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\*CORRESPONDENCE

Fan Yaoyao

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# Exploring the Impact of Family Parenting Factors on Young children's Autonomy development

Fan Yaoyao<sup>1\*</sup>, Junainah Abd Hamid<sup>2</sup>, Jacqueline Tham<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Gongqing Institute of Science and Technology, Gongqing City Gongqing Avenue 1, Jiujiang City, 332020, Jiangxi Province, China

<sup>1,2,3</sup>Post Graduate Centre, Management and Science University, University Drive, Off Persiaran Olahraga, Section 13, 40100, Selangor, **Malaysia**.

## Abstract

Autonomy refers to the individual's awareness of their own ability and fully predicted, is a good psychological quality, but also a person to overcome difficulties, self-improvement, and success. It is also a good psychological quality, and an internal motivation for people to overcome difficulties, improve themselves and achieve success. Early childhood is the key period for the formation and development of autonomy of young children, and parents are the first teachers of young children. Parents are the first teachers of young children, and parental education plays a fundamental role in the growth of young children. Family parenting factors are very important to the healthy growth of an individual, and autonomy is a sign of the maturity and development of a young child's self-cognitive ability, and a source of healthy psychological development for young children. Parents who are too authoritarian, spoiled, or indulgent in their upbringing of young children are not conducive to the formation of their good character. Only when young children grow up in a democratic and harmonious family environment and feel the importance and trust of their parents, can they believe in themselves and recognize themselves more, and ultimately enhance their autonomy.

## Keywords

Young children; autonomy; parenting factors; influence

## 1. Introduction

The education that a person receives in his or her life can be divided into three types, namely, family education, school education and social exercise. Family education, i.e., family training, plays a role in a person's life, which cannot be replaced by other education. 3-6 years old pre-school children's education is synchronized between family and kindergarten, both of which are educated in the same direction. 3-6 years old children are in the key period of their autonomy development, and in addition to the kindergarten's education, the family education method plays a very important role in it.

The word parent has a very special meaning for every individual. In our lives, our parents have a very strong influence on us and are our first teachers. Parents have several roles to play, one is to raise us, and the other is to function as educators as we grow up.

The influence of parenting factors in each family basically determines the direction of our life-long growth, and it is precisely because parenting factors play a very important role in the process of individual growth and development that in recent years many experts and scholars have focused their attention on this topic and have given it the significance it deserves.

In recent years, family education has received sustained attention, and increased people have begun to recognize the important role of family upbringing in the development of young children. However, family upbringing factor which will help young children develop psychologically still remain a concern for parents (Chinese Family Education Association, 2021).

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 Definition of parenting factors

In foreign countries, parenting factor is often defined as "parenting pattern" or "parenting factor", and as the earliest researcher of parenting factor, Ms. Baumrind (2019) believes that it refers to the different feedback on children's behaviors in the course of parenting. As the earliest researcher on parenting factor, Ms. Baumrind (2019) thinks that it refers to the different feedback on children's behaviors from parents in the process of child-rearing, and such feedback show the parenting factor of parents (Baumrind, 2019). Frances and other scholars (2021) believe that the parenting factor is the stable educational attitudes and stable educational beliefs formed by the parents in the process of educating their children. American psychologists Nancy Darling and Laurence Steinberg (2021) believe that family functioning is the most perfect interpretation of parenting factor, which is an emotional complex expressed by parents' attitudes towards children and parental behaviors, including educational concepts embodied in the process of raising children, attitudes towards children, and the whole range of words and behaviors. Domestically, Tao & Lin (2020) define parenting factor as the behavioral tendency that parents show in the process of daily education and child rearing, which is a summary of the characteristics of various kinds of parenting behaviors, and it is stable. Gong (2005) believes that parenting factors are the external manifestation of educational concepts, manifested as a stable behavioral pattern in daily life, and that the behavior has tendencies. Zhang & Chen (2013) believe that parenting factor is a

synthesis of parents' parenting behaviors, attitudes, and perceptions towards their children. Domestically, scholars in China often refer to parenting factors as "parenting factors" and "family education factors", etc. Li (2019) refers to parenting factors as a combination of parenting behaviors, attitudes, and perceptions towards children. Li (2019) defines parenting factor as a pattern of behavior towards children's daily life in the process of family education. Chen (2022) believes that parenting factor refers to a firm educational philosophy and educational factor of parents in raising their children. Wang (2021) also defined parenting factor in his theoretical research, and in addition to the usual educational philosophy and educational attitude, he highlighted the role of non-verbal language.

### 2.2 Influences on Parenting factors

Research on the factors influencing parenting factors has been analyzed in terms of parents' own characteristics as well as the characteristics of young children. Studies have focused on parents' age, gender, regional differences, and level of education.

**Age and gender factor:** the difference in the age and gender of parents is an important factor that affects the parenting factor of parents towards their children (Lee, 2018). Parenting factors do not differ according to the age and gender of the young child but are affected by the age gap of the mother (Bi, 2010). It was found that mothers under the age of 30 would use more physical punishment methods on their children than mothers over the age of 30, and mothers between the ages of 30-35 would experience more maternal warmth in their children than mothers under the age of 30 and over the age of 35 (Bi, 2010). However, in Qin's (2019) study it was concluded that in the parenting process, parents show more emotional warmth and spoiling to boys compared to girls.

**Regional difference factor:** There is a significant difference in parenting factors between parents in rural areas and parents in urban areas. Qin (2019) believes that for urban parents, rural parents are more spoiled than their children. Qin (2021) found that urban parents were significantly higher than rural parents in terms of warmth and understanding towards their children, but significantly lower than rural parents in terms of harsh and protective dimensions. Wang (2020), in a study of college students, found that urban college students were higher than rural college

students in terms of harsh punishment and excessive interference from their parents. Parents in the urban and rural areas were more inclined to harsh and punitive parenting factors.

**Educational level factor:** According to Luo (2019), parents' educational level significantly influences their parenting factors towards their children. The level of education has a significant effect on both fathers' and mothers' parenting factors in terms of emotional warmth, understanding, and over-interference. In Wang (2022) study, it was found that when parents were raising their children, highly educated parents were more likely to use emotional warmth and favoritisms in their parenting factors, while less educated parents were more likely to use negative parenting factors such as rejection and denial.

### 2.3 Definition of Autonomy

Domestic scholars on the definition of autonomy: basically around the definition of the two aspects of self-awareness and external behavioral performance, Zhu (2020) believes that autonomy is the individual through the full assessment of their own ability on the basis of believing that they have the ability to complete a certain task; Wu (2023) believes that autonomy is the individual's recognition of their own, and objectively on their own ability in various aspects with a more positive and stable evaluation. Zhang (2020) holds a similar view that autonomy is a stable evaluation of the individual's self-competence and value, with a complex psychological hierarchy. According to Zhao (2019), self-efficacy, on the other hand, is a great motivation based on an objective and accurate evaluation of the self, free from the interference of external factors, and a firm conviction to strive towards a preset goal. And Wang & Yang (2016) divided autonomy into three aspects, arguing that young children's autonomy is closely related to self-efficacy, self-expression, and self-accomplishment, which are the driving force, prompting behavioral factors and core factors for the development of children's autonomy, respectively, and at the same time, children's self-efficacy is the highest form of expression for their autonomy development. The various aspects are the individual's awareness of his or her own ability, and based on which confidence is generated.

It can be seen that autonomy is an individual's recognition of self, as well as a more objective evaluation of self-competence and skills. The

definition of autonomy of young children in this study refers to the way of Wang(2016)delineation, and the autonomy of young children includes self-efficacy (young children's evaluation of the self in order to achieve a certain goal, and their belief in their own ability to complete this goal, i.e., the degree of certainty about their own ability), sense of achievement (the emotional experience of joy and fulfillment that young children get after reaching their wishes and succeeding), and self-expression (young children's self-competence, attitudes, and expression in terms of the child's self-efficacy, attitudes and thoughts).

### 2.4 Influencing Factors of Young Children's autonomy

The development of autonomy in young children is affected by both internal and external factors. Internal factors refer to the development of young children's body's own development. From their own point of view, the influencing factors include age and gender, physical condition, temperament, sense of security, attributional factor, peer interactions, and success experience. External factors refer to: kindergartens, early childhood teachers, young children's families, society, and other factors (Soeprijono, 2021). Since the independent variable of this study is family influences, this part of the review will focus on this.

As far as family factors are concerned, early childhood is in the key stage of learning and imitation, and family education has a profound influence on the lifelong development of individuals. In the family, parents are the preferred objects of imitation. From the perspective of family system theory and ecology, Gardiner (2022) divided the family environment in which children grow up into subjective and objective ones: the subjective environment refers to the man-made environment in the family, such as the way of upbringing, interpersonal relationships, and parental expectations of the children, etc. The objective environment, on the other hand, refers to the family structure, the economic situation, the cultural status of parents, and their expectations of their children; objective environment means that it is not shifted by human will, such as family structure, economic situation, parents' cultural level, occupation, number of children and so on (Niland, 2023). At present, in the research on young children's autonomy, there are fewer studies in which the objective environment is used as the independent variable, and most of them focus on exploring the role and influence of the

subjective environment on young children's autonomy. The following studies have been conducted.

First, parent-child relationship. In the process of children's socialization and personality development, parent-child relationship and early family education are the core and main motivation of it (Ye, 2002). Parent-child relationships have an important impact on children's personality and habits, as well as psychology, and a positive parent-child relationship can help children grow independently and confidently (Li, 2016). The healthy state of parent-child relationship can enable young children to build a strong sense of security and trust in their surroundings, which provides confidence for young children to leave their mothers' arms and try to explore unfamiliar environments independently (Wang, 2019). Social anxiety and loneliness are more prominent in left-behind toddlers, and they often lack autonomy in social interaction, and these problems are triggered by long-term parental separation, which is very detrimental to the development of the toddler's personality and socialization (Wang, 2019).

Firstly, parent-child relationship. Parent-child relationships and early family education are central and major motivators in the process of children's socialization and personality development (Dirks, 2022). Parent-child relationships have a significant impact on a child's personality and habits, as well as psychology, and a positive parent-child relationship can help a child grow in independence and confidence. A healthy state of parent-child relationship can enable young children to develop a strong sense of security and trust in their surroundings, which provides confidence for young children to leave their mother's arms and try to explore unfamiliar environments independently (Lanier, 2022). Social anxiety and loneliness are more prominent in left-behind children, and they often lack autonomy in social interaction, which is triggered by prolonged parental separation, which is detrimental to the development of their personality and socialization (Liang, 2023).

Secondly, parent-child communication. Communication is an important part in children's education, which is related to whether the child can be raised into a person with a sound personality, physical and mental health, integrity, cheerfulness, autonomy, and the ability to have a good relationship

with others in a friendly manner and adapt to the society (Lanier, 2022). Individuals are in the process of forming and developing their self-awareness and personality psychology at the age of 3-6 years, parents should not use their status as an advantage and communicate with them in a superior position. Parents should dialogue with them like peers and respect them as independent individuals, so as to lay the foundation for good parent-child communication. Such a role model demonstration will enable young children to be more able to understand how to dialogue and communicate with others as equals in their future growth (Dong, 2018). In the latest research review, Zhang (2020) mentioned that indicators that can positively predict subjective well-being include parent-child communication. Jin (2019) affects subjective well-being through the mediating role, i.e., the path from parent-child communication to collective self-esteem to individual self-esteem to subjective well-being, and adolescents' loneliness comes from negative parent-child communication, and such negative communication can seriously trigger their mental health problems, such as anxiety, depression, and so on (Hu, 2020). Moreover, the lack of parent-child communication among young children in left-behind families makes it easier for them to form an inferiority complex, which also adversely affects the cultivation of young children's autonomy (Zhao, 2020).

Third, parental expectations. Different levels of parental expectations affect the development of children's autonomy, and Jeynes (2022) explicitly mentions high expectations as an important cause of children's low self-esteem. The key zone that promotes the development of autonomy is the degree of moderation between parental expectations and the child's actual level. When parents' expectations are too high, they unconsciously demand that their children achieve what they expect. But when parents' expectations are low, they tend to neglect their children's growth. Therefore, parents should pay attention to whether their expectations are in line with their children's recent development, to help their autonomy to develop continuously. This is because when parents have high expectations and the child finds it difficult to achieve them, the parents produce more negative evaluations, making the child feel that the parents do not care about their efforts and thus lack motivation and confidence (Jeynes, 2022). It is clear that parents need to establish the correct

concept of expectations, give their children correct and positive evaluations, and consciously guide their children to make objective attributions in order to better help their children's autonomy to thrive.

Fourth, parenting factor. Based on Baumrind's research, McCombie and Martin, the famous American child psychologists, classified parenting factors into four types, namely, authoritative, arbitrary, indulgent, and neglectful; children growing up in authoritative families are mostly good at self-control and problem solving and have greater independence and autonomy. Children raised in neglectful families are prone to greater impulsivity and aggression, lack of warmth towards others, and are more likely to have adverse behavioral problems in adolescence (Lawall, 2022). Garcia (2020) elaborated that different parenting factors have different impacts on young children's autonomy, i.e., authoritarian parents emphasize their children's absolute obedience to them, which largely undermines young children's autonomy in exploring the world; democratic parents in their strictness will guide them scientifically on the basis of reasonable expectations, and encourage their children to try to solve the problems they encounter on their own, and they will strengthen their own autonomy when they feel their parents' trust. Kong (2022) concluded that a good parenting factor will make children optimistic, confident, socially competent, and more likely to succeed; conversely, any deviation in the family's parenting factor will cause children to be introverted, develop an inferiority complex, or worse, become autistic. Therefore, it is recommended that parents replace their own traditional educational concepts with those from a dominant perspective to help their children's autonomy develop better.

In conclusion, we believe that in the process of children's growth, family factors, as the most basic factors, are the main environment for children to acquire basic life skills and basic life norms, and parents are the earliest and the most basic implementers of children's socialization, and parental participation and support have an extremely important impact on children's social development. In addition, among the family factors, no matter parental expectations or parenting factor, the parent-child relationship is indispensable, and in the formation of all factors, parent-child communication also plays an important role.

### 3. Findings & Discussion

Research on the relationship between parenting factors and autonomy is rich, with scholar Zheng (2022) finding that parenting factors influence children's mental health and are also significantly associated with levels of autonomy. Parents' personality traits, educational level, educational factor, and emotional management all affect all aspects of young children's personality development. Authoritarian parenting factors are prone to the development of psychological problems such as low self-esteem, cowardice, and negative emotions. Scholars such as Bi (2014), also confirmed through research that the development of autonomy is significantly influenced by parents in terms of parenting factors in the process of human growth, and that parental attitudes are also crucial. Da (2018) confirmed through a study of college students that both in terms of autonomy, self-esteem and self-efficacy are significantly or closely related to parenting factors and parenting attitudes. Li (2019) emphasized the contribution of harmonious parent-grandparent co-parenting relationships and mothers' self-efficacy in parenting to young children's socialization Yang (2018) Parental emotional warmth factor positively predicted total self-efficacy and academic autonomy, while parental denial factor negatively predicted total self-efficacy and social autonomy. Liu (2018) suggests that, in general, there are several ways in which parenting factors have an impact on autonomy. First, family atmosphere, if a student's family atmosphere is harmonious, then the child has a high level of physical and mental health and a strong sense of well-being. Second, the role model effect, parents are the best teachers of children, parents' words and behavior permeate the education. Thirdly, the concept of education, the parents have a reasonable concept of upbringing, the children's personality integrity and autonomy.

#### 3.1 The impact of authoritarian parenting factor on young children's Autonomy

Authoritarian parents tend to be overly intrusive in the development of their young children, demanding that the trajectory of their young children's behavior must follow their own teachings, unable to tolerate the slightest error from their young children, and having high expectations and demands on their young children that are not in line with their actual abilities (Zheng, 2022). Woodhouse (2018) suggests that being educated under authoritarian parenting



factors may perpetuate a lack of warmth and affection, and that young children are lackadaisical or powerless. Bureau (2020) argues that under such demands that are not in line with a young child's own development, a young child who is constantly passive and repressed may develop two different personalities: one is submissive and lacks the ability to judge and deal with things, and the other is due to the formation of rebelliousness by being overly interfered with, and may even develop a tendency to violence.

### 3.2 The impact of Democratic factor (Emotional Warmth and Encouragement) on young children's Autonomy

Democratic parents are usually gentle and affectionate, understanding, and supportive of their children's development. While paying attention to their children's behavior, they will encourage their children to try what they can do. They do not reprimand their children for their mistakes, but rather reason with them, criticize and correct them; they also recognize their children's small successes in a timely manner, and it is in this small progress that their children experience success (France, 2021). Liu (2022) suggests that children with democratic parenting factors are strong-willed and positive, able to interact harmoniously with others, and confident in themselves. Compared with other parenting factors, democratic parenting is beneficial to the cultivation and development of children's autonomy.

### 3.3 The impact of Spoiling parenting factor on young children's Autonomy

Dirks (2022) suggests that parents spoil their children because they have misplaced their position towards their children, placing them in a special position, putting them in the palm of their hands, obeying them, doing everything for them, and even fulfilling all their unreasonable demands out of pampering them. Malureanu (2021) argues that in such a family atmosphere, the young child, because of the over-indulgence of the parents, may be inclined to selfishness and inferiority complex, and may not have basic living skills, may have weak will power and may be unmotivated. The overly soft view of young children prevents them from exploring the outside world and from exercising and growing.

### 3.4 The impact of neglected parenting factor on young children's Autonomy

The parenting attitude of neglectful parents towards their young children is to ignore them and let them be free. These parents have little free time to educate their toddlers because they are busy with their careers, lack emotional communication with their toddlers, and neglect their toddlers' inner aspirations (Lee, 2018). When parents are not involved enough in their toddlers' growth, toddlers are disappointed when they make progress and do not receive timely positive reinforcement from their parents (Garcia, 2020). Lee (2018) neglectful parents do not pay enough attention to their toddlers, the toddlers will have doubts about the existence of the self, parental neglect makes the toddlers lose the sense of belonging, and the toddlers thus show characteristics such as introversion, lack of social interaction, and lack of autonomy.

## 4. Conclusion

Parents should be consistent in their parenting factor, which is known as "strict but not harsh, lenient but not pampering, loving but not spoiling, and letting go but not indulging". Parents should show more love and care for their children, provide more guidance, support their interests, listen more patiently, and encourage and praise their children. Parents of different cultural heritage and connotation should be combined with teachers to form an educational synergy and become an irreplaceable backing to promote home and family co-education. Parents in the process of teaching children should also create equality, respect, understanding of the educational atmosphere; adhering to the "leniency and strictness, love, but not spoiled, let go, but not indulgence" of the good education policy. They should pay attention to their children in their leisure time and give them the care and love they deserve in their lives; at the same time, they should maintain consistency with the kindergarten, pay attention to their children's lives, pay attention to their children's growth from various angles, and contribute to the development of their autonomy.

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