

Differences In Academic Achievement as A Function of Parenting Styles

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ABSTRACT: *The objective of the present study was to examine academic achievement as a function of parenting styles. A parenting - style scale was administered to a random sample of 560 students from four junior secondary schools. Besides, for each student, average academic achievement scores of four years were obtained from school records. Chi-square and analysis of variance were employed in data analyses. The results indicated statistically significant differences in academic achievement in favour of students from authoritative homes. No substantial differences were observed in academic achievement of children from authoritarian, indulgent, and neglectful homes.*

Introduction

Children's earliest learning experiences occur within the family. These include, among other things, the learning of attitudes, values, and ways of behaving toward others. Along with these learning experiences, how parents react to the behaviours of a child is of great importance in determining what the child becomes. Alternatively, how a child behaves in childhood as well as later in life is greatly affected by the child rearing practices exercised in the family. For instance, the methods parents use in child upbringing have been found to be related to the child's performance in school.

Studies that were undertaken to investigate the relationship between parenting styles and academic achievement used some dimensions to distinguish one parenting style from another. The four most frequently employed dimensions of parental behaviour are warmth, control, autonomy, and maturity demands. Each dimension has been independently shown to be related to some aspects of children's behaviour. Mostly, however, the dimensions occur in combination.

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The possible combinations of the dimensions and the resulting parenting styles are shown in Table 1 below.

Table 1. A Two-dimensional Classification of Parenting Patterns

	Responsive Child-Centred	Unresponsive Parent-Centred
Controlling, Demanding	Authoritative Parents	Authoritarian Parents
Low In Control, Undemanding	Indulgent Parents	Neglectful Parents

Source: E. E. Maccoby and J. A. Martin (1983).

The main focus of this study was to examine the relationship of parenting style and academic achievement using the revised four-fold model (shown in Table 1 above). Recently, the model has been extensively used by investigators in the area. It has also been recommended for use by scholars (Maccoby & Martin, 1983; Lamborn et. al., 1991) for it can classify parenting styles more adequately than the three-fold model developed by D. Baumrind & Black (1967) who pointed out that there were three parenting patterns - authoritative, authoritarian, and permissive.

Literature

There seems to be a general consensus among theorists in psychology and education that a child's academic achievement is not a simple function of his/her innate ability. In addition to ability, environmental factors play important roles in the child's scholastic performance. In particular, exposure to different types of stimuli out of the school may produce different levels of academic achievement independent of ability. Among these out-of-school variables which influence or which are at least related to academic achievement of children and adolescents, much attention seems to be given to parenting styles (e.g., Baumrind & Black, 1967; Dornbusch et.al., 1987; Lamborn et. al., 1991).

A number of studies indicated that there are direct and indirect relationships between parenting styles and academic achievement. Indirectly, parental stimulation, expectation for high achievement,

encouraging curiosity, and challenges were found to be significantly and positively related to children's intrinsic academic motivation, which in turn was a significant predictor of academic achievement (Gottfried, 1990; Gottfried, Fleming, & Gottfried, 1994). Also, direct parental involvement in such activities as reading books, advising, reinforcing, showing techniques of study was found to have positive effect on academic achievement (Fehrmann, Keith, & Remers, 1987).

In an attempt to identify processes linking family and school achievement, some studies compared the home environment (including parental behaviour) of high-achieving and under-achieving high school boys. Morrow and Wilson (1961), for example, revealed that parents of high achievers gave their children more praise and approval, showed more interest and understanding, were closer to their children and made their children feel more attached to the family. In contrast, parents of underachievers were characterised as more domineering, over-restrictive, and more punitive (in terms of both severity and frequency of punishment). The latter parents were also more likely to pressurise their children excessively to make them work and achieve. The results further indicated that family moral fosters academic achievement among high school students by fostering positive attitudes toward teachers and toward school and by promoting interest in intellectual activities. Similar results were also reported by a study that employed observation to examine parent-child communication in families of low and high achievers (Nicassio, 1983).

Somewhat differently, other studies tried to compare the academic achievement of students whose parents employ different parenting styles. In other words, while the above studies tried to compare the home environment of high and low achievers, other studies preferred to identify families who exercised different parenting styles first and then compared the academic achievement of children from these families. We can classify these studies into two: those that used Baumrind's three-fold model (authoritative, authoritarian and permissive styles) and those that employed the revised four-fold model (authoritative, authoritarian, indulgent, and neglectful styles).

One study (Dornbusch et. al., 1987) adopted the three-fold model to examine the relation between parenting style and adolescent school performance using a large ($n=7,836$) and diverse sample. The study revealed that authoritative parenting is positively correlated with adolescent school performance whereas authoritarian and permissive parenting are negatively correlated. That is, adolescents who described their parents as more democratic, more warm, and more encouraging earned higher grades in school than their peers who described their parents to be less so. Other studies that examined the relation between parenting styles and children's school performance also reported similar results (Baumrind & Black, 1967; Coon, 1986; Fischer & Lazerson, 1984).

Employing the four-fold model, a study (Lamborn et.al., 1991) classified the families of approximately 4,100, 14-18-year-olds into one of the four parenting styles on the basis of the adolescents' ratings of their parents on two dimensions: acceptance/involvement and strictness/supervision. Analysis of the data revealed that while adolescents from authoritative parents surpassed all others, adolescents from neglectful parents exhibited the poorest outcomes on school performance. High school students from authoritarian homes scored reasonably well (next to those from authoritative homes) but those from indulgent homes scored relatively low (next to those from authoritarian homes). Similar results were reported by other studies (Bee, 1994; Berk, 1991; Irwin & Simons, 1994).

Another study (Steinberg et. al., 1992b) examined the long term effects of authoritative parenting, parental involvement, and encouragement on students academic achievement using a longitudinal sample ($n=6400$). According to Steinberg and his associates, the sample was ethnically and socio-economically heterogeneous and consisted of 14-18-year old Americans who were followed up over a one-year period. The results showed that high school students who described their parents as authoritative improved more academically and became more engaged in school over the one-year study period than did their counterparts from non authoritative homes.

The studies reviewed thus far, which employed either the three-fold or the revised four-fold model, consistently found that authoritative parenting facilitates or at least is positively related to the academic achievement of both children and adolescents. Besides, some studies disclosed that the positive influence of authoritative parents persists over time (Baumrind & Black, 1967; Steinberg et al., 1992b).

Finally, it is important to note that there are few exceptions to the above findings. In one such study, Chao (1994) compared parenting styles employed by fifty immigrant Chinese mothers (in the United States of America) and fifty European American mothers whose children were pre-school boys and girls (ages 2-5). The study revealed that for the Chinese, authoritarian parenting (or greater parental control) was associated with high achievement in school. According to this author, the concept of authoritativeness and authoritarianism are somewhat ethnocentric. A similar study by Kin and Chum and Rohner (cited in Chao, 1994) confirmed that the concepts "authoritarianism" and "restrictiveness" are more pertinent to American parenting values in which "strictness" is sometimes equated with parental hostility, aggression, mistrust, and dominance. They further suggested that for Asians, obedience to parents and some aspects of strictness may be equated with parental concern, caring, or involvement.

Similarly, Steinberg, Dornbusch, and Brown (1992a) investigated the relationship between family variables and academic achievement in four ethnic groups: Asian Americans, African Americans, Hispanic Americans, and European Americans. The results indicated that except for the Asian Americans, authoritarianism and permissiveness were negatively related with school performance while parental authoritativeness was positively so. In other words, the study revealed that the Asian Americans came from families high on authoritarianism and permissiveness and low on authoritative characteristics and yet they had higher high school grades than even the European Americans most of whom had authoritative parents.

In sum, although many studies underscored the positive role of authoritative parenting in children's and adolescents' academic achievement, some studies have challenged this conclusion. For

instance, for subjects of Asian descent, authoritarian rather than authoritative parenting is associated with positive school outcomes. This suggests that though the relationship between parenting style and school performance appears to be conclusive, actually it is not. This, in turn, calls for the need for further research on the aforementioned relationship across different ethnic groups.

In fact, there were some studies conducted to examine parenting styles in Ethiopia. According to the studies, authoritarian style was prevalent among the Amharas (Habtamu, 1979), Siltigna-speaking community (Abraham, 1996), and the Ethiopian people at large (Ringness & Gander, 1974). Recently, a few studies (Berhanu, 1996; Markos, 1996) have also investigated the relationship between parenting style and academic achievement. According to Berhanu and Markos, high school students who characterised their parents as authoritative achieved higher in school than their counterparts who rated their parents as authoritarian, indulgent, or neglectful. But the studies seem to have limited generalizability in the sense that each study was conducted on a single (homogeneous) ethnic group.

The purpose of the present study was, therefore, to investigate differences in academic achievement among children as a function of parenting styles across four ethnic groups (Oromo, Amhara, Gurage, and Harrari) of the country. Besides, by focusing on seventh and eighth graders the present study would see whether the results for senior-high students (Berhanu, 1996; Markos, 1996) could be generalised for junior-high students. The study could thus give a comprehensive picture of the relationship of parenting styles and academic achievement in the Ethiopian context.

It is important to note that though the study sampled subjects from the four ethnic groups, it did not intend to compare the ethnic groups in terms of academic achievement and parenting styles. It rather aimed at investigating the relationship of parenting styles and academic achievement across the four ethnic groups.

Methods

Subjects

The study was conducted on a random sample of 560 (281 males & 279 females) seventh and eighth grade students with ages ranging from 11 to 21. They were members of the Oromo (67 males & 73 females), Amhara (71 males & 68 females), Gurage (71 males & 70 females), and Harrari (72 males & 68 females) ethnic groups. Whereas ethnic Oromos were selected from a school in Ambo, the Amharas, Gurages, and Harraris were chosen from a school in Debre Birhan, Butajira and Harrar towns respectively.

Students in each town were first grouped into two: those who came from rural areas to study in the town and those who resided in the town. The former students were not eligible for inclusion in the sample because otherwise it would be very difficult to procure their four years' achievement scores. Thus, the sample comprised students who resided in town. A similar sampling procedure was employed in each study site.

As indicated above, the study chose students from grades seven and eight to see whether or not the results found for senior-high students would hold true for junior-high students as well. On the other hand, the four ethnic groups were selected to represent a heterogeneous sample from among the most populous (Oromo and Amhara) and less populous (Gurage and Harrari) ethnic groups.

Instruments

A questionnaire, written in Amharic, was used to collect mainly data pertaining to parenting styles. The questionnaire consisted of three sets of items. The first set comprised nine items which were related to demographic variables such as sex, age, grade level, and ethnic identity. The second set included four items developed to examine the consistency of parental behaviour. The third part of the questionnaire consisted of thirty five items. These items were used to classify parental behaviours into one of the four categories

(authoritative, authoritarian, indulgent, or neglectful). The items on parenting styles were adapted from different sources (Baumrind & Black, 1967; Becker et. al., 1962; Becker & Krug, 1964; Dornbusch et. al., 1987; Schaefer, 1965).

The items on parenting styles required students to rate their parents in terms of the two dimensions of parenting styles, namely, the warmth/love dimension and the control/demandingness dimension. The warmth/love sub-scale consisted of eighteen items related to parental warmth, acceptance, and closeness to youngsters. This sub-scale measures the extent to which the student perceives his/her parents as loving, responsive, and warm. The control/demandingness sub-scale included seventeen items assessing parental monitoring and limit setting as well as parental pressure and encouragement toward high achievement.

In addition to the questionnaire, data were gathered by analysing official school records. For each student, the average academic achievement scores for four years were gathered. Then, the mean of these average scores was taken to represent the average academic achievement score for each student.

Finally, before collecting data for the main study, the questionnaire was pilot-tested. The major objective of the pilot study was to test and refine the instrument. This was carried out on 152 students (76 males and 76 females) from all the four schools. After scoring the responses, the (Cronbach α) reliability computed for each sub-scale was found to be good (0.91 for the warmth/love sub-scale and 0.89 for the control/demandingness index).

Data - Analysis Procedure

The independent variable of prime importance in this study was parenting style. It included four categories: authoritative, authoritarian, indulgent, and neglectful parents. Based on students' ratings of their parents on the two dimensions (warmth/love and control/demandingness) and following previous works (e.g., Lamporn

et. al., 1991), the four parenting styles were derived using median split as follows.

- a. Authoritative parents were those whose children scored above or equal to the sample median on both the warmth/love and the control/demandingness indices.
- b. Authoritarian parents were those parents whose children earned a score below the sample median on the warmth/love index but above or equal to the sample median on the control/demandingness index.
- c. Indulgent parents were those whose children scored above or equal to the sample median on the warmth/love index but below the median on the control/demandingness index.
- d. Neglectful parents were those parents whose children received a score below the sample median on both the warmth/love and the control/demandingness indices.

Finally, in analysing the data, chi square and analysis of variance (ANOVA) were employed.

Results

To see whether or not there were academic-achievement differences due to parenting styles, a one-way ANOVA was employed.

Table 2 : Number of Cases, Means, and Standard Deviations of Achievement Scores by Parenting Style

Style of Parenting	N	Mean	SD
Authoritative	237	60.00	6.43
Authoritarian	180	51.72	3.96
Indulgent	87	50.56	2.43
Neglectful	56	49.93	1.98

A simple inspection of the data in Table 2 clearly shows that achievement scores differ from one parenting style to another. Results of one-way ANOVA (in Table 3 below) supported this observation. There is a statistically significant difference in students' academic achievement due to differences in parenting styles. In other

words, children who came from different homes characterised by different parenting styles showed different levels of achievement.

Table 3: One-way ANOVA (Achievement Scores by Parenting Style)

Source	SS	df	MS	F
Between Groups	11001.73	3	3667.24	152.87*
Within Groups	13339.23	556	23.99	
Total	24340.96	559		

* $P < 0.0001$

Employing Scheffe's multiple-comparison test, children from authoritative homes were found to receive a substantially higher mean achievement score than did children from each of the other homes. But the differences in mean achievement scores among students of authoritarian, indulgent, and neglectful homes were not statistically significant. Thus, the results suggest that parents' authoritativeness is related to better academic achievement of children.

While the above results pertain to the entire sample, the same procedures were repeated for students of each ethnic group to see whether or not the results were true across the ethnic groups studied. Here also Scheffe's comparison test as well as one-way ANOVA disclosed reliable differences in achievement scores favouring those from authoritative homes for each ethnic group. Like the result for the entire sample, no reliable difference was observed in achievement scores of students from authoritarian, indulgent, and neglectful homes.

The study further examined whether or not the above relationship between parenting styles and academic achievement is the same for boys and girls. The means and standard deviations of achievement scores for boys and girls are presented first.

Analysis of the data using two-way ANOVA produced the following results.

Table 4. Number of Cases, Means, and Standard Deviations of Achievement Score by Parenting Style and Sex

Parenting Style	Sex	N	Mean	SD
Authoritative	M	78	60.62	5.96
	F	159	59.70	6.66
Authoritarian	M	118	52.08	4.52
	F	62	51.05	2.52
Indulgent	M	54	50.44	2.38
	F	33	50.76	2.57
Neglectful	M	31	50.29	1.94
	F	25	49.48	2.02

The only statistically significant difference in academic achievement as indicated in Table 5, is due to differences in parenting style. The results also show that the difference in academic achievement

Table 5: Two-way ANOVA (Achievement Scores by Parenting Style and Sex)

Source	SS	df	MS	F
Parenting Style (A)	10584.047	3	3528.016	147.07*
Sex (B)	70.270	1	70.270	2.93
A x B	27.797	3	9.266	0.39
Residual	13241.160	552	23.988	

* P < .0001

between boys and girls as a function of parenting style is not significantly different. In other words, the (parenting-style-by-sex) interaction effect is not statistically significant.

Thus, so far as males and females come from families who employ the same parenting style, no substantial difference could be observed in their academic achievement. This implies that a specific parenting style could have no differential effects on academic achievement of boys and girls.

Nevertheless, an examination of the number of boys and girls by parenting style indicates some interesting results.

Table 6: Number and Percentage of Males and Females by Parenting Style

Parenting Style	Male		Female	
	N	Percent	N	Percent
Authoritative	78	28	159	57
Authoritarian	118	42	62	22
Indulgent	54	19	33	12
Neglectful	31	11	25	9
Total	281	100	279	100

Table 6 shows that parenting styles differ as a function of the sex of the child ($\chi^2 = 50.81$, $df = 3$, $p < 0.0001$). In more specific terms, slightly more than twice as many females (57%) as males (28%) reported that their parents are authoritative. In direct contrast, nearly twice as many males (42%) as females (22%) rated their parents as authoritarian.

Discussion

Results of the present study revealed that children from authoritative homes scored significantly higher in their academic achievement than did children from non authoritative homes. But no substantial differences were observed in the academic achievement of children from authoritarian, indulgent, and neglectful homes. These findings are consistent with results of studies conducted on high school students in the Ethiopian context (Berhanu, 1996; Markos, 1996) as well as in other countries (Dornbusch et al., 1987; Lamborn et al., 1991).

Generally, the results underscored the importance of parenting style in school performance. The variable explained more than one-third of the variations in students' achievement ($R^2 = 0.345$). This is a large contribution given the fact that many variables do affect students' academic achievement. Furthermore, the study provided evidence that the effect of parenting style on academic achievement

transcends ethnic lines. What makes this argument more convincing is the identical results found for each ethnic group. Authoritative parents in each ethnic group were reported to have children with better academic achievement than did children from non authoritative homes.

One can give a number of reasons why authoritative child rearing is so effective. First, control exercised in a way that appears fair and reasonable to the child, not impetuous and arbitrary, is far more likely to be complied with and internalised (Berk, 1991). Second, nurturant and non permissive parents who are secure in the standards they hold for their children provide them with models of caring concern for others as well as confident, assertive behaviour. In addition, such parents are likely to be more effective reinforcing agents, praising their children for behaviours that meet their expectations and making more successful use of disapproval, which works best when applied by a nurturant parent who can withstand counter-pressures from the child. Finally, parents who rely on authoritative techniques make demands that are sensitive and responsive to their children's developing capacities. By adjusting expectations so that they fit with children's ability to take responsibility for their own behaviour, these parents communicate to children a sense that they are competent beings who can do things successfully for themselves. As a result, high self-esteem and mature, autonomous functioning are fostered (Steinberg et.al., 1989).

The results of the present study indicate that if parents want their children to perform well in school, they need to be controlling and demanding as well as responsive to children's needs. That is, parents should be warm toward their children but they should also be able to demand good standards of behaviour and be supportive. The results also warn indulgent and neglectful parents that the behaviours they manifest in bringing up children have negative effects on their children's school performance. These parents are undemanding and low in control. The study, however, underscored the importance of demanding and controlling in relation to school performance. The study further indicates that parental control in the form of punishment without responding to children's needs adequately does not result in any appreciable school performance.

The findings seem to have some implications. The results indicate that many parents are not aware of the impact of parenting styles on all-round development of children. For instance, some parents blame the school for children's low academic performance. Such an attribution may emanate from the fact that parents are not sensitive or to some extent not aware of their parental roles and responsibilities to follow up and guide children's education. In fact, the school has its own responsibility in guiding children's education. It is, therefore, important that both parents and the school work closely in order to fully accomplish their tasks of bringing up children. In particular, with the support of concerned organisations, teachers may take the responsibility of educating parents to alleviate problems associated with parenting styles.

Finally, although not a main focus of this paper, the analysis indicates that significantly more females than males tended to have authoritative parents. Given this result and the fact that authoritative parenting positively contributes to students' academic achievement, we would expect females to surpass males in their academic performance. But this was not the case in the present study because although girls had a better performance than boys the difference was not large enough to be statistically significant. Why this was so is difficult to explain from the data at hand. The point thus needs further investigation.

Summary and Conclusion

It is obvious that a number of variables account for variations in students' achievement scores. This study, however, focused on the role of parenting styles. The results evidenced that the parenting style employed at home greatly affects a student's academic achievement. Nearly 35 percent of the total variance in students' achievement is accounted for by parenting style alone ($R^2 = 0.345$). Among the four styles of parenting, namely, authoritative, authoritarian, indulgent, and neglectful, the former is the only one that has a positive contribution to school performance while the latter three are associated with low achievement in school.

In conclusion, the study clearly showed the importance of parenting style in relation to students' academic achievement. The study further indicated that the positive contribution of authoritative parenting to academic achievement holds true not only across the sexes but also across grades and ethnic groups.

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