

Academic Interventions for Children in Foster Care in the Professional Literature

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Citation: Carpenter-Aeby T, Aeby VG, Cooper A, Kellam C, Salter L (2017) Academic Interventions for Children in Foster Care in the Professional Literature. Acta Psychopathol Vol. 3 No.5:69

Abstract

The purpose of this systematic literature review is to determine the number of articles and provide a summary of the academic needs of youth in foster care, to explore the barriers those children and caregivers face within the educational system and to highlight successful interventions. The method section illustrates the specific steps in conducting a systematic literature review utilizing the "Cochrane Methodology" to identify interventions that promote academic success in foster children. The aim of this literature review is to provide the number of articles and themes of current literature that focuses on the academic needs of youth in foster care and potential interventions. Thirty of 474 studies met the criteria of the systematic review. Three major themes emerged, educational programming tailored to children in foster care, foster parent engagement, and team approaches to working with children and their foster parents. While the professional literature identifies a number of interventions that have been developed, those interventions may not be appropriate for small, rural school settings.

Keywords: Foster care; Academic success; Interventions; Higher education

Received: September 08, 2017; **Accepted:** October 05, 2017; **Published:** October 13, 2017

Introduction to the Problem

Children in foster care tend to have substantially lower school achievements and educational attainments than peers growing up in their own families [1-6]. The consequences of youth not completing their education or not moving on to higher education are far reaching, impacting their ability to obtain and maintain employment, obtain affordable housing and impacting their ability to move forward without government assistance. For example, each year in North Carolina approximately 125,100 children are involved in investigations of possible abuse, neglect and dependency. Of those children, approximately 4,800 children enter foster care each year [7,8]. Another 32% of school age youth living in foster care receive special education programming, compared to 14% of students receiving special education services who are not in foster care [9-11].

While the literature offers a limited view of academic struggles among foster care children, there are little data regarding outcomes and effectiveness. In order to gain more positive outcomes, the importance of understanding the educational needs of children in care should be emphasized. Information available regarding practice recommendations suggests attention

to existing academic deficits, ensuring stability and security and responding sensitively to social and cultural differences are other important aspects of practice that should be held in high priority when promoting academic success with children in foster care [12-14].

For many youth in foster care life is one stressor after another. Often, they are removed from the only home they have ever known, sometimes with only minutes to put their possessions into a plastic bag. They are not only separated from their parents, but often their siblings and their family pets. In a study comparing school transition, researchers found that maltreated foster children might exhibit differences in school adjustment compared to other children [15]. For example, children that are maltreated in the foster care system have a lower affective and cognitive school engagement than other children in the community [16]. Children with a history of maltreatment including placement into foster care have an elevated risk of poor psychosocial outcomes including school failure, substance abuse and deviant peer association [17,18].

Negative outcomes for adults who have aged out of the foster care system are staggering. National statistics report that half of all children and youth in foster care drop out of school, 25% are

homeless 18 months after emancipating and one third become public welfare recipients [19]. Twice as many foster care youth repeat grades as non-foster youth. Sawyer and Dubowitz found 45% of their sample had experienced grade retention, with a higher number of older ages and at advanced grades. What is more, 63% of adolescents had repeated grades [20].

Many articles report that behavioral issues in school, resulting in disciplinary actions are common for youth in foster care. Behavioral and relationship functioning are often problematic for children in foster care. During the first several months of placement, problems tend to persist or worsen, which may increase the risk of placement disruption. Because children are reliant on their caregivers for self-control, disruptions and inconsistencies in the early caregiving environment, such as maltreatment and foster placement, are likely to have deleterious effects on later inhibitory control [21,22]. The need for interventions for youth placed out of the home is clear. Some interventions that have been researched include personal education plans, tutoring and mentoring, staff development and educational tools provided to the foster care parents. Utilizing these tools within appropriate time frames will ultimately be key in addressing the needs of the youth in foster care.

When reviewing the literature, it is apparent that there may be scholarly information that detail academic interventions for children in foster care. Children who have been placed out of their home for reasons of abuse and neglect are of the most academically neglected group within the school system. "Education systems have increased their capacity over time for including families and providing youth with fair, equitable and significant educational opportunities in order to obtain a high quality education" [23]. Many macro-systems must work together to provide the highest quality of care to the children who are the most vulnerable throughout our country. Pears et al. [24] stated, "If effective interventions to improve school engagement in children in foster care can be developed, they could hold great potential for improving the long term trajectories of these vulnerable children" [25].

Other studies provide effective interventions that have been proven to assist children in foster care with decreasing grade retention and improving academic standards. Typically, foster children have lower school performance than peers with similar cognitive capacity [24,26]. Considerably fewer children in foster care go on to secondary and post-secondary education compared to peers with the same cognitive capacity level. There is a strong connection between foster children's poor school achievements and unfavorable outcomes later in life. This is especially true for children who spent a third of their formative years placed in foster care [26,27]. Children in foster care have a more difficult time in school than their peers, tending to experience higher rates of suspension, retention, special education classes and lower achievement. They are also less likely to graduate from high school [27]. School mobility is also cited as a possible indicator of poor academic outcomes for children. Children who have been removed from their home often times are placed outside of their home communities, which, in turn, means a change in school. When school mobility [28] becomes an issue for children in foster

care, there is often a slow transition with school enrollment and transfer of records. During this time, children lose critical academic instruction time, which only further delays academic gains

The purpose of this review was to complete an exploratory study to determine how many articles existed about the academic interventions that are available to foster children. Not much research has been done to effectively implement the interventions and outcomes. The research team identified the problems related to academic success for children and youth placed in foster care and identified interventions and strategies that can promote academic success. After analyzing and assessing the results from the systematic literature review, common themes emerged. The results indicated that there were many existing interventions for academic success with children in foster care. However, there appeared to be little follow up in determining if the interventions utilized rendered successful outcomes and were effective over a significant period of time.

Methods

A systematic literature review (SLR) was used to identify the number of articles (**Table 1**) that met the criteria shown in **Figure 1** relating to academic success among children in foster care. Three Masters of Social Work research students The research team began the systematic search using a university library databases (ERIC, PsychINFO, Social Work Abstract, Social Work Index, Academic Search Complete and PsychARTICLES) then limited the article selection using peer reviewed articles published from 2005-2015 with the specific key words, *academic interventions* and *foster children* (**Table 2**). Articles that met the criteria illustrated in **Figure 1** were critiqued using a literature review sheet, which included citations, quotes, key points, and how the article related to the key words. The three research students were trained in creating and examining the literature review sheets. They assessed the number, quality and themes of the articles that met the criteria of the systematic literature review regarding successful academic interventions and foster children. Based on the information found in the literature review sheets, the researchers categorized the articles by *quality of content*, placing more emphasis on the articles that were written from a social work perspective. To determine inclusion in the study, each team member reviewed the literature review sheet with at least two of the three researchers concurring that the article met the study criteria. The research team focused on articles based on the social work perspective and expertise.

Results

The research team determined that 30 articles met the criteria and were selected for review to determine themes shown in **Figure 1**. **Table 1** presents the articles (n=30) that were included in the study. These articles described several interventions have demonstrated promise in assisting children in foster care to increase the academic success with children who are placed in foster care. There were three themes that emerged from a content analysis of the titles, abstracts, and intervention sheets for the articles (n=30). The following three interventions have

Table 1 Literature review matrix for the systematic literature review outcomes (n=30).

	Study	N	Activities	Research Design	Measures	Statistical Analysis	Outcomes
1	Early School Engagement and late Elementary Outcomes for Maltreated Children in Foster Care	N=177	2 phases: phase 1 began when the children were between the ages of 3 and 6 and continued for 24 months; phase 2 the children were in grades 3,4,5 and were assessed every 6 months for 4 assessment periods	Quasi-experimental Independent group comparison	Group Status, School Engagement, Behavioral Engagement, Affective Engagement, Cognitive Engagement, Late Elementary school outcomes, academic competence, risk behaviors, endorsement of substance abuse, externalizing behaviors, deviant peer association child gender	Group differences in early school engagement variables between FC and CC were examined using independent t tests; the associations between dimensions of early school engagement and late elementary outcomes were examined with correlational analyses and SEM	Correlational analyses, multivariate analyses
2	A systematic review of interventions to support looked-after children in school	N=11	Interventions targeted at children aged 10-15 in mainstream school who were placed outside their families by authorities; Interventions had to support the attainment or improve the attendance of looked-after children and be delivered to caregivers, children or professionals	11 studies that filled the criteria of this review, 6 were before-after evaluations without a comparison, 4 were policy evaluations of implementation processes or outcomes, and 1 was a before-after study with a non-equivalent comparison group	Final year exams, exclusion numbers, attendance numbers, literacy and numeracy	Studies has to have made attempts at measuring outcomes at baseline and follow up; from the content of these interventions six categories emerged: strategic interventions, pilot interventions of spending targeted money, residential school, community project, reading encouragement and tutoring	Findings are indications of promising interventions rather than evidence of effect; 9 of the studies were pilot evaluations of a newly developed program; this indicates that the development of programs is still in its early stages despite long-standing concern for the education of this group
3	Improving Educational Outcomes in Foster Children and Youths in Foster Care	N=185	Evaluating policy and practice responses	Reviewing evidenced based interventions	HighScope Perry Preschool program, Attachment and Biobehavioral Catch-Up program, Read 180 and Successmaker, mentoring programs such as Big Brother/ Big Sister, ALAS, Twelve together, Check & Connect	Use programs identified to work with foster children, use the recommendations to build programs at the mezzo and macro levels to enhance community-building efforts for all students	Early direct practice efforts with 0-5 year olds to macro interventions emphasizing collaborations between schools and CPS, efforts to improve educational outcomes for children and youth in foster care must continue to be pursued

4	Family case study of Multidimensional family therapy (MDFT) on adolescent substance abuser	N=1	Year long weekly therapy session alternating individual session with substance abuser and family	Foster Father Foster Mother Twin Siblings; daughter son (substance abuser)	Reduced substance abuse, weekly drug screens; notable increase in academic performance, weekly report cards from school; self-reported increase in self-esteem	Clear drug screens, went from grades of F and D to C grades, Self reported increased self-worth	Family therapeutic approach builds on core principles of MDFT can be effective with even the most severe and complex cases of adolescent substance abuse.
5	Preventing the School-Justice Connection for Youth in Foster Care			Foster children, juvenile justice system, criminal system, school system	To succeed in school, foster children must have experiences that promote educational success. These experiences must target extra supports, fair discipline and integrated by multiple agencies.	Programs must be tailored to the needs of foster children to include mentoring and tutoring programs through the school community, disciplinary policies and educational supports.	Identify practices and interventions that improve foster children's experiences in school; strategies are aimed at preventing behavior issues and identifying poor social and academic experiences that crossover from juvenile justice and the criminal system.
6	The Effectiveness of Multidimensional Treatment Foster Care for Preschoolers (MTFC-P) for Young Children with Severe Behavioral Disturbances: Study Protocol for a Randomized Controlled Trial	N=80	Nine month time period, weekly therapeutic playgroup with a skilled trainer, foster parents participate in weekly group meetings and home visits	Foster children ages 3 to 7 years that have been referred to the Academic Center for Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, 80 foster parents	Child Behavior Checklist, Teacher Report Form, Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire, Parent Daily Report	The program suggests promising outcomes, with fewer behavior problems with foster children.	The program aims to provide children with a positive and stimulating foster family setting with individually tailored behavioral interventions.
7	Improving Foster Children's School Achievements	N=25	Placement for foster children that is likely to last longer than 2 years	Foster children ages 7 to 11 years,	Psychological assessment including cognitive ability, WISC-III, VMI, Beck Young people Inventories, Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire, Visual Analogue Scale	Foster children tend to have lower test scores and overall lower level of education. Tutoring, individual education plan and additional training to foster parents are some interventions to help improve academic scores.	After 2 years, significant improvements with IQ scores, reading and spelling tests were noted. However, there was a noted decline in numeracy skills.

8	Using research and outcome data to improve educational services and supports for young people in care: A case study of a local children's aid society in Ontario	N=92	2009 and 2011 FCS Waterloo organized data review days for youth in care, staff, foster parents and community partners to review local data and discuss the results	staff from community mental health and counseling agencies, school board personnel, residential care providers and neighboring child welfare staff were in attendance along with front line staff, management, foster parents and youth in care	data from the 40 Developmental Asset profile and the Strengths and Difficulty Questionnaire, both of which are imbedded in the AAR-C2-2010.	Educational achievement has a significant impact on numerous key outcomes for children including future career success and quality of life	The AAR, practitioners and caregiver gain valuable knowledge about a child's strengths and needs. This can allow for planning on an individual level to meet the child's needs and facilitate healthy development.
9	Treatment Foster Care for Improving Outcomes in Children and Young People:A Systematic Review	N=390	A systematic review	5 studies		Analyses were based on available data for all included studies relevant to comparison and outcome of interest	Looked-after child outcomes, treatment foster caregiver/ caregivers/family outcomes, TCF agency outcomes, costs
10	Teachers' Language Practices and Academic Outcomes of Preschool Children	N=44	Review	five settings and about an hour of transcribed data from classrooms	a curriculum designed to foster enhanced language in a Head Start program and compared fall-spring growth between practice as usual and two intervention conditions	Videotaped classrooms so as to assess fidelity of implementation and language use	Fidelity of implementation was well below the level we hoped to achieve. resulted in 38% fidelity to core intervention instructional elements during book reading versus 16% of these elements in the control groups.
11	The Waiting Children: Pathways (and Future) of Children in Long-Term Residential Care	N=238	Qualitative	children, from 198 families who were in residential care facilities in seven Spanish autonomous communities	Children were younger than 12 years old and residential care continuously for at least one third of their life; examined various aspects of the profile of the child, the family or origin, intervention process and prospects for the future	analysis was completed between gender and age variables, infants, birth to age 3; early childhood, between 4 and 8, preadolescent, 9 and 12	support the data of intensifying the intervention in its early stages and trying to avoid the children reaching this age in residential care;behavioural and emotional problems were noted in children ages 9-12
12	The academic status of children and youth in out of home care: A review of literature	N=203 n=27	Literature Review	studies were identified and evaluated to assess the characteristics of the children and youth studies, academic and school functioning areas evaluated, reports of overall academic performance and quality of reported research	Searched electronic databases with specific search terms	Research started with 203 articles which were narrowed down to 27 articles, 9 of which were intervention or pre-post studies, 176 were rejected because there was no academic or school functioning information reported, 2 were accepted for inclusion	from the 29 studies, 36 data sets were reported

13	Student perspectives on how trauma experiences manifest in the classroom: Engaging court involved youth in the development of a trauma informed teaching curriculum	N=39	Qualitative	female students ages 14-18	participated in focus groups to describe externalizing behaviors that they have both witnessed and personally struggled with in the classroom, discuss the perceived causes of these behaviors and their suggestions for improving school culture	Transcripts from the focus groups were uploaded into NVIVO and content was analyzed for themes using constant comparison methods to look for commonalities, differences and main ideas	most common solutions that students gave to reduce externalizing behaviors in school settings included “encouraging respect for others” and “improving behaviour management to enhance student engagement”
14	School performance in primary school and psychosocial problems in young adulthood among care leavers from long term foster care	N=10	Qualitative	Data from Swedish national registers for ten entire birth year cohorts (1972-1981)	to examine psychosocial outcomes in young adulthood for youth that left long term foster care after age 17, comparing them with majority population peers, national adoptees and peers who had received in home interventions before age 13	Cox regression models, SAS software package	Suicide attempts, drug abuse, alcohol abuse, serious criminality, welfare dependency, secondary education
15	Running away from foster care: what do we know and what do we do?		to review literature to determine what is known about youth running away from foster care placements and to identify strategies that have been implemented to reduce the magnitude of the problem.		described how running away has been defined within the child welfare system, consider risk factors, discuss motivation for running away and offer suggestions of strategies to prevent or reduce running.		discussed prevalence, risk factors, ramifications, motivation for running, strategies to reduce running, suggested continued research on interventions for children at risk for running away
16	Profiles of needs of children in out of home care in Singapore: school performance, behavioral and emotional needs as well as risk behaviors	N=451	data collection took place from Oct. 2011 to Jan 2012, looked at the Child and Adolescent Needs and Strengths (CANS)	children, 5-17 years old, residing in 11 Voluntary children’s homes	CANS items can be grouped into domains such as life functioning, school, behavioral and emotional needs, and risk behavior needs, 82 items across the above 7 domains	Categorical data are reported as percentages and continuous data are presented in relation to means and standard deviations,	findings demonstrate that children residing in out of home care are not performing well academically, highlighting the need to prioritize effective educational services, practitioners are beginning to see the value in strengths based approaches

17	Practitioner Inquiry: A method to advocate for systemic change		to develop interventions which were in-school strategies for supplemental help in reading, writing and math recruiting middle and high school peers tutors	several apartment complexes in the community, single-parent, low incomes households	2 year-post study with the counselor; data was obtained from the schools that the children attended such a testing scores and grades		88% of 3rd grade students passed the reading benchmark, 86% passed the math benchmark and 99% of intact students passed benchmarks in reading and math
18	The Letterbox Club: An account of a postal club to raise the achievement of children aged 7 to 13 in foster care	N=852	Materials are send addressed to the child at their place of residence, for children to use on their own or to share with other family members	1st pilot- 20 children ages 8-11 (2003); 2004, 2005, 2006-30 children ages 7-11	each pilot provided different data ; reading and number assessments were carried out before the children received their first parcel, assessments were completed after every 2 parcels, after last parcel semi-structured interviews were conducted with the children	Assessments were made on 852 children before and after their were Letterbox Club members	The activity has resulted in extensive and there seem to be four aspects in particular that lead to Letterbox Club being successful in having an impact on education achievement amongst many participating children: feeling special, doing things for themselves, doing things together and good materials
19	Reactive Attachment Disorder: Implications for School Readiness and School Functioning		Literature review of current knowledge regarding Reactive Attachment Disorder				Interventions identified that will assist children diagnosed with RAD to continue a successful academic experience and make continued progress through interventions that assist their particular needs related to their diagnosis.
20	Mentoring and Social Skills Training: Ensuring Better Outcomes for Youth in Foster Care		Literature review of mentoring programs for children in foster care				Mentoring and social skills training has a significant positive impact on children in foster care.
21	On the Way Home: Program description and preliminary findings		Study conducted evaluating the effects of intervention programs in place for foster children	Families were assigned to a Family Consultant and received 12 months of services	The children that were chosen for the study received transitional support services for a specific period of time.	The study was for 12 months where services were provided.	Significant improvements were noted for the children that received the On the Way Home transitional services.
22	Breaking the cycle of academic failure for foster children--What can the schools do to help?		Foster children must be provided with opportunities to receive direct instruction with an enriched curriculum				Foster children are subjected to many obstacles during their education in public schools. There needs to be greater investment in the education of these students to help promote success.

23	Adverse Consequences of School Mobility for Children in Foster Care: A Prospective Longitudinal Study	N=117	Descriptive information on school moves for children in foster care was examined. Associations between early moves and late elementary academic outcomes were evaluated.	Complete sample included 117 maltreated foster children	Data was collected from 2001 to 2009. Children were monitored and assessed every 6 months and 24 months.	28% of foster children's moves occur within the same or contiguous districts, potentially within driving distance, suggesting that school and child welfare systems might be able to prevent some school moves by coordinating transportation efforts.	Evidence that children in foster care are likely to experience multiple school moves in the first 2 years of school and that the moves can negatively impact the later school functioning.
24	Academic engagement and performance: Estimating the impact of out-of-home care for maltreated children	N=5872	Children over the age of 6 were interviewed regarding questions about school engagement and performance	only children over the age of 6 years	Data collected took place during 2008 and 2009, and second wave of data collected 18 months later		Continuity in care can help ameliorate the negative consequences typically associated with maltreatment.
25	Interventions aiming to improve school achievements of children in out-of-home care: A scoping view	N=413	A review was conducted with children in foster care focused on three questions	For studies to be included in the review they had to meet specific criteria	Limited (n=32) to	32 studies in total screened	Research shows that school achievements of children in out-of-home care can be improved through several approaches.
26	To investigate the frequency of engagements in literacy-promoting activities by children in the child welfare system	n=114 n=403	data were obtained from a longitudinal study of outcomes for children and young people in out of home care	children were between the ages of 1 and 4 years 114 children in foster care compared with data collected from children living in biological homes from a Statistic Canada 4403 participates ages 1-4	data were collected from participants, along with surveys	responses were measured on a seven point scale	finding were that foster care children were receiving many opportunities for literacy promotion in their foster care home
27	A replication of the Helsingborg study was conducted in the municipality of Norrköping in 2008-2011	N=24	data was collected through school assessment and tests	24 children were studies over 2 years 12 boys and 12 girls living in foster care	evaluations occurred pre and post intervention over a 24 month period	the results indicate a significant growth in intellectual capacity.	poor school performance can be improved if children are given adequate support.
28	To explore whether disparities in school adjustment can be observed in maltreated foster care, as early as kindergarten	N=177	Data was collected from school assessment	Data from 117 children in the foster care system and 60 children non-maltreated children living in their biological home.	individual scales and multimethod, multi-agent composites were created according to Patterson and Bank's method	the study concluded that foster children are markedly behind their peers in academics as early as kindergarten and first grade	possible interventions include caregiver involvement and increased literacy programs

29	31 studies were examined via four meta-analyses to answer questions regarding educational status of children in out of home placement	N=31	literature review	31 studies were reviewed	data from the research was analyzed using comprehensive meta analysis version 2	on the question of special education; between 1980 and 2000 the percent of foster care children who qualified for special education increased from 18% to 36%	This study raised questions regarding the appropriateness of special education as in intervention for foster care child.
30	To compare academic performance of youth at varying levels of the Child protection system	n=395,967 n=6562	This study relied on secondary data from DHS and MDE to answer questions about impact of programs	The group included youth K-12 in public school from 2009-2010 395,967 general population group 6562 in child protection group 2009 in out of home placement group	Statistical analysis using IBM SPSS statistics, version 22	without adjustment for socioeconomic status youth with CPS were 2.8 times less likely to show proficiency on standardized tests	need for policy that supports collaboration, training and information sharing between CPS and education system.

Table 2 Synthesis of keywords for the systematic literature review (n=30).

Years	Keywords	Limiters	Number of Articles
1977-2015	Foster care and academic success and interventions		N = 474
	Foster care and academic success and interventions	Scholarly Peer Reviewed	n= 266
2005-2015	Foster care and academic success and interventions	Last 10 years	n= 37
	Foster care and academic success and interventions	Face validity	n=30

Note: Engine Searches: SociIndex with Full Text, ERIC, PsychINFO, PsychARTICLES, Academic Search Complete, Social Work Abstracts.

1. Defining the review question and developing criteria for including studies
How many articles are in the professional literature regarding academic success interventions for foster children?
2. Searching for studies-- used the specific search engines Academic Search Complete, ERIC, PsychARTICLES, PsychINFO, Social Work Abstracts, Socio Index with Full Text--using the key words academic interventions and foster children--limiters to reduce the number of articles such as: Scholarly Peer Reviewed, published date. Please review Tables 2 and 3 for more information.
3. Selecting studies and collecting data--articles reviewed for relevance with key words.
4. Assessing risk of bias in included studies--high risk of bias --used Cochrane Model to guide systematic search
5. Analyzing data--unit of analyzing data was literature review sheet--each article was reviewed by members of the research team and critiqued using sheets created to examine each article based on the information found within the literature review sheets we categorized the articles by quality of content in the articles.
6. Addressing and reporting biases-- used research team to review literature review sheets to reduce researcher bias
7. Presenting results and "summary of findings" tables
8. Interpreting results and drawing conclusions--After analyzing and assessing the results from the systematic literature review, common themes emerged--results that were found were many interventions exist for academic success with children in foster care. However, there is little follow up in regards to determining if the interventions put in place are actually effective over a significant period of time.

Figure 1 Cochrane systematic review.

been shown to be particularly effective at keep children in foster care on-track academically

Theme 1: Interventions for direct instruction with enhanced curriculum

The first intervention is schools providing opportunities for children in foster care to receive direct instruction with an enriched curriculum as well as continually assessing children to determine their level of progress [28]. Vacca indicates that adequate planning and administrative support can provide the most educationally disadvantaged children an enriched curriculum that includes problem solving and thinking skills [20]. Schools can also minimize continued failure among children in foster care by keeping them in classrooms with their regular teachers and peers that may be higher achieving. When foster children are removed from classrooms for special services they continue to be stigmatized not only by being foster children but also by being low achievers. Students in foster care are enrolled in special education at three times the rate of children who are not in foster care [20,27]. When allowing children who are in foster care to remain in a classroom with their peers, it allows them to gain academic standing that may keep them abreast with children who have the same cognitive capacity but are not placed out of their homes.

Theme 2: Interventions for the team approach in monitoring academic outcomes

A second intervention theme that is helpful is using the team approach. This helps to ensure that foster children have more coordination of communication between schools and welfare agencies. There must be a strong, collaborative relationship between the child welfare agency and the education system to be sure that children are getting needed services so they can meet grade requirements each year [29,28].

Theme 3: Interventions for supportive mentoring

A third intervention theme that is successful is providing supportive mentoring to children in foster care. This may be done with programs through the Boys and Girls Club and other types of programs that link a child up with an older child or adult to help them through the difficult circumstances they live in. Mentoring has been shown to positively affect academic achievement. In a five-year longitudinal study of a two-year mentoring program created to serve at-risk youth, significant improvements were noted in both social skills and academic improvement among the at-risk youth who participated in the services [29].

In summary, it is important to ensure that in the emotional chaos of changing placements, *someone*, foster care workers, other case workers, or foster parent, must pay attention to children's school progress and monitor children's attendance, homework, and school progress while in foster care.

Recommendations from the Literature

The results of the literature review painted a clear picture of the educational experiences and needs of the youth in the foster care

system. Many of the reports highlighted how poor these children do in the educational system compared to those not living in foster care. Of the 30 articles reviewed nearly half provided comparison data on interventions used to promote educational success. Three important conclusions can be drawn from this data.

Recommendation I: Implementing educational programming tailored to foster children

Students in foster care are often not provided stability in their homes. Due to a variety of circumstances, their birth parents were not able to provide a stable learning home environment. The home environment has an impact on literacy interaction, exploration, expressions and sets the tone for lifelong learning [20,30]. Once children are in foster care, interventions tailored to the child's needs are keys to academic success. Promoting a child's strengths while addressing their needs was instrumental in researched interventions. Programs like the Letter Box and the Helsingborg study both reported successful outcomes related to individual programming along with support [31].

Recommendation II: Implementing mentoring and foster care parent engagement

In addition to tailoring academic programs several studies researched the effectiveness of mentoring programs. Programs like the Boys and Girls Club and Big Brother, Big Sister have addressed the needs of children lacking stability at home [5,32]. These programs offering time and attention to foster children result in better grades, engagement in school and decreased behaviors. Another theme of support was the need to educate foster parents on the importance of at home learning, even as young as kindergarten. Wrapping services around foster children who also have a supportive person to coach them through these services is a pathway to academic success.

Recommendation III: Implementing team approach

Finally the literature was clear that there are many people involved in the life of foster children including teachers, social workers, biological parents, foster parents and counselors [17]. Due to the events that brought the child into foster care, these children now have the benefit of a variety of services. Navigating and managing these services can be extremely challenging. The research suggests that there is an increase in academic success when an individual plan is in place and the plan is being shared with all those involved in the care of the youth [25].

The results from this study support the premise that foster children may be behind their peers in academic competence. In the absence of interventions, these deficits are likely to lead to poor academic achievement across the school years, including dropping out of school. Working with the school system, after school programs and preschool programs to develop literacy programs tailored to foster care children is clearly a needed intervention. This, along with addressing mentoring needs of foster children, can be implemented by the social service agency that has custody of the child. These agencies can require foster children to engage in mentoring programs, whether the program

is within the agency or by referral. Providing support to foster parents, education, resources and referrals is also key the meeting the needs of foster care children. This may be covered in foster parent training such as Partnering for Safety and Permanence Model Approach to Partnerships in Parenting (PS-MAPP), Model Approach to Partnerships in Parenting (MAPP), Foster Care and Adoptive Parents On-line Training, to name a few. Child and family team meetings can be helpful with ensuring a plan of care is in place to address educational strengths and needs. This may also ensure that all parties involved in a child's life are kept up-to-date on the academic needs of the child. Foster parent trainings help the foster parents understand the expectations for working with children who have been maltreated in some way and removed into their care. These children may be anxious, lack focus, and have difficulty transitioning to another school, home, and community. It is imperative to create educational teams for foster children consisting of the foster parents, teachers, caseworkers, and social workers to create common goals, monitor, supervise, and evaluate foster children to prevent miscommunications and misunderstandings about children's school progress and wellbeing.

The authors examined the literature related to children who are in foster care and their academic success and interventions available to them. Future interventions may need to consider attainment support as well as other aspects as the effect of emotional trauma resulting from pre-care experiences [12]. There is also a need for interagency collaboration and intervention to improve practice for these children [20]. Future research could lead to understanding the timing and extent of CPS involvement factor into the achievement gap [32].

However, stability for teens in foster care may not always be easily achieved due to outside factors and agencies involved with the youth. There are various issues that must be addressed to reduce the time children wait in residential placements. Studies may not correlate the problems with the stays in residential care or why the child came into care [25]. Prolonged stays in residential care may create serious developmental problems.

Studies in this SLR seem to indicate that families not being able to maintain stability within their home community. School records were not always complete which made the study difficult to complete [33]. Many of the studies were secondary data analyses

using existing data sets. As a result, it was impossible to determine when a child had changed schools or whether the change also meant a change in placement from the data examined. Some studies specified that the research outcomes with children in foster care should be focused on the professionals who serve children in foster care to focus more on discharge from foster care and aftercare outcomes [30,34].

Policy and Practice Implications

This study can change policy and practice by encouraging social workers, school officials and foster parents to work together in order to give children and youth in foster care additional supports to ensure school attainment. Community agencies and supports working together may help to ensure that children in foster care do not *slip through the cracks*. Nurturing good relationships within the communities appears to be one of the most important ways to improving the lives of the children and youth in foster care.

This study allows social workers and other professional helpers to review interventions and research that illustrate the academic challenges of children and youth in foster care. Many effective interventions have been identified to help promote school attainment by providing these interventions to rural areas. The researchers identified three overall themes for interventions in articles that met the study criteria, (1) direct instruction, (2) mentoring and parent engagement, and (3) the team approach to supervising children and youth in foster care.

Conclusion

It is vital to help foster children and youth achieve in school to have "a level playing field" with their peers who do not experience the trauma regarding school transition, adjustment, and achievement. Children and youth in foster care have been removed from family and familiar environments and transitioned to a different home, different neighborhood or community, a different school, and different guardians or parents. It can be overwhelming for them. Some research has been identified that discusses successful academic interventions for foster children. Typically, these are community programs that use a team approach to supervising, monitoring, mentoring, and nurturing the future of human kind, children and youth.

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