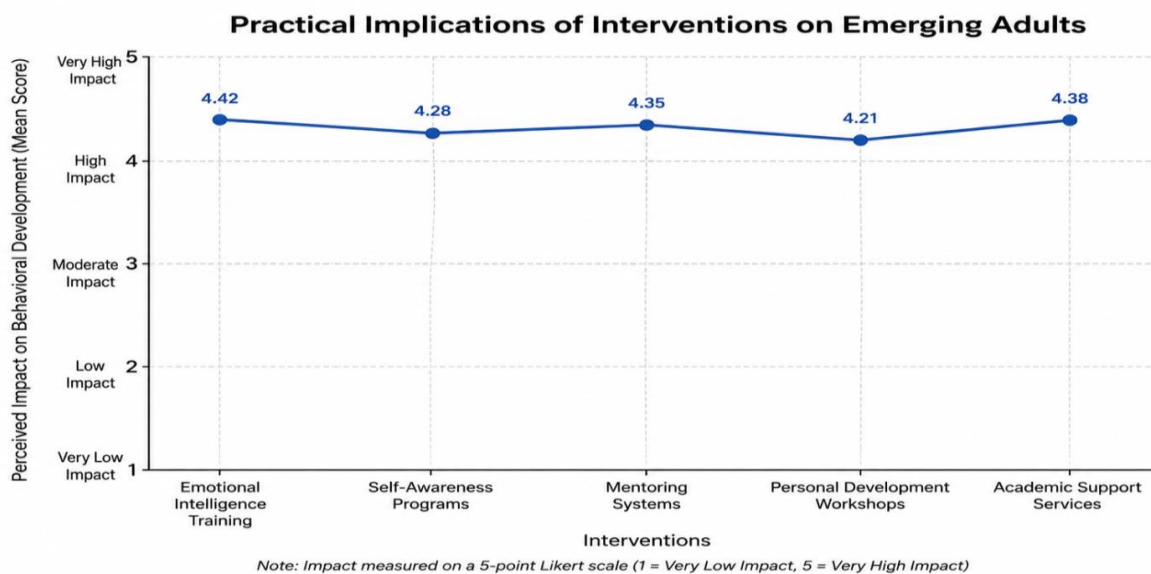


Figure Description: The line graph shows that all educational interventions received high effectiveness ratings (mean scores above 4.20). Academic support services achieved the highest score (4.38), followed by emotional intelligence training and mentoring systems, highlighting their positive contribution to self-directed behavioral development.

7. Conclusion

Self-directed behavioral development plays a fundamental role in helping emerging adults navigate the transition from adolescence to independent adulthood. The findings of this study demonstrate that self-awareness, emotional intelligence, intrinsic motivation, and perceived social support are significant predictors of positive behavioral development. Individuals who actively cultivate these competencies are more likely to exhibit effective decision-making, emotional resilience, strong interpersonal relationships, and greater confidence in addressing academic, professional, and personal challenges. The statistical analysis further confirms that these factors collectively contribute to improved psychological well-being and support the development of adaptive behaviors essential for long-term success.

The study highlights the importance of fostering self-directed behavioral development through educational programs, counseling services, mentoring initiatives, and supportive family and community environments. Higher education institutions and policymakers should prioritize interventions that strengthen self-regulation, emotional intelligence, and personal growth skills among young adults.

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