The Impact of Parental Academic Control on Academic Burnout among High School Students

Yunhan Xu

College of Education and Human Ecology, The Ohio State University, Columbus, Ohio 43210, The United States

xu.5376@osu.edu

Abstract. With the development of times, educational pressure is constantly increasing, and the problem of academic burnout in high school students is more and more serious. This literature review integrate 10 articles from 2020 to 2025 to investigate the impact of authoritarian parenting styles on academic burnout and learning motivation among high school students. Research has found that authoritarian parenting exacerbates academic burnout by inducing academic anxiety. There are cultural differences in the role of behavioral control. In East Asian, excessive behavioral control significantly reduces students' academic performance; In the Turkish sample, although behavioral control promotes self-regulation ability, it cannot directly alleviate burnout. Research has found that authoritarian parenting significantly suppresses learning motivation by hindering the satisfaction of psychological needs. Academic self-efficacy can effectively buffer the negative impact of academic pressure on burnout, parental warmth can significantly boost children's learning motivation. The inhibitory effect of behavioral control on boys' academic performance will be stronger, and this situation will be more prominent in the context of East Asian culture. Parents can replace accusatory words with open-ended questions and active listening. They can also offer children more freedom to choose and using goal communication training.

Keywords: Academic burnout, authoritarian parenting, learning motivation, behavioral control, cultural differences.

1. Introduction

The competition in contemporary global education is becoming increasingly fierce, the problems of academic burnout and learning motivation among high school students are becoming increasingly prominent. Research shows that academic burnout is manifested as emotional exhaustion, cognitive alienation, and a low sense of achievement, while the lack of learning motivation can affect the persistence of academic commitment [1-3].

Authoritarian parenting style was characterized by high behavioral control, low psychological control and low autonomous support, is closely related to the above-mentioned problems [4-6]. Existing research shows that psychological control can significantly induce learning anxiety, behavioral control in East Asian cultures can negatively predict academic performance, both types of control can increase the risk of burnout [2, 6].

However, there also has some limitations in current research. The research data only collected reports on the parenting behaviors of mothers, but not those of fathers [5]. This study describes the influence mechanism of authoritarian parenting styles on the academic burnout and learning motivation of high school students, and systematically sorts out authoritarian parenting styles, academic burnout and learning motivation. In addition, this study offers enlightenment and suggestions for parents, so that they can refer to these suggestions to better pay attention to their children's psychological needs and the cultivation of their autonomy.

2. Introduction to the research subjects

2.1. Authoritarian Parenting Style

The authoritarian parenting style is an educational model that has a high degree of control and demand over children but a low degree of emotional response. Parents want their children to unconditionally obey discipline and restrain their behavior through strict rules and punishment. This parenting style neglects children's psychological needs and the development of their autonomy [5, 7]. Authoritarian parenting styles include behavioral control and psychological control. Parents control their children's behavior by supervising and constraining their daily conduct. A typical manifestation of this is the supervision and restraint of their children's study time and social activities, such as checking their children's homework, forcing them to follow a regular schedule, and ensuring that they can perfectly carry out their own plans. Parents intervene in their children's inner state through emotional manipulation, mainly manifested in inducing children to feel guilty, such as denying children's ideas and constantly emphasizing that they do so for the children's good [3, 8].

2.2. Academic Burnout

2.2.1 Definition of Academic Burnout

Academic burnout refers to a syndrome mostly caused by long-term academic pressure, characterized by emotional exhaustion, learning alienation, and reduced sense of achievement, ultimately leading to learning detachment and a decline in self-efficacy. Learners usually feel physically and mentally exhausted and start to question the meaning of learning, believing that they cannot achieve their academic goals [2, 8].

2.2.2 Introduction to Emotional Exhaustion, Learning Alienation and Low Sense of Achievement

Emotional exhaustion means the state where learners are physically and mentally exhausted due to continuous academic pressure. Typical manifestations include feeling completely drained and having difficulty concentrating during study [2]. In 2023, Gao et al. pointed out that emotional exhaustion is characterized by chronic fatigue and inattentiveness during the learning process, and is often accompanied by symptoms such as headaches and physical discomfort.

Learning alienation means the attitude of learners towards the learning content and related matters, which is indifferent, distant, or even sarcastic. Typical behaviors include evading learning tasks and questioning the value of the knowledge being learned [8].

Low sense of achievement means the continuous negative self-evaluation that learners have of their academic abilities and achievements. Typical manifestations include the thought that "no matter how hard one tries, one cannot make progress" [6].

2.3. Learning Motivation

2.3.1 The Conceptual Significance of Learning Motivation

Learning motivation is the psychological driving force that prompts learners to engage in learning activities. It influences learning outcomes by helping learners overcome some factors of procrastination, automatically filtering out important information, and maintaining the endurance of learning [1]. For example, helping learners shift from leisure activities to academic tasks; Help learners review core knowledge points before the exam; When learners encounter difficulties in their studies, they are willing to spend time addressing them. This kind of motivation can be changed. Learners can change their motivation by relying on external pressure, recognizing the value of learning and enjoying the learning process [4]. For example, students finish their homework on time to avoid punishment. Students are happy because they have solved some rather troublesome academic problems.

2.3.2 Intrinsic Motivation, Extrinsic Motivation and Self-determination Theory

In the theory of self-determination, the growth of an individual human being requires the satisfaction of three fundamental needs. Autonomy means the fact that the behavior perceived by an individual stems from their own will and choice. The sense of ability means an individual's perception of whether they can achieve the goals they desire. A sense of belonging means whether an individual feels that their value is recognized by the outside world.

Intrinsic motivation refers to learners' interest in exploring and acquiring knowledge itself, willing to take the initiative to learn and understand. Actively learning knowledge and solving problems can make them feel happy. For example, some learners may feel happy about their studies and also be delighted when they have mastered a relatively difficult knowledge point [1]. Extrinsic motivation relies on external rewards or punishments as driving forces. For example, if a student wants credits and can earn them by completing and submitting their homework, they will complete and submit their homework in order to obtain credits [3].

3. The Impact of Authoritarian Parenting Styles on Academic Burnout

3.1. Research on the Relationship between Authoritarian Parenting Styles and Academic Burnout among High School Students

The authoritarian parenting style is an educational model with high demands and low responses. Parents expect their children to strictly follow the plans they have made and unconditionally act in accordance with their requirements. The authoritarian parenting style is reflected not only in strict control but also in psychological control. According to the self-determination theory, when a person's three basic needs (autonomy, sense of ability, and sense of belonging) are blocked, the individual will experience learned helplessness, which can lead to burnout manifestations such as emotional exhaustion [8]. This study shows that when the three basic needs of teenagers (autonomy, sense of ability, and sense of belonging) are blocked, authoritarian parenting will intensify their sense of frustration. Parental psychological control can cause teenagers to directly inhibit their own autonomous development through strategies, such as inducing guilt, leading to learned helplessness and avoidance behaviors, and also weakening students' abilities, resulting in a decline in self-efficacy. Recent studies have shown that this parenting style is significantly associated with academic burnout among adolescents. Authoritarian parenting styles can weaken students' learning motivation and harm their self-regulation ability [6, 8].

3.2. Detailed Study 1

The sample of Xu's research included 731 tenth grade students, 356 were boys, accounting for 48.7%. These students all come from regular high schools in four cities in China (Beijing, Guangzhou, Fuzhou and Xian). This study conducted stratified sampling based on the urbanization level of the students' family locations (high, medium, low). The typicality of psychological characteristics is reflected in the context of rapid urbanization, so stratified sampling is necessary.

In Xu's research, the measurement of parents' psychological control was conducted using an 18 question self-developed scale, focusing on two typical behavioral characteristics: emotional manipulation and guilt induction. The study adopted a Likert 5-point rating (1=completely inconsistent; 5=completely consistent). In this study, the Cronbach 'α coefficient was 0.94, which was higher than the standard of 0.80, indicating good internal consistency. Non-adaptive functions were evaluated using the Academic Burnout Scale [5], with a focus on emotional exhaustion and cognitive avoidance, such as "Learning makes me feel physically and mentally exhausted" and "I always procrastinate when doing my homework". The reliability of the scale is very good, $\alpha = 0.88$.

This study employed the cross-lag model (CLPM) to analyze how parents' psychological control and academic function interact over time. It examined the data of parents' psychological control, academic adaptation function, and non-adaptation function during the baseline period (T1) and the

one-year follow-up period (T2), and controlled for gender, age, and urbanization level. This study focused on examining the predictive effect of parents' psychological control on T1's academic function in T2, verifying the hypothesis that parents' psychological control has a significant impact on future academic function. The predictive effect of T1 academic function on the psychological control of T2 parents was also investigated to verify that academic function performance might also have a reverse impact on the false psychological control level of parents. This study also evaluated the temporal stability of parents' psychological control, academic adaptive function and non-adaptive function from T1 to T2. It is carried out respectively on the basis of controlling gender, family social status and baseline academic performance, etc.

This study employed the maximum likelihood estimation (MLE) method to estimate the path coefficients and processed the missing data of 731 samples using the full-information maximum likelihood estimation (FIML) method. The model demonstrated an acceptable goodness-of-fit index. To examine the moderating effect of urbanization levels, the cities were divided into first-tier and second-tier groups for multi-group analysis. The significance of the moderating effect was determined by comparing $\Delta\chi^2$.

The findings of Xu et al. show that parental psychological control significantly predicted the growth of maladaptive academic function in high school students and confirmed the theoretical hypothesis that psychological control undermines autonomy. Adaptive academic function has a significant negative predictive effect on subsequent parents' psychological control. However, the reverse effect of non-adaptive function on psychological control was significant in the samples of second-tier cities, but the effect was not significant in first-tier cities. The research also has flaws. The research samples were only limited to four urban areas and rural samples were not included.

3.3. Detailed Study 2

The Harma study took 295 junior high school students and their mothers from the Anatolian region of Turkey as the research subjects, 145 were girls, accounting for 49.2%. The average age of the students is 12.14 years old. They all study in three public schools in the Ankara region of Turkey, with grades 6 and 7.

In this study, the parental control type was measured by the Student Self-Rating Scale. Behavioral control was carried out using the "Parental Knowledge Monitoring Scale" revised by Kerr & Stattin (24 items), with a 4-point score (1=never; 4=always), and the reliability of the sub-scale α was 0.79-0.87. Psychological control was carried out using the "Parental Psychological Control Scale" (16 items) [5], with a 4-point score (1=never; 4=always), and the reliability of the sub-scale α was 0.82-0.87. Academic self-efficacy was evaluated using Marsh's (1990) "Academic Self-Description Questionnaire" (ASDQ), which included 6 items each in mathematics and literature, with a 4-point scoring system. The reliability α ranged from 0.87 to 0.89.

The researchers used the Structural Equation Model (SEM) to test the causal relationship between variables. Firstly, a theoretical path model was constructed, with behavioral control and psychological control as the starting points, self-regulation ability as the core mediating variable, and academic self-efficacy and adaptation problems as the end variables. The model parameters were calculated by the statistical software Mplus 7, and the maximum likelihood estimation method was used to quantify the intensity of the interaction between variables. To verify the mediating role of self-regulation, the 95% confidence interval of the indirect effect was calculated using the Bootstrap repeated sampling method (1,000 times). The mediation model and the direct effect model were also compared through the chi-square difference test. The model controls the family SES and the age of teenagers.

Empirical research supports the significant promoting effect of behavioral control on self-regulation ability (β=0.19 for boys and β=0.09 for girls), while psychological control does not show a statistical impact. Self-regulation ability further positively predicted academic self-efficacy and negatively predicted adaptation problems.

In conclusion, behavioral control significantly enhances academic confidence and reduces behavioral problems among teenagers by improving their self-regulation ability. However, this study has the defect of not integrating father data.

3.4. Other Studies

Yau et al. 's research: Through the data analysis of 220 adolescents in this study, it was found that maternal psychological control significantly reduces students' academic performance [9]. When the mother's psychological control is negative (such as denying her child), the tendency of teenagers to deviate from their academic goals will increase, and they will reduce their efforts in their studies. As a result, the academic performance of teenagers will decline. Therefore, excessive psychological control by mothers is an important factor in intensifying academic burnout among teenagers. In contrast, father's psychological control has no significant impact on academic motivation. This indicates that the psychological intervention of mothers has a stronger destructive effect on the academic development of teenagers.

Regarding Yang et al.'s study, this study is based on the reality of a follow-up study of 9,449 Chinese junior high school students. Self-supportive parenting can significantly improve academic performance, but behavioral control can lead to a decline in academic performance. The study found that if teenagers' autonomy is overly deprived and they are kept in a passive state for a long time, they will easily experience feelings of fatigue and powerlessness. When teenagers' studies are monitored rather than what they want to learn, they will develop an aversion to learning. In addition, research also shows that parents will increase the intensity of behavioral control when their boys' grades improve. This phenomenon indicates that traditional gender expectations have a counter-moderating effect on parenting behaviors.

Another study found that emotional dysregulation can trigger hostile speech (such as scolding and rebuking). If parents fail to understand their children's needs, it will lead to excessive intervention [10].

This study shows that if parents make derogatory remarks about their children or have excessive controlling behaviors, they will convey doubts about their children's abilities to them and damage their children's sense of self-efficacy. At the same time, if homework interaction is repeatedly associated with intense negative emotions, it will weaken children's intrinsic motivation for learning.

3.5. Summary

In conclusion, authoritarian parenting styles significantly increase the risk of academic burnout by weakening adolescents' goal engagement and stimulating maladaptive learning strategies. However, the intensity of influence varies in different cultural backgrounds [8, 9]. Research shows that in collective culturalism such as Turkey, the negative effects of psychological control are relatively weak, while behavioral control may play a positive role by promoting self-regulation [5]. Research shows that mothers have stronger psychological control than fathers. Boys who make progress in their studies are more likely to be subject to their parents' academic control. Urban teenagers are more sensitive to psychological control [6, 8].

4. The Impact of Authoritarian Parenting Styles on Learning Motivation

4.1. Research Overview

Research shows that authoritarian parenting styles generally cause damage to the learning motivation of high school students, mainly manifested in authoritarian parenting styles suppress students' psychological needs and reduce their intrinsic learning motivation [1]. And it will cause students to fall into a state of completely giving up their efforts. At this stage, parental control often intensifies, thereby creating a vicious cycle [3]. In collective culture in China, behavioral control may be transformed into learning motivation through gratitude towards parents, but in individual cultures

such as Turkey, if one wants to enhance learning efficiency, behavioral control and emotional support need to work in coordination [4, 5].

4.2. Detailed Study 1

The sample of this study included 447 high school students in Fuzhou, 46% were male and 54% were female. The study found that when parents adopt non-invasive supervision (such as asking their children about their school performance), it promotes students' emotional filial piety (a model of filial piety based on emotional gratitude), and then students will take the initiative to study harder out of gratitude. However, if parents use emotional coercion (such as emphasizing self-sacrifice, saying that they have sacrificed a lot of themselves for their children), it will directly dampen the children's interest in learning and cannot alleviate this situation through any form of filial piety. Research shows that the obedience norms of authoritative filial piety are related to parents' parenting practices, but statistics indicate that these norms cannot directly and effectively enhance learning motivation.

4.3. Detailed Study 2

This study examined 295 Turkish junior high school students and their mothers, exploring the path of the effect of autocratic upbringing on academic motivation under Islamic culture, mainly focusing on the differential influence of behavioral control and psychological control. This study adopted mother-reported behavioral control and psychological control as independent variables, and measured the dependent variable and the mediating variable respectively through the Academic Self-efficacy Scale and the self-regulation Questionnaire. The core finding of this study lies in that behavioral control enhances teenagers' self-regulation ability, thereby increasing their academic self-efficacy. Psychological control neither has a direct impact on the academic self-efficacy of adolescents, it not produce a brief effect through self-regulation ability. This shows that behavioral control promotes academic motivation by cultivating self-control ability. Psychological control cannot effectively influence academic motivation.

The conclusion shows that after comparison with studies in other cultural contexts, it is pointed out that the positive impact of behavioral control on academic adaptation had cross-cultural consistency, while the detrimental effect of psychological control highlights the key role of control types in differentiating academic motivation.This study has the limitation of lacking data on fathers' parenting. It only collected reports on mothers' parenting behaviors and did not collect those of fathers.

4.4. Other Studies

Regarding the Çelik’s study, this study involved 427 Turkish high school students, the research found that when parents independently support their children, it directly enhances the basic psychological needs of teenagers (such as autonomy and a sense of ability). The study also found that autonomous support could only stimulate learning motivation (such as interest in learning) by meeting psychological needs such as students' autonomy, sense of ability and belonging. Authoritarian parenting indirectly weakens intrinsic motivation by suppressing the satisfaction of psychological needs [1].

Regarding the study by Tunkkari et al., this study took 814 Finnish adolescents and their mothers as the subjects and analyzed the bidirectional association between mothers' homework intervention behaviors, adolescents' academic motivation and academic well-being through the cross-lag model. The study found that a mother's psychological control can significantly reduce the motivation level of teenagers. High intrinsic motivation can significantly reduce the subsequent psychological control level of mothers, indicating that a positive academic state has a buffering effect on parents' control behavior. Conversely, it may intensify psychological control [3].

4.5. Summary

In conclusion, studies from multiple countries have consistently found that psychological control directly weakens intrinsic motivation and then leads to a decline in academic well-being by enhancing

dismotivation [3, 4]. Behavioral control in China can indirectly enhance autonomous motivation by promoting reciprocal filial piety, but in non-East Asian cultures, behavioral control needs to be combined with emotional warmth to achieve self-regulation of tendons and academic efficacy [4, 5].

Parents can prevent the emergence of a state of lack of motivation by reducing emotional coercion, thereby avoiding the vicious cycle of motivation damage. In addition, Chinese parents can ask some questions by discussing with their children (for example, how do you want to arrange your afternoon time for study?) This action can effectively utilize the reciprocity in filial piety values to promote children's learning motivation.

5. Discussion and Suggestion

5.1. Overall Conclusion Summary

In conclusion, the authoritarian parenting style will deprive students of their need for autonomy, intensify their academic burnout and weaken their learning motivation, thereby triggering negative learning outcomes [1, 8]. In addition, Yang et al. 's research also indicates that parents will increase the intensity of behavioral control when boys' academic performance improves. This phenomenon indicates that traditional gender expectations have a counter-moderating effect on parenting behaviors.

5.2. Practical Insights and Suggestions

To alleviate the negative impact of authoritarian parenting on students' academic performance, parents can first stop their psychological control behaviors (such as belittling) towards their children, and then adopt mentalization strategies [10]. Parents can ask their children questions (for example, although the child made a mistake in one question, the parent can ask the child, "The solution approach for this question you wrote is very interesting. Could you tell me how you came up with it?")" Replace accusatory words with open-ended questions and active listening, which can reduce controlling behavior. In addition, parents can set basic rules for their children, but let the children decide on what to carry out specifically. Then, through regular discussions, the specific content and rules to be implemented can be determined. This can have a positive impact on the children's academic development [6]. In addition, parents and teachers can also use goal communication training [9]. For example, after a child's exam results are out, the parent asks the child, "Your English exam score has improved. Do you think the new learning method you used is effective?" Instead of directly scolding the child, saying, "Your grades are still very poor. This shows that you have not studied hard.". This can enhance students' learning engagement (such as concentration duration, etc.).

5.3. Future Research Directions

The monitoring behavior in traditional autocratic upbringing is being replaced by technological control. For instance, the daily supervision of students by parents and teachers is gradually being replaced by digital learning software. Whether this kind of behavior belongs to psychological control remains to be verified [5].

6. Conclusion

Through the literature review method, this study examined the mechanisms by which authoritarian parenting styles on academic burnout and learning motivation of high school students, covering empirical research in the cultural context of countries such as China. Research has shown that psychological control can significantly increase academic burnout. Psychological control leads to burnout by inducing academic anxiety, causing academic goals to deviate and weakening learning motivation. Behavioral control in China may indirectly lead to burnout due to the neglect of autonomy, but the correlation in Western culture is relatively small.

Autocratic upbringing (especially psychological control) can harm intrinsic motivation and weaken it. High self-efficacy can weaken the impact of academic pressure on burnout, and if

psychological needs are met, it will promote autonomous motivation. The negative impact of a mother's psychological control on academic performance is generally significant, but the role of a father's psychological control is relatively small. Parents can reduce psychological control and adopt self-supportive parenting.

In conclusion, self-supportive participation helps improve students' long-term academic performance, while behavioral control participation may hinder academic development. Research has found that Chinese parents tend to implement performance-oriented behavioral control reinforcement for boys, while this pattern is not obvious among girls. This indicates that educators need to develop gender-differentiated parent guidance programs, especially guiding parents to avoid overly relying on behavioral control strategies for boys when pursuing academic performance.

References

[1] Çelik, O. (2024). Academic motivation in adolescents: The role of parental autonomy support, psychological needs satisfaction and self-control. Front. Psychol., 15, Article 1384695.

[2] Gao, X. H. (2023). Academic stress and academic burnout in adolescents: A moderated mediating model. Front. Psychol., 14, Article 1133706.

[3] Tunkkari, M., Hirvonen, R., Vasalampi, K., & Kiuru, N. (2024). Bidirectional associations between maternal homework involvement, adolescents' academic motivation, and school well-being. J. Fam. Psychol., 38 (3), 421–432.

[4] Guo, M. C., Wang, L., Day, J., & Chen, Y. H. (2021). The relations of parental autonomy support, parental control, and filial piety to Chinese adolescents' academic autonomous motivation: A mediation model. Front. Psychol., 12, Article 724675.

[5] Harma, M., Aktas, B., & Sümer, N. (2025). Behavioral but not psychological control predicts self-regulation, adjustment problems and academic self-efficacy among early adolescents. J. Psychol. Advance online publication.

[6] Yang, Y. (2025). Reciprocal relationships between parental involvement and academic performance in early adolescence: A two-year longitudinal study in China. J. Youth Adolesc., 54 (4), 876–889.

[7] Martínez, I., García, F., Veiga, F., García, O. F., Rodrigues, Y., & Serra, E. (2020). Parenting styles, internalization of values and self-esteem: A cross-cultural study in Spain, Portugal and Brazil. Int. J. Environ. Res. Public Health, 17 (7), Article 2370.

[8] Xu, X. P., Dai, D. Y., Liu, M., & Deng, C. P. (2020). Parental psychological control and academic functioning in Chinese high school students: A short-term longitudinal study. Br. J. Dev. Psychol., 38 (1), 90–107.

[9] Yau, P. S., Cho, Y. W., Shane, J., Kay, J., & Heckhausen, J. (2022). Parenting and adolescents' academic achievement: The mediating role of goal engagement and disengagement. J. Child Fam. Stud., 31 (4), 897–909.

[10] Cohen, R., Gershy, N., & Davidov, M. (2024). Why things can go wrong when parents try to help children with their homework: The role of parental emotion regulation and mentalization. J. Educ. Psychol., 116 (6), 921–935.