

The Influence of Parental Authority Type on College Students' Learning Engagement: The Mediating Role of Self-Efficacy

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Abstract:

Parental authority is a key component in understanding college students' academic engagement because it has been demonstrated in various studies to influence children's motivation, emotional control, and learning behavior from early adolescence to maturity. This paper seeks to investigate the impact of different kinds of parental authority on college students' academic learning engagement and test whether and how interpersonal factors such as self-efficacy can mediate this influence. Data were collected from 121 college students using an online survey that included three instruments: Parental Authority Questionnaire, General Self-Efficacy Scale, and Learning Engagement Scale. Mediation analyses were performed by means of SPSS v25.0 via PROCESS macro. The obtained results indicated that parental authority had a significant direct effect upon students' learning engagement; however, mediation effect for self-efficacy was not statistically significant. Thus, the finding suggest that parental authority might affect learning engagement mostly through direct pathways, whereas self-efficacious behavior may not act as a useful mediator. Future research is recommended to consider situational factors when exploring the mechanisms of parental influence over pupils' academic behaviors.

Keywords: Parental authority type; learning engagement; self-efficacy

1. Introduction

Engagement in learning implies the cognitive, behavioral, and emotional investment of learners in the process of learning [1]. It constitutes one major determinant of academic success and life-long personal development, hence it plays central roles not only in

the context of college learning but throughout life. People begin to experience early adulthood during their collage years. Personal upbringing often persists until the high school period or even life after graduation and thus indirectly shapes pupils' actions and decision making, apparently in less overt manners. Previous literature has demonstrated the favorable

outcomes associated with positive parenting styles, predicting children's learning engagement [2]. Parental authority, another vital aspect related to knowledge dissemination and power delegations within parenting systems, remains under-investigated empirically as to how it induces academic commitment in college students. Thus, current research strives to analyze how parental authority type relates to students' learning engagement at college. It is likely that authoritative parenting profile scores will correlate positively with college students' learning engagement level.

Self-efficacy is defined as one's confidence in having the capability of successfully completing a particular task, according to Bandura's theory of self-efficacy [3]. Students possessing greater levels of self-efficacy tend to exhibit more confidence in mitigating difficulties they encounter during the acquisition phase and accomplishing school-related objective, thus inspire their engagement in school-related events and participating actively in academic endeavors [1]. Additionally, Wang Zhenzhou's study found that self-efficacy is positively associated with emotional intelligence and both ability- and effort-attribution tendencies [4]. Specifically, college students possessing higher self-efficacy perform more superior in regulating their internal emotions while learning, adopting an affective stance, and attributing academic achievements to their personal efforts along with participation.

Parents' evaluation as well has a great impact on children's psychology, which indirectly or directly influences their development of self-efficacy [5]. Thus, the type of parental authority might potentially be a significant determinant in guiding students' self-efficacy. Based on the rationale above, the current investigation proposes that the connection has been mediated by self-efficacy between parental authority and college students' pursuit of learning.

In summary, this study aims to employ college students as subjects for exploring the effects that various types of parental authority exert on learning engagement and determination if self-efficacy plays the intervening agent in relation to the aforementioned variables.

2. Literature Review

Families exist as the basic social unit which is involved in the developmental course of adolescent beings. Each interaction between parents and child carries potential implications influence the child's physical and mental wellness, ultimately impacting their learning and growth. Previous studies have found that the parenting style, such as supervising, advising, setting demands, and providing emotional assistance play a significant role in shaping

students' attitudes and promoting their participation to school-based engagement.

Fute et al. conducted an empirical study to examine the influence of parenting styles on learning engagement [6]. They hypothesized that there would be a positive and significant correlation between parenting styles and student's learning engagement and academic achievement, with the learning engagement playing a mediating role. Furthermore, mother's parenting styles on student's academic achievement was found to be more pronounced than the father's parenting styles. For the purposes of the study, researchers distributed questionnaires adapted from the Chinese Simplified Parenting Style Scale (CSPSS) and the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale for Students (UWES-S) to 1,557 Chinese high school students. The result was consistent with the hypothesis: parental emotional acceptance did not merely predict students' learning engagement as a form of positive parenting style, but also promoted learning motivation by enhancing emotional security, which helped to strengthen academic performances. In contrary, parental rejection and parents' excessive guidance impeded both student's learning engagement and academic achievements.

Nonetheless, owing to the nature of this investigation — utilizing a cross-sectional approach and concentrating solely on secondary-level learners- it remained unfeasible for them to elucidate the extent to which such shifts occur as per time. It is precisely because of this that the present inquiry aims to unravel whether earlier-developed offspring are still subject to their parents' parenting styles impacting upon learning engagement during advanced stages of development.

Self-efficacy is defined as an individual's belief regarding his or her competency in carrying out certain tasks, and parental styles play a vital role on developing it. Previous literature indicates that authoritarian parenting style is negatively linked to students' self-efficacy; on the other hand, authoritative (flexible) and permissive parental style is positively associated [7]. Yousaf also presented an empirical investigation of the connection between parenting style and adolescents self-efficacy and hypothesized that parenting styles are important predictor for self-efficacy and boys and girls differ in relation to it. He presented the Parental authority questionnaire (PAQ) along with the General self-efficacy scale (GSES) to 80 respondents (40 men vs. 40 women). Findings revealed authoritarian parenting was significantly negatively correlated with adolescent's self-efficacy probably due to absence of positive reinforcement result from parents; alternatively, authoritative and permissive Parenting style was significantly positively correlated with self efficacy. Moreover, there was not any gender-based difference in self-efficacy.

However, some limitations existed: The sample size does not represent different regions and cultures decreasing the generalizability and contradicted earlier findings may be because of inconsistencies in measuring instruments or ways to score them.

Bandura's triadic reciprocal determinism of the social cognitive theory defines people interacting as three components of personality, behavior, and environment, interrelating with each other. This means self-efficacy as a quintessential aspect of an individual can strongly influence one's behavior, motivation, and thought process. Earlier investigations show that high self-competent students make more effort to improve their skills and active engagement in learning activities [8].

The same relation had been discovered among Turkish middle school students. This research employed data from a questionnaire administered to 407 participants, which included demographic information along with other related variables such as the Constructivist Learning Environment Scale (CLES) and the Patterns of Adaptive Learning Scales (PALS). The test of the mediation effect of self-efficacy between learning environment and engagement were conducted via survey methodology. Results indicated that differences in similar learning environments accounted for 29%, 27%, 21%, and 33% variance in agentic, behavioural, emotional, and cognitive engagement, respectively. At the same time, self-efficacy accounted for 29%, 27%, 21%, and 53% variance within each category and was also found to largely predict the varied dimensions of engagement, namely, agentic, behavioural, emotional, and cognitive ($\beta = 12$ to 23).

This paper established that self-efficacy proves to be not just a direct factor influencing learning engagement but also the potential mediator contributing between learning environment and engagement. Nonetheless, owing to its drawing back a certain culture in Turkey, the applicability and generalization to Chinese cultures are unclear. Besides, being pure-sample collection survey methods relying on personal information submitted by learners themselves with possible effects due to multiple social desirability influences or objectivity and subjectivism bias, could also undermine objectivity and authenticity.

In terms of social cognitive theory, parenting styles shape children's psychological development, both directly and indirectly. As a vital psychological resource driving people's attempts to persist toward learning and enhance academic achievements, human beings harbor self-efficacy, i.e., one's own belief concerning their abilities to complete particular tasks successfully.

This association was investigated among Iranian high school students by Dehdar and Samavi, who used Parenting Styles questionnaire, Academic Self-Efficacy Scale,

and Student Engagement Scale [9]. Through path analysis, the hypothesis was verified that authoritative parenting significance predicted self-efficacy ($\beta = 0.25$) and engagement ($\beta = 0.35$), while authoritarian parental behavior was found to negatively affect self-efficacy ($\beta = -0.15$) and engagement ($\beta = -0.13$). The impact of permissive parentliness on engagement appeared insignificant. Meanwhile, additional investigation confirmed that partial mediation was responsible for the interrelationship between authoritative parental behaviors and engagement.

These findings imply enhancing self-efficacy through positive parenting may foster academic engagement. However, due to our small-scale with only 272 samples from one portion of Iran ($N = 272$), it is not clear if our findings are generalizable to other cultures within Iran. Moreover, we have used self-reported data which reminds us that there could be problems related to the social desirability phenomenon and subjectivity, making this finding less objective.

3. Method

3.1 Participants

Convenience sampling was applied to recruit participants for the study. An online questionnaire was administered on Wenjuanxing site to college students from all over China. For this study, we received a total number of 121 valid surveys including (49) male respondents (40.5%) and (72) female ones (59. %). Out of those, (85) respondents were undergraduate students (70.25%) and (36) respondents were graduate students (29.75%). The mean age was 22.16 years old.

3.2 Measures

Parental authority was evaluated using the Chinese revised version of the Parental Authority Questionnaire proposed by Shang Bourui based on Zhou Yajuan, et al. [10]. It consists of 42 questions divided into 3 dimensions: authoritative parenting, authoritarian parenting, and permissive parenting. There are in total 28 questions counting from 12 questions included the authoritative parenting dimension, another 11 items are contained in the authoritarian parenting and the final five items contained within the permissives parenting items. This scale employs a 5-point Likerts rating system shifting along a continuum from "Strongly disagree" to "Strongly Agree". The higher the score the more pronounced belong to that particular type. The Test (Chinese Version) examined both the internal consistency and well-structured ownness ($\alpha = 0.8730$, $\alpha = 0.8070$, $\alpha = 0.6563$ for authoritative, authoritarian, and

permissive parenting, respectively). Its test-retest reliability ($r=0.83, p<0.001$) also supports its adequacy. The chi-factor examination was carried out and confirmed its lack of multidimensionality.

3. 2. 1 General Self-Efficacy Scale

Self-efficacy was approached through General Self-Efficacy Scale (GSES) in Chinese revised version formulated by Schwarzer, et al. [11]. In total, this scale comprises ten items but they are graded along a 4-point Likerts scale spectrum (1 = “not at all true”, 4 = “exactly true”). This scale demonstrates adequate internal consistency ($\alpha = 0.87$) and test – reestablish continuity ($r = 0.83, p < 0.001$). Factor investigation together with single plotting consider it unidimensional.

3. 2. 2 Learning Engagement Scale

The Utrecht Work Engagement Scale for Students (UWES-S) adapted by Schaufeli et al. was used to measure learning engagement [12]. It includes 17-items across

three dimensions and is rated on a 7-point Likert scale (1 “strongly disagree,” 7 “strongly agree”). Higher scores reflect higher degrees of engagement in learning.

3.3 Data Analysis

Overall data analysis was done with SPSS 25.0. First cross-sectional comparison between genders, independent-sample t-test was applied to analyze gender differences in perceived parental authority, self-efficacy, and learning engagement. Secondly, Pearson correlation tests were implemented to investigate correlations between different parenting styles, self-efficacy, and engagement. Lastly, PROCESS version 4.2 macro (Model 4) was implemented to carry out mediation analyses with an application of bootstrapping at 5,000 samples with 95% confidence intervals as test of mediating role of self-efficacy.

4. Results

4.1 Gender Differences

Table 1. Gender Differences in Parental Authority, Learning Engagement, and Self-Efficacy

	Male		Female		Levene’s-Test	
	M	SD	M	SD	T	Sig
Authoritative Parenting	3.5389	74933	3.3924	71213	1.014	377
Authoritarian Parenting	3.3469	91130	3.2172	74990	856	117
Permissive Parenting	3.3306	94653	3.1194	75408	1.305	036
Learning Engagement	78.2653	14.92729	70.3611	17.99136	2.537	302
Self-Efficacy	29.2857	8.49264	28.8194	6.16287	330	003

Independent-sample t-tests showed significant gender differences in permissive parenting ($t = 1.305, p < 0.05$) and self-efficacy ($t = 0.330, p < 0.05$) as shown in table 1. Male participants perceived a higher level of permissive parenting ($M = 3.3306, SD = 0.94653$) than females (M

$= 3.1194, SD = 0.75408$), and their self-efficacy ($M = 29.2957, SD = 8.49264$) was also significantly higher than that of females ($M = 28.8194, SD = 6.16287$).

4.2 Correlation Analysis

Table 2. Correlation Analysis of Parental Authority, Learning Engagement, and Self-Efficacy

	1	2	3	4	5
1. Authoritative Parenting	1				
2. Authoritarian Parenting	227**	1			

3.Permissive Parenting	484**	376**	1		
4.Learning Engagement	422**	405**	308**	1	
5.Self-Efficacy	272**	126	200*	237**	1

Note: $p < .05^*$, $*p < .01$

Authoritative, authoritarian, and permissive parenting were all positively correlated with college students' learning engagement as shown in table 2. Notably, the correlation between authoritarian parenting and academic engagement ($r=0.454$) was even higher than its correlation with self-efficacy ($r=0.126$). This unexpected pattern merits deeper analysis in the discussion.

Self-efficacy was significantly and positively correlated with authoritative and permissive parenting, as well as learning engagement, but not with authoritarian parenting.

4.3 Mediation Analysis

The mediating effect was examined using Model 4 of the

PROCESS macro (version 4.2) for SPSS 25.0. The Bootstrap method was employed with 5,000 resamples and a 95% confidence interval to assess the indirect effect.

The results showed that self-efficacy did not exhibit a significant mediating effect for any of the three parenting styles. In the authoritative parenting model, the effect of self-efficacy on students' learning engagement was not significant as shown in figure 1 ($\beta = 0.131$, $p = 0.129 > .05$). In the authoritarian parenting model, the predictive effect of authoritarian parenting on students' self-efficacy was not significant as shown in figure 2 ($\beta = 0.126$, $p = 0.169 > .05$). In the permissive parenting model, although the path coefficient is statistically significant, the confidence interval for the indirect effect include zero, thus rendering the mediating effect non-significant,

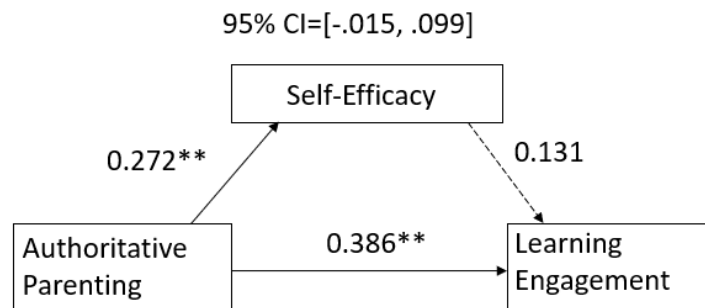


Fig. 1 The Mediating Effect of College Students' Self-Efficacy between Authoritative Parenting and Learning Engagement

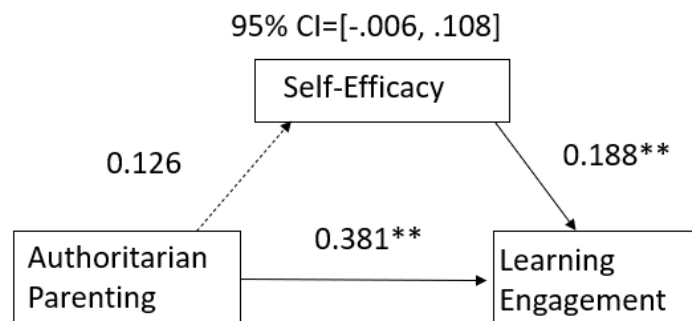


Fig. 2 The Mediating Effect of College Students' Self-Efficacy between Authoritarian Parenting and Learning Engagement

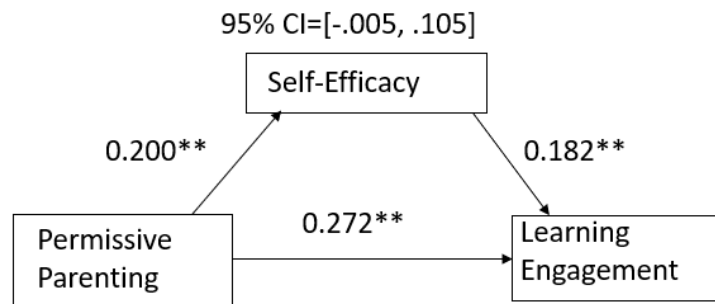


Fig. 3 The Mediating Effect of College Students' Self-Efficacy between Permissive Parenting and Learning Engagement

5. Discussion

This study investigated how parental authority types (authoritative, authoritarian, and permissive) affect college student's learning engagement and whether self-efficacy mediating these relationships. The results showed that all three types of parental authority were significantly and positively correlated with learning engagement, however, the mediating role of self-efficacy was not supported in any of the three models.

Contrary to previous studies suggesting that authoritarian and permissive parenting impede learning engagement, this study found that all three parenting style—authoritative, authoritarian, and permissive parenting—were positively correlated with academic engagement. One possible explanation is that, within the specific cultural context, these parenting styles may function differently. For instance, in a collectivist culture such as China, authoritarian parents' emphasis on discipline and obedience may be interpreted as high academic expectations, which can enhance students' motivation and engagement. In this cultural context, authoritarian parenting is not perceived as purely cold control: rather, it can be reinterpreted as "strict yet caring". Similarly, permissive parents' provision of greater autonomy and support may align with college students' growing need for independence and self-development, also fostering engagement. This may help explain authoritarian and permissive parenting's positive correlation with academic engagement. However, this explanation should be interpreted cautiously, as the correlations do not imply causal relationships and the relatively small sample size may have limited the statistical power and generalizability of the findings.

The non-significant mediating effect of self-efficacy may indicate that parenting styles may directly affect college student's learning engagement rather than mediated by self-efficacy during the university stage. This interpretation is further supported by the correlation analysis: the weak association between authoritarian parenting and

self-efficacy which make it logically unlikely to mediate the pathway. Nevertheless, there might be other potential mediators—such as economic support, learning motivation, or emotional regulation—which could better explain how parenting affects students' engagement. Additionally, the relatively small sample size may have limited the statistical power to detect subtle indirect effects. Future research should consider larger, multi-regional, or longitudinal samples to further test these mechanisms.

There are several limitations that must be acknowledged. First, cross-sectional design precludes causal inference. Second, small sample size reduces statistical power and limits the representativeness of the finding. Hence, future research should therefore adopt larger and longitudinal designs to more rigorously examine the mechanisms.

6. Conclusion

In summary, this study highlights the influence of parenting styles on students' learning engagement during early adulthood. Although self-efficacy did not mediate this relationship, parental authority types—particularly authoritative parenting—remain important predictors of students' academic engagement. Future studies could incorporate contextual and motivational variables to better understand the complex pathways through which family upbringing and academic behavior.

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