

# Exploring the Link between Parenting Styles and Academic Performance among Grade 12 Learners in Lusaka, Zambia

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## ABSTRACT

This study aimed to investigate the connection between parenting style and academic performance of high school students in Munali Constituency, Lusaka District, Zambia. The study utilized a cross-sectional design, with a sample of 30 Grade eleven pupils selected from 3 secondary schools in Munali Constituency. The participants were high school students aged between 13 and 21 years old, chosen through a simple random sampling technique. The Parental Authority Questionnaire was employed to assess the parenting style utilized by the parents. The results of the study revealed a positive and significant correlation between authoritative parenting style and academic achievement, as well as a negative correlation between neglectful parenting style and academic achievement. Furthermore, a relationship between authoritarian parenting style and academic achievement was established. These findings suggest that adopting a positive parenting style can enhance the academic achievement of adolescents in Munali District. Therefore, it is recommended that parents be provided with appropriate knowledge and skills to cater to the needs and development of their adolescent children.

**Keywords:** parenting styles, academic achievement/performance

## INTRODUCTION

Education is a vital component of a country's developmental agenda, and Zambia is no exception. Parenting plays a crucial role in children's education, and the quality of the relationship between parents and their children can greatly impact cognitive development and learning abilities in the early years (Klein & Kühhirt, 2023; Leung et al., 1998; Mize & Pritt, 1997). Unfortunately, recent data from the Ministry of Zambian Education indicates that overall academic performance among high school students is lacklustre nationwide (Grigorenko et al., 2007; Joshi et al., 2023; Kaani, 2014; Kaani & Joshi, 2013; Nkamba & Kanyika, 2000). In fact, the 2014 grade 12 examination demonstrated a decline in performance compared to the previous year (The Examination Council of Zambia report, 2014).

Poor academic achievement can have several negative consequences for students, including increased vulnerability to issues such as stress, delinquency, mental health problems, and substance abuse (Grigorenko et al., 2007; Stemler et al., 2009). Therefore, it is crucial to investigate and understand factors influencing academic achievement in adolescents. Various factors have been examined in relation to academic achievement, such as family socioeconomic status, family structure, family functioning, peer association, school, and educational environment (Ali et al., 2023; Steinberg et al., 1989; 1992; Olige, 2008).

Research has shown that parenting styles play a critical role in shaping children's development and achievement (Jacobs & Harvey, 2005; Klein & Kühhirt, 2023; Masud et al., 2015). Jacob and Harvey asserted that parenting styles significantly contribute to students' academic performance in school. Parenting

is a complex activity that involves a range of specific behaviours that work individually and collectively to impact child outcomes (Darling, 1999). This is mainly because parents hold ethnotheories—explicit and implicit beliefs about child development and the socialization practices as defined by the sociocultural developmental niche—which define how they treatment and bring up their children (Harkness et al., 2015; Super & Harkness, 1986). Baumrind (1971, 1991) identified four patterns of parenting styles based on two aspects of parenting behavior: control and warmth. Parental control refers to the extent to which parents manage their children’s behavior, ranging from being highly controlling to setting few rules and demands. Parental warmth refers to the extent to which parents are accepting and responsive to their children’s behavior, as opposed to being unresponsive and rejecting.

When these two aspects of parenting behavior are combined in different ways, four primary parenting styles emerge: *Authoritative Parents*, who are warm but firm; *Authoritarian Parents*, who display little warmth and are highly controlling; *Permissive Parents*, who are very warm but undemanding; and *uninvolved or Neglectful Parents*, who are neither warm nor demanding. These parenting styles provide a framework for studying parenting in Western societies, where they are believed to originate. Although these distributions of parenting are thought to be applicable to Western society, they also serve as a basis for studying parenting worldwide. This may explain why the influence of parenting has been more extensively analyzed in the Western world compared to other regions, especially in Africa (Abesha, 1997; Kaani & Machila, 2023).

The authoritarian, authoritative, and permissive styles make up the three original parenting styles. They have, however, been modified over the years but remain the foundation of a number of studies that seek to understand how parenting affects the characteristics of children. Baumrind’s (1997) constructs of parenting have received widespread recognition in the United States of America and Europe, but the same cannot be said of them in Africa, although they form a basis for studying parenting in a variety of cultures (Brown, 2013; Kaani & Machila, 2023).

The authoritative parenting style is associated with a balance of responsiveness and demandingness. Parents who adopt this style provide emotional support, allow their children autonomy to a reasonable extent, maintain open communication, and set boundaries at home (Darling & Steinberg, 1993). The authoritative parenting style is widely accepted as the most effective, particularly in Western samples, as it promotes positive adolescent adjustment and is highly recommended. On the other hand, the authoritarian style is characterized by high demandingness and low responsiveness, and associated with collectivistic cultures (Brown, 2013; Yaman et al., 2011; Ali et al., 2023). Parents who adopt this style are strict and expect their children to strictly follow rules, without offering any autonomy or room for negotiation. Unlike authoritative parents, authoritarian parents provide little emotional support and are generally harsh towards their children. This parenting style is generally condemned in Western samples and has been associated with negative adolescent outcomes in that part of the world (Steinberg & Silk, 2002).

Permissive parents lack both demandingness and responsiveness. They do not set any rules for their children and do not offer emotional support (Smith, 2007). The permissive style is categorized into two: the *neglectful* and *indulgent* parenting styles (Martinez & Garcia, 2007). The neglectful parenting style describes parents who show very little involvement in the lives of their children. Parents exhibiting this style are generally disengaged and have low levels of both demandingness and responsiveness. The indulgent parenting style describes parents who are overly responsive to their children, but have very low levels of demandingness. Both varieties of the permissive style have been associated with undesirable adolescent outcomes. Unfortunately, there are still gaps in understanding parental behavior and its impact on child development within African societies, where parental control is more embraced and accepted as a good norm for child rearing (Abesha, 1997).

In Zambia, school performance has been declining steadily in recent years (The Examinations Council of Zambia Report, 2014). For instance, Lusaka district has recorded low pass rates at both grade nine and 12

level in national exams conducted by the Zambian national examining board, the Examination Council of Zambia. Grade 12 examination serves as a pathway to tertiary education and improve future employment prospects. It is not only used for selection and classification, but also used for certification purposes and determines who enters tertiary level education (The Examinations Council of Zambia Report, 2015). Many scholars have attempted to identify factors that contribute to this poor performance (Malambo, 2012; Ikakena, 2014), but none have studied the impact of parenting styles on the academic performance, which considering the sociocultural worldview of Zambia, may play an important role in defining the teaching-learning outcomes (Harkness & Super, 1999; Kaani & Machila, 2023)

Academic performance is linked to positive identity structures, such as self-esteem, self-efficacy, and motivation (Bandura, 1997). Zimmerman (2001) defines academic performance as self-regulated learning, encompassing excellence in sports, arts, culture, behavior, confidence, and communication skills (Abar & Wisler, 2009). It demonstrates how learners control their emotions, feelings, and actions to achieve academically. In different education systems, academic performance is often defined in terms of examination results (Crosnoe et al., 2004).

Since the Zambian education system is heavily focused on passing examinations predominantly for purposes of progression, there is no internal structure in place to monitor other learning accomplishments. In certain areas of Zambia, poor academic performance has been attributed to various factors. These factors include student absenteeism, lack of facilities, teacher motivation, understaffing, overcrowding in classrooms, and inadequate guidance and counseling (Daka et al., 2021; Nkamba & Kanyika, 1998).

### **Parenting Styles and Academic Achievement**

Different stakeholders in education have different views on the reasons for adolescents' low academic performance in high school. There seems to be a lack of willingness to take responsibility. Pupils blame teachers, teachers blame pupils, and parents blame teachers and administrators. Teachers argue that students are not serious about their education and lacked respect for their teachers and believed that students performed poorly because their parents were not fulfilling their responsibilities. On the other hand, parents opine that overcrowded classrooms make it difficult for teachers to monitor individual students, while some parents blame poor qualification for ineffective teaching and students' failure (Kanere, 2009).

Just as parenting styles impact various personality traits and psychological, social, and emotional outcomes in children, they also influence academic performance and achievements in school. Baumrind's (1967) four dimensions provide a framework for parent's expectations, control, and responsiveness toward their child, which, in turn, affect their academic outcomes. However, discovering the perfect parenting style remains a challenge for humankind. While all parents want their children to succeed in school, not all are successful in facilitating that success (Areepattamannil, 2010; Hong, 2012; Mandell & Sweet, 2004).

Parenting styles have become a significant topic of study in contemporary education and parenting, given their impact on the development of children's personality traits, social interactions, and academic achievements (Lamborn et al., 1991; Nyarko, 2011; Tope, 2012). This increased focus can be attributed to the growing awareness of the benefits of appropriate parenting practices for educational success. Moreover, ample evidence in literature suggests a correlation between parenting styles and children's academic achievements (Jacobs & Harvey, 2005; Mize & Pritt, 1997). Several studies have examined parenting styles and their impact on academic performance in individualistic societies—children are allowed to explore their own interests and strengths (Chandler, 2006; Turner & Heffer, 2005), there seem to no marked differences in the performance in children raised in collectivist societies, such as Ghana (Ofuso, 2013) and Kenya (Munyi, 2013). In all cases reviewed, the authoritative parenting styles seem to facilitate school achievement among students (Ali et al., 2023; Cohen, & Rice, 1997; Hayek et al., 2022; Mize & Pritt, 1997; Sadeghi et al., 2022).

## The Current Study

The purpose of this study is to determine the relationship between parenting style and the academic performance of high school pupils in the Munali constituency of Lusaka District in Zambia. The specific objectives were to investigate the extent to which the academic performance of students is affected by parenting styles, and determine the parenting style that best facilitates academic performance. The rationale is to contribute to the existing knowledge vis-à-vis the uniqueness of child rearing in the African culture, specifically within the Zambian context, which has been largely unexplored. Exploring the relationship between parenting style and academic achievement of high school adolescents will not only provide important insights for the education sector, but also for professionals working on programs or services aimed at promoting positive development among adolescents. Additionally, it may inspire further research to identify other factors that influence academic achievement. Thus, there is insufficient literature, particularly in Zambia, and the available few studies focus on the attachment between mother and child (Malambo, 2012; Ikakena, 2014).

## METHOD

**Design:** The study utilized a cross-sectional research design, which involves examining individuals who differ in a key characteristic, such as age, at a specific point in time.

**Sampling and Participants:** Using simple random sampling, a sample of 30 grade 12 pupils from three selected secondary schools in the Munali constituency. The ages of the participants ranged between 13 and 21 years old. Of the 30 participants, 17 (56.7%) were female, which demonstrates the gender distribution of learners in Zambia.

**Instruments for Data Collection** Data for the study were collected through self-administered questionnaires and researcher-made academic achievement tests.

**The Parental Authority Questionnaire (PAQ).** The PAQ, developed by Baumrind (1991), was used to assess the parenting style employed by the parents of the participants. The questionnaire consists of three dimensions: 1) authoritative parenting style, 2) authoritarian parenting style, and, 3) permissive parenting style. Each dimension has 10 test items and students were asked to rate their parents on a five-point scale, ranging from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree.”

**Academic achievement:** Participants’ academic achievement was measured using class tests based on the design of grade 12 examinations. The final score was computed using point system of the Examination Council of Zambia standards as follows: Grade D = 0 – 40 (fail), grade C = 40 – 44 (8) and 45 – 49 (7) Pass, grade B = 50-54 (6) (weak), grade B = 55 – 59 (5) (Credit), B+ = 60 – 64 (4) and 65 – 69 (3) (Merit), grade A = 70 – 74 (2) (Distinction), and A+ = 75 (1) and above (Distinction)]. The final categorised the grade points into four levels: The points obtained in mathematics, English, and three of the other best subjects were added to calculate the total points. The total points were grouped as follows: 6 – 9 points (very good), 10 -14 points (good), 15 -19 points (average), 20 – 24 points (poor), and 25 – 29 (very poor).

## RESULTS

### Gender-based Academic Performance Rate of Respondents

The purpose of this study is to examine the correlation between parenting style and academic achievement among high school students in the Munali constituency of Lusaka District. According to Table 1, only four participants (2 males and 2 females) of the 30 participants obtained scores within the highest performance range, ranging from 6 to 9 points. This represents a mere 13% of the sample. Additionally, 14 students

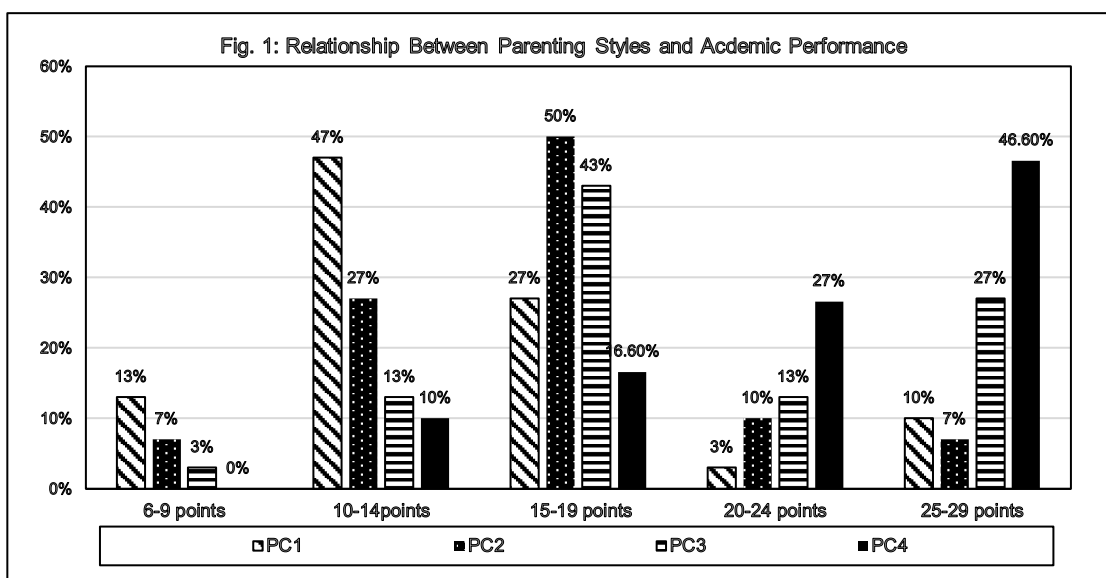
(47%) scored between 10 and 14 points, while eight students (27%) achieved scores between 15 and 19 points. One male student and three other students obtained scores of 20-24 points and 25-29 points, respectively.

**Table 1: Academic performance of respondents by Gender**

Number of points	Distribution by Gender		
	Male	Female	Total
1 6 to 9	2	2	4
2 10 to 14	6	8	14
3 15 to 19	3	5	8
4 20 to 24	1	0	1
5 25 to 29	1	2	3
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>30</b>

**Nexus between Parenting Style and Academic Achievement:** The results depicted in Figure 1 showcase the correlation between participants’ perception of their parents’ parenting styles during their upbringing and their academic performance, as evidenced by the points attained in their four highest-scoring subjects. The findings suggest that an authoritative parenting style has a significant positive effect on participants’ academic achievement, while an indulgent parenting style has the least impact. More precisely, thirteen percent of students raised in authoritative households obtained scores within the range of 6 to 9 points, whereas 47% fell into the second category of 10 to 14 points. None of the participants from indulgent households were able to achieve scores within this range.

Children who have authoritarian parents tend to achieve at a moderate level, with approximately 50% of them falling within the range of 15 to 19 points. On the other hand, there is evidence to suggest that neglectful parenting style contributes to academic success, as children who perceive their parents as neglectful do not attain higher levels of academic achievement. The majority of children from neglectful parents scored within the fourth category, with points ranging from 25 to 29. In contrast, only 10% of the participants with authoritative parents fell into the failing group.



Note: PC1 = authoritative, PC2 = authoritarian, PC3 = neglectful, PC4 = indulgent



These findings provide empirical evidence supporting the hypothesis that parenting styles are correlated with academic achievement. In particular, the results suggest that child rearing practices play a critical role in shaping educational success. Moreover, the study emphasizes the significant impact of authoritative parenting in promoting positive academic outcomes for children. On the other hand, neglectful parenting seems to have a negative effect on learners' academic development, while the influence of the authoritarian parenting style is found to be moderately impactful. It is important to note that permissive parents exerted a relatively weaker influence on academic performance.

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this study was to examine the impact of parenting styles on the academic achievement of children in the Munali constituency of Lusaka District, Zambia. Alongside investigating potential differences in performance based on gender across four subjects, this study aimed to establish the influence of parenting style on the academic success of secondary school children. Furthermore, it sought to identify the parenting styles that have the greatest and smallest effect on children's academic achievement. Although there were some distinctions in overall performance between boys and girls in the four subjects considered, these discrepancies were not statistically significant. This outcome is unexpected, given that previous research studies have reported notable differences in mean performance (Grigorenko et al., 2007; Stemler et al., 2009). Typically, female students lag behind their male peers academically, particularly in nature science-based subjects.

Regarding the connection between parenting styles and academic achievement, the findings revealed that school performance varied according to the participants' perception of their parents' child-rearing practices. Grade 12 students who identified themselves as having authoritative parents performed better academically compared to those with neglectful parents. This suggests a clear association between parenting styles and academic achievement, which is supported by the findings of a study conducted by Jacob and Harvey (2005). Other studies have similarly reported comparable links (Ali et al., 2023; Cohen, & Rice, 1997; Hayek et al., 2022; Klein & Kühhirt, 2023; Lamborn et al., 1991; Nyarko, 2011; Tope, 2012; Mize & Pritt, 1997; Sadeghi et al., 2022)

Additionally, the present study provides evidence to support the notion that the authoritarian parenting style has a more pronounced effect on students' academic performance when compared to other parenting styles. The findings indicate that the categories encompassing performance scores ranging from 6 to 9 and 10 to 14 are predominantly comprised of children from authoritative families, while the proportion of these children gradually declines as the performance score increases. On the contrary, neglectful and indulgent parenting styles have a negative impact on academic achievement, as a majority of participants from these parenting approaches struggle academically. Therefore, it can be inferred that authoritative parents tend to exert a positive influence on their children's education (Leung et al., 1998), while neglectful parenting practices have the opposite effect (Barber, 1996).

These results support Barber's (1996) observation that children of indulgent parents often become spoiled, thus adversely affecting their academic performance. Conversely, children who receive nurturing care and are granted autonomy to pursue their interests tend to excel in all aspects, including education (Ali et al., 2023; Cohen, & Rice, 1997; Hayek et al., 2022; Mize & Pritt, 1997; Sadeghi et al., 2022). However, these findings contradict the traditional cultural beliefs prevalent in Zambia. In collectivist communities, such as those found in Africa and Asia, authoritative parenting is generally favoured over authoritarian parenting, wherein strict control over children's behavior is imposed, to uphold the commonly accepted collective standards espoused by Zambian culture (Kaani & Nachila, 2022).

Surprisingly, our results challenge this notion, possibly due to changes in the family structure and the adoption of Western child-rearing practices by urban parents (Brudevold-Newman et al., 2018; Hapunda et

al., 2019). Thus, one would have expected a larger proportion of children to belong to the authoritarian parenting style and potentially witness improved academic performance, similar to the situation observed in China. Chinese parents also tend to prefer authoritarian parenting, and existing research reveals that children from authoritarian households outperform their counterparts from authoritative homes (Leung et al., 1998; Yang & Zhao, 2020). These variations may be attributed to cultural differences since cultural-specific parental ethnotheories determine parenting styles and child-rearing practices (Bornstein, 2012; Whiting, 1963).

In conclusion, the present findings propose a notable correlation between parenting styles adopted by primary caregivers and academic outcomes among grade 12 students residing in the Munali constituency of Zambia. However, in deviation from traditional views, the findings suggest that an authoritative parenting approach, rather than the anticipated authoritarian style, appears to contribute to academic success, despite Zambia's adherence to collectivist principles in child rearing. This inconsistency may be attributed to the influence of evolving cultural norms in the face of globalization. Hence, it would be advantageous to conduct a study focusing on a rural and more collectivist populace to ascertain its potential disparities with children in urban and Western communities. Consequently, it is recommended that initiatives be undertaken to equip parents with comprehensive knowledge on effective parenting styles to foster their children's academic achievements.

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