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Does Parenting Style Influence Learning Autonomy? An Empirical Investigation in Higher Education

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to investigate the relationship between undergraduate university students' learning autonomy and the three parenting philosophies. To collect data, the Convenient Sampling technique was employed recruiting 250 university students from 18 to 24 years. The Parental Authority Questionnaires by Buri and the Self-Regulation Questionnaire (Learning), which assessed three parenting philosophies and students' learning autonomy, were used to collect data from the University of Gujrat in Pakistan. The findings showed that parenting methods and learning autonomy did not significantly correlate with gender. Furthermore, measurably significant associations between parenting styles and learning autonomy were found through multiple regression analyses. Furthermore, all parenting styles aside from the mother's authoritative and autonomous regulation exhibited a highly significant correlation with controlled regulation. Additionally, there was a strong correlation between parenting styles and controlled regulation. However, when comparing two groups, such as male and female, using the Autonomous and Control variables of the Self-regulation Questionnaire, the results of an independent sample t-test analysis showed that there was no significant correlation between gender differences and learning autonomy. The study's conclusions showed that parental practices had a strong correlation with kids' learning autonomy, albeit these results vary depending on the culture and society.

Keywords: Parenting Style, Learning Autonomy, Higher Education

Introduction

Understanding, decision-making, and flexibility are just a few of the learning components that are included in student achievement. However, a number of mediating factors can have a detrimental impact on academic performance, which can leave students, parents, and teachers unhappy (Brown & Iyengar, 2008, Mufti et al., 2023). Parenting style is one such important component that has a big influence on a child's academic, emotional, and cognitive development. Fewer studies have looked at how parenting styles affect undergraduate students' academic achievement, especially in relation to self-regulation and learning autonomy, despite the fact that a large body of research has examined how



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parenting styles affect the development of children and adolescents (Meghan, 2011). The purpose of this study is to look into how parenting practices and undergraduate students' learning autonomy relate to one another.

Parenting Styles and Their Impact on Development

Parenting styles are typically categorized into four types: **authoritative, authoritarian, permissive-indulgent, and neglectful** (Darling & Steinberg, 1993). For this study, the permissive subtypes will be grouped together.

Permissive Parenting Style

Permissive parents adopt a non-punitive, lenient, and accepting approach toward their child's impulses and activities (Baumrind, 1966). They allow children significant freedom in decision-making and rarely enforce strict rules. These parents avoid exerting control, believing that excessive restrictions may lead to defiance or dependency (Baumrind, 1978). Instead, they emphasize self-regulation, allowing children to govern their own behavior without external enforcement. Proponents of permissive parenting argue that rigid control stifles creativity and independence, while autonomy fosters self-motivation (Grolnick & Ryan, 1989). However, research suggests that children raised under permissive parenting may struggle with self-discipline and academic perseverance (Steinberg et al., 1994).

Authoritarian Parenting Style

Authoritarian parents enforce strict discipline, emphasizing obedience and adherence to established rules (Baumrind, 1966). They utilize punitive measures to correct behavior and discourage independent decision-making. This parenting style prioritizes order, respect for authority, and traditional values, often at the expense of open communication (Dornbusch et al., 1987). While authoritarian parenting may instill discipline, it has been associated with lower self-esteem, reduced creativity, and diminished intrinsic motivation in children (Glasgow et al., 1997).

Authoritative Parenting Style

Authoritative parenting strikes a balance between structure and autonomy (Baumrind, 1966). These parents set clear expectations while encouraging open dialogue and reasoning. They support independence but maintain consistent boundaries, fostering self-regulation and accountability (Steinberg et al., 1994). Research indicates that children raised by authoritative parents exhibit higher academic achievement, social competence, and psychological well-being compared to those raised under authoritarian or permissive styles (Aunola et al., 2000).

Learning Autonomy and Self-Determination Theory

Self-Determination Theory (SDT) posits that individuals have three innate psychological needs: **competence, relatedness, and autonomy** (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Fulfillment of these needs enhances intrinsic motivation, leading to optimal learning and personal growth.

- **Competence** refers to the ability to effectively navigate one's environment.
- **Relatedness** involves feeling connected and supported by others.



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- **Autonomy** reflects self-initiated behavior and personal agency (Deci et al., 1991).

These demands manifest in many ways in the classroom. One way to interpret the demand for competency is as the need that students comprehend their coursework. A student's desire for belonging, stability, and personal support in their school interactions may be interpreted as a translation of their relatedness need. According to Connell (quoted in Stefanou, et al., 2004), the desire for autonomy may be reflected in the requirement for decision-making abilities in the classroom with regard to starting, stopping, maintaining, and rerouting activities. Learning engagement is more achievable if students believe that activities and events in the classroom support these demands (Stefanou et al., 2004).

In educational settings, autonomy-supportive environments enhance intrinsic motivation, whereas controlling approaches (e.g., excessive rewards or punishments) undermine it (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Studies demonstrate that students with higher autonomy exhibit greater academic persistence, deeper engagement, and improved performance (Stefanou et al., 2004).

Parenting Styles and Academic Achievement

Research consistently links authoritative parenting with positive academic outcomes. Steinberg et al. (1994) found that adolescents raised authoritatively displayed higher academic self-concept and achievement compared to peers from authoritarian or permissive households. Similarly, Dornbusch et al. (1987) observed that authoritarian and permissive parenting correlated with lower grades, whereas authoritative parenting predicted better academic performance. Children of authoritative parents develop stronger self-regulation skills, enabling them to approach learning proactively (Grolnick & Ryan, 1989). In contrast, authoritarian parenting may suppress autonomy, leading to extrinsic motivation driven by fear of punishment rather than genuine interest (Deci & Vansteenkiste, 2004). Permissive parenting, while fostering independence, may fail to provide sufficient structure, resulting in poor academic discipline (Baumrind, 1973).

Significance of the Study

This study explores the relationship between parenting styles and learning autonomy among undergraduate students, with particular attention to cultural variations. While Western research predominantly favors authoritative parenting, Asian contexts often emphasize authoritarian approaches, yet still produce high-achieving students (Park et al., 2010). This discrepancy suggests that cultural factors may mediate parenting effects.

Additionally, understanding how parenting styles influence learning autonomy can inform educational interventions. For instance, students from authoritarian backgrounds may benefit from autonomy-supportive teaching strategies, while those from permissive households may require more structured academic guidance (Baharudin & Kordi, 2010).

Methods and Materials

Sample

The study used convenient sampling technique. A sample of 250 participants from different departments were recruited who completed demographic information, Parental Authority Questionnaire (Buri, 1991) and Learning Self-Regulation



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Questionnaire (SRQ-L) (Black & Deci, 2000; Williams & Deci, 1996). The data were taken from 250 undergraduate students from different departments of University of Gujrat. The age range of the participants ranges from 18-23 years. Only those participants were included who had given their informed consent for the data collection.

Procedure

A sample was collected from several departments of the University of Gujarat. The researcher clarified the purpose and intent of the study, and stated that the results of the study would be kept confidential and utilized only for the current study. After obtaining consent, data were obtained from 250 university students. Students were handed survey questionnaires, and the researcher instructed them to answer every question

Instruments

Parental Authority Questionnaire (PAQ): The Parental Authority Questionnaire (Buri, 1991) was used to collect data from the parents. PAQ consisted of two scales with thirty items for mother and father authority. On a five-point Likert scale, scores range from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5). There were six independent subscales; “mother authoritarianism, mother authoritativeness, mother permissiveness, father authoritarianism, father authoritativeness, and father permissiveness”. The ratings range from 10 to 50, with higher values suggesting that the parent is seen to be more similar to the particular parenting style. Cronbach Alpha values for each subscale ranged from .75 to .93 (Buri, 1991).

Learning Self-Regulation Questionnaire: The Learning Self-Regulation Questionnaire (SRQ-L) (Black & Deci, 2000; Williams & Deci, 1996) is a tool for analysing the ability of one's learning. It answers their learning in what, when and how perspective. The survey contains two subscales: “Controlled Regulation and Autonomous Regulation”. Reactions to each of these items are scored on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from not true (1) to very true (7). The high scores indicated higher autonomy.

Results

Table 1: Demographic characteristics of the Participants

Demographic Characteristics	Frequencies (f)	Percentage (%)
Gender		
Male	114	45.6
Female	136	54.4
Father Education		
Illiterate	16	6.4
Primary	21	8.4
Middle	6	2.4
Matric	50	20.0
F.A.	36	14.4
B.A.	65	26.0
M.A.	56	22.4



Mother Education		
Illiterate	30	12.0
Primary	18	7.2
Middle	15	6.0
Matric	56	22.4
F.A.	61	24.4
B.A.	48	19.2
M.A.	22	8.8
Family Type		
Joint	108	43.2
Nuclear	125	50.0
Extended	17	6.8
Area		
Rural	135	54.0
Urban	115	46.0
Socioeconomic status		
Lower	5	2.0
Middle	225	90.0
Upper	20	8.0

Table 1 presented that the sample consisted of 250 participants. Moreover, the participants of the current research live more in nuclear family system (50%) as well as more participants' lives in rural areas (54%) than urban areas (46%). More participants were from middle class (90%).

Table 2: Correlation for Scores on Parenting Styles and Learning Self-Regulation

Sr.no	variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1	Gender	-	-.12	-.07	.03	.17	-.04	.02	.15	.01
2	Autonomous		-	.59*	.32*	.18	.46*	.34*	.29*	.51**
3	Controlled			-	.27*	.25*	.26*	.31**	.30*	.37**
4	Mother permissive				-	.63*	.63*	.64*	.43*	.58*
5	Mother authoritarian					-	.55*	.42*	.49*	.48*
6	Mother authoritative						-	.45*	.35*	.59*
7	Father permissive							-	.51**	.65*
8	Father authoritarian								-	.49*
9	Father authoritative									-

** p < 0.01, * p < 0.05

Table 2 showed the correlation of gender, parenting styles and learning self-regulation. Table illustrates that gender shows non-significant correlation with parenting styles and learning self-regulation. However, autonomous self-



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regulation show highly significant correlation with Controlled self-regulation, Mother's permissive, mothers authoritative, Father's permissive, father's authoritarian and father's authoritative parenting styles ($p < .01$). Table also shows that controlled self-regulation shows highly significant correlation with Mother's permissive, mother's authoritarian, mothers authoritative, Father's permissive, father's authoritarian and father's authoritative parenting styles ($p < .01$).

Table 3: Multiple Regression Analysis for Mother's Parenting Styles Predicting Autonomous Regulation

Predictors	Model 1 (B)	Model 2 (B)	95% CI (LL, UL)	R ²	ΔR ²	F	ΔF
Permissive Model							
Gender	-0.13*	-0.14*	(-4.51, 0.42)	0.1	0.11	4.74***	12.29***
Mother's Education	-	-	(-0.74, 0.61)				
Mother's Permissive	—	0.33*	(0.01, 0.41)				
Authoritarian Model							
Gender	-0.13*	-0.16*	(-4.51, 0.42)	0.031	0.04	2.05*	4.37**
Mother's Education	-0.03*	-0.02*	(-0.74, 0.61)				
Mother's Authoritarian	—	0.21**	(0.01, 0.41)				
Authoritative Model							
Gender	-0.13*	-0.11*	(-3.63, 0.80)	0.2	0.2	9.31**	25.76**
Mother's Education	-0.03*	-0.04*	(-0.75, 0.47)				
Mother's Authoritative	—	5.07**	(0.25, 0.58)				

Table 3 reported the mother's parenting styles predicting autonomous regulation. Authoritative parenting showed the strongest association with autonomous regulation explaining 20% variance. Whereas permissive parenting and authoritarian parenting were also found to be significant predictor explaining 11% variance and 4% variance respectively.

Table 4: Multiple Regression Analysis for Mother's Parenting Styles Predicting Controlled Regulation

Predictors	Model 1 (B)	Model 2 (B)	95% CI (LL, UL)	R ²	ΔR ²	F	ΔF
Permissive Model							
Gender	-0.05*	-0.07*	(-3.84, 1.82)	0.05	0.07	2.99*	8.24**
Mother's Education	-0.04*	-0.04*	(-0.60, 0.97)				



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Mother's Permissive	—	0.28**	(0.10, 0.55)				
Authoritarian Model							
Gender	-0.05*	-0.10*	(-4.35, 1.38)	0.05	0.07	2.97**	8.15**
Mother's Education	-0.04*	0.07*	(-0.50, 1.07)				
Mother's Authoritarian	—	0.28**	(0.10, 0.57)				
Authoritative Model							
Gender	-0.05*	-0.04*	(-3.54, 2.16)	0.04	0.06	2.65**	7.21**
Mother's Education	-0.04*	0.04*	(-0.60, 0.97)				
Mother's Authoritative	—	0.26**	(0.07, 0.49)				

Table 4 described the mother's parenting styles predicting controlled regulation. Permissive parenting and authoritarian parenting were found to be significant predictor explaining 7% variance. Whereas authoritative parenting showed the slightly weak but significant association controlled regulation explaining 6% variance.

Table 5: Multiple Regression Analysis for Father's Parenting Styles Predicting Autonomous Regulation

Predictors	Model 1 (B)	Model 2 (B)	95% CI (LL, UL)	R ²	ΔR ²	F	ΔF
Permissive Model							
Gender	-0.12*	-0.13*	(-4.00, 0.65)	0.1	0.11	5.00**	13.19**
Father's Education	0.01*	0.01*	(-0.77, 0.63)				
Father's Permissive	—	0.34**	(0.14, 0.50)				
Authoritarian Model							
Gender	-0.12*	-0.16*	(-4.44, 0.38)	0.06	0.07	3.18**	7.82**
Father's Education	0.01*	0.01*	(-0.66, 0.78)				
Father's Authoritarian	—	0.27**	(0.07, 0.43)				
Authoritative Model							
Gender	-0.12	-0.12	(-17.53, 2.67)	0.26	0.26	12.78***	36.16***
Father's Education	0.01	0.05	(-3.61, 0.61)				
Father's Authoritative	—	0.52**	(0.31, 0.62)				



Table 5 reported the fathers's parenting styles predicting autonomous regulation. Authoritative parenting showed the strongest association with autonomous regulation explaining 26% variance. Whereas permissive parenting and authoritarian parenting were also found to be significant predictor explaining 11% variance and 7% variance respectively.

Table 6: Multiple Regression Analysis for Father's Parenting Styles Predicting Controlled Regulation

Predictors	Model 1 (B)	Model 2 (B)	95% CI (LL, UL)	R ²	ΔR ²	F	ΔF
Permissive Model							
Gender	-0.07*	-0.08*	(-3.96, 1.61)	0.07	0.09	3.71**	10.62**
Father's Education	0.001*	0.02*	(-0.96, 0.72)				
Father's Permissive	—	0.31**	(0.13, 0.56)				
Authoritarian Model							
Gender	-0.07*	-0.12*	(-4.52, 1.10)	0.07	0.1	3.82**	10.94**
Father's Education	0.001*	0.00*	(-0.81, 0.86)				
Father's Authoritarian	—	0.32**	(0.13, 0.55)				
Authoritative Model							
Gender	-0.07*	-0.06*	(-3.71, 1.72)	0.12	0.14	5.54**	16.09**
Father's Education	0.001*	0.02*	(-0.69, 0.95)				
Father's Authoritative	—	0.37**	(0.20, 0.60)				

Notes: *p < .05, **p < .01

Table 6 reported the father's parenting styles predicting controlled regulation. Authoritative parenting showed the strong association with controlled regulation explaining 14% variance. Whereas authoritarian parenting and permissive parenting were also found to be significant predictor explaining 10% variance and 9% variance respectively.

Discussion

The research aimed to examine the relationship between three styles of parental control (authoritarian, permissive, and authoritative) and how independent the learners are in studying, among university undergraduate students. Multiple regression was used to test each hypothesis.

The findings indicated that parental style played an important role in the development of student autonomy. Authoritarian parenting methods were associated with more scholastic independence. Even though no earlier research studies examining this idea were discovered, the current findings contradicted prior research (Glasgow et al., 1997; Ginsburg & Bronstein, 1993). These studies



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discovered that children who were raised with authoritative parental approaches had higher levels of inner drive, autonomy, and self-sustaining mental processes. In contrast, the findings revealed some fascinating bivariate associations. Autonomous learning regulation was shown to be highly connected to controlled learning regulation, indicating that regulation occurs both internally and externally. These findings are congruent with Deci and Ryan's (2000) study into self-determination theory. The central idea of this theory is built on a continuum that runs from motivation to external drives, culminating in internal drive and integration. Over time, behaviors and ideals become more consistent and ingrained. Internalization means the "incorporation" of an attribute or norm. Integration is the method of converting that authority into one's own, permitting the individual to develop a sense of self. Internalization and integration can be used to regulate behavior throughout one's life, as many activities begin with external motivation (Deci and Ryan, 2000). Through internalization and integration, behaviors that were not previously intrinsically driven can become genuinely motivated and self-directed over time. The more a behavior is valued and regulated internally, the more the individual thinks it to be self-directed (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Stefanou et al., 2004).

Switching a particular button down while triggering other produces no difference. It could be analogous to reducing the amount of each of one part whilst raising the the amount of the opposite until a desired level is attained, at the moment when the initial one diminishes away entirely. It may elucidate the considerable constructive relationship between autonomous and controlled regulation. Conceivably in this scenario, both are occurring simultaneously. When it comes to autonomous and controlled regulation, university students may encounter both as a result of the convergence of societal rules set by parental expectations and beliefs, as well as an increase in their own sense of autonomy as individuals. Students at universities may be perceived as trapped in the middle of the state.

Another intriguing discovery was that there were larger relationships between mothers' and dads' attitudes of their children's outcomes. These findings contradict prior studies on the impact of parental role on engagement in children's lives (Hawkins, et al., 2006; Finley, et al., 2008). Previous research shown that mothers appeared to be more inclined to be engaged than dads. These findings rely on prior research by Parsons and Bales (1955), who discovered that dads do functional responsibilities such as giving financial support and teaching offspring, while females perform caregiving activities and friendship. In compared to the present research, results counter the conclusions of prior studies. Fathers' parenting styles have a strong association with the results for their children.

Mother's permissiveness and authoritativeness were really connected with her authoritarianism, according to Buri's PAQ. In fact, the permissiveness and authoritativeness of fathers were linked to their authoritarianism. Contrary to the theorizing connections between each type of parental authority, the current study found that the three parental authority scales were positively related.

The fact that parental impact varies from culture to culture might be one reason why this study produced such important results. These results go counter to previous studies that examined the inverse relationship between the aforementioned styles (Baumrind 1967). Following Baumrind it may be possible to assume that the strong affiliations observed in the context of parental influence



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and younger children might not be observed in students of universities. This is due to the fact that the children don't stay under the direct supervision of their parents for a considerable period of time and get autonomous in their early years. For the purpose of this study, it may be possible to assume that cultural differences do play a role and thus, these members are more under the immediate influence of their parents for a long term duration and stay dependent on their parents and hence exhibit higher levels of learning autonomy.

Conclusion

Parenting style significantly shapes a child's academic trajectory by influencing their autonomy, motivation, and self-regulation. Authoritative parenting, characterized by warmth and structured guidance, consistently correlates with positive academic outcomes. In contrast, authoritarian and permissive styles present challenges that may hinder learning autonomy. Further research within diverse cultural contexts, such as Pakistan, is essential to elucidate how parenting practices interact with educational achievement. By identifying these dynamics, educators and parents can better support students in developing the autonomy necessary for lifelong learning and success.

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