

Parental Educative Practices and Pupils' Experience in Primary School Level One: Children's and Teachers' Perspectives

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ABSTRACT: This study examines how parenting styles influence pupils' experiences in primary school. The study draws on qualitative interviews with pupils and teachers from two primary schools in Yaoundé, Cameroon. Three main parenting styles were identified: equalitarian-directive, repressive, and liberal. The findings suggest that equalitarian and directive parenting practices encourage pupils to be autonomous, persistent, and to take a constructive approach to managing errors. In contrast, repressive parenting is associated with anxiety and behavioral inhibition in school contexts. Liberal parenting, characterized by a lack of structured guidance, may hinder the organization and regularity of learning activities. The study emphasizes the importance of considering both children's perceptions and teachers' observations to better understand the impact of parental educational practices on the school experience. Overall, the results underscore the central role of balanced parental support combining emotional support, dialogue, and clear structure. The study recommends raising parental awareness and strengthening parent-teacher collaboration to enhance students' motivation and school success, especially in socioeconomically constrained contexts.

1. INTRODUCTION AND PROBLEM STATEMENT

Numerous studies conducted in various contexts have demonstrated that parental educational practices are a major determinant of children's school experience (Deslandes & Bertrand, 2001; Henderson & Mapp, 2002). This body of research shows that parental involvement, such as supervising homework, communicating with teachers, and providing motivational support, has a positive effect on pupils' achievement, motivation, and socio-emotional adjustment. However, many of these studies rely primarily on reports from parents and teachers, focusing mainly on relatively advantaged Western contexts. Children's direct perceptions, which are essential to understanding their daily educational experiences, have been largely overlooked, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa.

Baumrind's (1967, 1978, 1991) model, which was further developed by Maccoby and Martin (1983), distinguishes three parenting styles: democratic, authoritative, and permissive. These styles are defined by two dimensions: responsiveness (support, warmth, and communication) and demandingness (control, rules, and discipline). Studies have shown that the democratic style is generally associated with the most favorable academic outcomes (Jeynes, 2005, 2007, 2010), while the permissive and authoritative styles tend to have less favorable effects (Driscoll et al., 2008). Meta-analyses confirm the significant effect of parenting style, with effect sizes ranging from 0.35 to 0.40 (Jeynes, 2010). However, certain dimensions, such as parental monitoring, show mixed effects depending on age or grade level (Clark, 1993; Jeynes, 2007).

At the same time, Francophone and anthropological research underscores the cultural variability of educational practices and their impact on students' attitudes toward school and the significance they attribute to education (Kardiner, 1949; Kellerhals & Montandon, 1991; Baatouche, 2018). Open communication, a flexible yet structured framework, and clearly defined expectations tend to foster motivation, autonomy, and the development of future-oriented goals. Conversely, rigid, control-centered practices are associated with difficulties in school and career engagement. Cross-cultural comparisons demonstrate that the impact of parenting styles is highly dependent on the context and closely linked to socialization goals (Sorkhabi, 2005; Keller & Otto, 2009). For instance, authoritative parenting has been found to negatively impact the school adjustment of children of European and American origin but positively correlate with the academic performance of Chinese children (Leung et al., 1998).

In developing countries such as Cameroon, socioeconomic constraints, such as parental education level, limited income, and reduced availability, shape educational practices and parents' capacity to support their children's schooling. However, little research has examined how children perceive these practices. Furthermore, teachers' perspectives, based on their daily observations of students' engagement with school and learning, are rarely integrated systematically, despite providing valuable information that can be triangulated with that obtained from parents and children.

The present study aims to: (1) identify parental educational practices as perceived by early primary school children in Cameroon, (2) examine how these practices influence children's school experience, and (3) incorporate teachers' perspectives to better

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understand the similarities and differences in perceptions among children, parents, and teachers within a socioeconomic context characterized by significant material and educational constraints.

2. METHODOLOGY

The study was conducted in two primary schools in Yaoundé, Cameroon. An interview guide adapted for children aged five to seven was developed to explore their perceptions of parental educational practices. The guide was written in simple language and featured open-ended questions addressing four main themes: family rules, discipline, autonomy, and academic support. These themes were examined in relation to three parenting styles: equalitarian-directive, repressive, and liberal. Using a maximum variation strategy, a purposive sample of 14 pupils was selected to allow for representation of diverse profiles in terms of reported parenting styles, pupils performance levels, and gender.

Meanwhile, six teachers (two per class) were interviewed to gather professional perspectives on student behavior, motivation, and perceived family support. The interviews were conducted individually in a calm and familiar school environment. They lasted 15 to 20 minutes for pupils and approximately 30 minutes for teachers. The introductory phase aimed to establish a climate of trust and remind the children of their freedom to participate. Responses were recorded in writing or via audio recording when parental consent was obtained.

A thematic approach inspired by Braun and Clarke was used for qualitative analysis. The interviews were fully transcribed, anonymized, and given an initial overall reading. Using both inductive and deductive coding — initially manual and later refined with NVivo software — themes related to educational practices, children's emotional school experience, perceptions of academic support, and teachers' observations were identified. The codes were then grouped into thematic categories that structured the interpretation. Attention was given to triangulating children's and teachers' accounts to identify convergences and divergences in their perceptions of the educational environment. Case narratives were also used to illustrate specific profiles until thematic saturation was reached to ensure the robustness of the analysis.

3. RESULTS

A qualitative analysis of interviews with pupils and teachers revealed that parenting styles influence pupils' motivation, error management, and classroom engagement. Three main parenting styles emerged: equalitarian-directive, repressive, and liberal. Teachers observe and interpret particular pupils' behaviors associated with each style.

3.1. Equalitarian-Directive Families

These families combine encouragement with a structured framework, fostering both autonomy and support. Pupils from these families view mistakes as learning opportunities and develop intrinsic motivation. One pupil (P1) reported, "When I get an exercise wrong, my parents tell me we will work on it together until I understand." This statement illustrates how parental support can transform failure into a constructive experience. The emphasis is on understanding the process rather than punishment, which promotes perseverance. Another pupil (P2) added, "My father always tells me that what matters is not the grade, but that I tried and understood what went wrong."

Analyzing these verbatim responses shows that valuing effort contributes to intrinsic motivation and encourages pupils to develop active learning strategies. One teacher (T1) confirmed this observation: "These pupils don't hesitate to ask questions or seek different solutions. They demonstrate remarkable autonomy and perseverance when confronted with difficulties." Another teacher (T2) noted, "When they make a mistake, they analyze it and use it as an opportunity to learn. They don't easily get discouraged and approach challenges with curiosity."

Together, these testimonies show that the equalitarian-directive parenting style promotes active engagement, autonomy, and school resilience.

3.2. Repressive Families: Pressure and Anxiety Toward Mistakes

In these families, success is highly valued, and failure is often punished. pupils develop anxiety about making mistakes and exhibit avoidance behaviors. One pupil (P3) explained, "If I get less than a 10, my father gets angry and tells me I'm not serious." This quotation shows that the fear of punishment dominates the learning relationship, turning mistakes into sources of stress rather than opportunities for growth. Another pupil (P4) said, "I'm afraid to make mistakes in class because my parents will be disappointed." A teacher (T3) confirmed, "These pupils remain withdrawn and participate little. They seem inhibited and hesitant to take the initiative." A second teacher (T4) emphasized, "Pressure at home is felt directly in class. Pupils find it hard to experiment or ask questions, fearing failure." Analyzing both pupils' and teachers' accounts reveals that repressive parenting generates extrinsic motivation based on fear, which limits creativity, participation, and perseverance.

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3.3. Liberal Families: Insufficiently Structured Autonomy

Liberal families provide great freedom but sometimes lack a structured framework. Pupils develop individual autonomy, but sometimes lack organizational guidance. One pupil (P5) said, "I do my homework when I remember. Sometimes I forget, and no one reminds me at home." Another pupil (P6) said, "I have a lot of freedom, but I feel a bit lost when it comes to organizing myself and making progress." A teacher (T5) confirmed that, although these pupils are resourceful, they show irregular progress. "They need guidance to structure their work. Without a framework, some get lost and don't advance consistently." Another teacher (T6) added, "These pupils are independent and try on their own, but a lack of guidance sometimes prevents them from maximizing their efforts." Thus, excessive freedom can lead to difficulties in planning and self-evaluation, which limits the effectiveness of autonomous learning.

3.4. Error Management and Perception of Success

The analysis shows that a child's perception of and response to mistakes is directly influenced by their parents' style of parenting. In equalitarian-directive families, for example, mistakes are seen as learning opportunities. One pupil (P7) said, "When I make a mistake, I try to understand why. My parents help me find the solution." A teacher (T7) confirmed this, saying, "They analyze their mistakes and use feedback to improve. Mistakes become a lever for learning rather than a barrier." Conversely, in repressive families, mistakes generate anxiety and inhibition. One pupil (P8) said, "I don't dare answer in class for fear of making a mistake." A teacher (T8) observed that these pupils participate little and avoid new tasks.

Fear of disappointing their parents hinders their active learning." In liberal families, mistakes are not anxiety-provoking; however, lack of guidance limits progress. One pupil (P9) said, "If I make a mistake, it's not a big deal, but I don't always know how to improve." A teacher (T9) confirmed, "They work independently and may repeat the same mistakes multiple times without understanding how to correct them. This leads to uneven progress."

3.5. Summary and Pedagogical Implications

The triangulated analysis shows that parenting style centrally affects motivation, autonomy, and error management. Families with an equalitarian-directive style encourage active engagement, reflection, and resilience. In contrast, repressive families generate anxiety and inhibition, which hinders creativity and participation. Liberal families promote autonomy; however, a lack of structure limits the regularity and effectiveness of learning. One teacher (T2) emphasized the importance of raising parental awareness of how their practices affect the school experience: "Parents often mean well, but some behaviors, like yelling after a bad grade, can discourage the pupils." The results show that scholar success depends as much on parental support as on pedagogical support. A balanced approach combining dialogue, guided freedom, and recognition of effort appears essential to fostering autonomy, intrinsic motivation, and perseverance among pupils.

4. DISCUSSION

The results confirm previous research on the effect of parental involvement on academic achievement, motivation, and socio-emotional adjustment (Deslandes & Bertrand, 2001; Henderson & Mapp, 2002) by showing that parenting style significantly influences pupils' school experience. Families with an equalitarian-directive style, which combines dialogue and structure, promote autonomy, perseverance, and resilience. This aligns with Baumrind's (1967) democratic model and with studies that highlight the positive effects of balanced guidance on the development of learning strategies and intrinsic motivation (Jeynes, 2005, 2007).

In contrast, repressive families generate anxiety toward mistakes and limit initiative-taking. This leads to extrinsic motivation centered on the fear of punishment and avoidance behaviors. These observations corroborate the finding that authoritative practices negatively impact school adjustment and classroom participation (Driscoll et al., 2008). Liberal families offer unstructured autonomy and produce pupils who are often resourceful but disorganized with irregular progress. The absence of a structured framework hinders the development of essential skills, such as planning and self-evaluation. This is consistent with research that emphasizes the importance of balancing freedom and guidance in learning (Sorkhabi, 2005).

Error management is a key indicator of parenting style. In equalitarian-directive families, errors are seen as opportunities for reflection and progress. In repressive families, however, errors become sources of stress and inhibition. In liberal families, a lack of structure limits pupils' ability to benefit from their mistakes. In summary, the study shows that parental support influences motivation, engagement, and error management. Equalitarian-directive families foster autonomy and resilience; repressive families induce anxiety and inhibition; and liberal families, lacking structure, limit consistent learning. These results underscore the importance of raising parental awareness and coordinating their involvement with teachers' involvement to promote educational practices that foster pupil's socio-emotional development.

5. CONCLUSION

This study emphasizes the significant impact of parenting styles on the early primary school experience of pupils in Cameroon. The results show that equalitarian families promote autonomy, perseverance, and constructive error management, while repressive

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families generate anxiety and inhibition. Liberal families, however, may limit organization and regularity in learning due to an absence of structure. The analysis also emphasizes the importance of considering children's perceptions and teachers' observations to understand the full impact of educational practices. The findings suggest that parental support that combines dialogue, structure, and emotional backing is key to fostering motivation, engagement, and scholar success. Finally, the study emphasizes the necessity of implementing awareness and training programs for parents, as well as fostering close collaboration between families and teachers, to create an educational environment that promotes the scholar and socio-emotional development of children in socioeconomically constrained contexts.

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