



The Importance of Parents to Students' English Learning: The Influence of Parenting Styles

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Abstract

This study explores the impact of parenting styles on the English learning engagement of non-English major students and examines the mediating role of individual self-control. The research utilized an online survey distributed to 500 non-English major students at S University, with 429 valid responses analysed. The Chinese edition of the Short Egna Minnen av Barndoms Uppfostran (S-EMBU-C), the English Learning Engagement Scale, and the Self-Control Scale were employed to measure parenting styles, learning engagement, and self-control, respectively. Structural equation modelling (SEM) was used to analyse the relationships among these variables. The results revealed that positive parenting styles significantly enhance English learning engagement, while negative parenting styles diminish it. Moreover, individual self-control was found to mediate the relationship between parenting styles and learning engagement, suggesting that students with stronger self-control are more engaged in their English learning. In conclusion, this study underscores the importance of positive parenting in fostering students' learning engagement and highlights self-control as a critical factor in this process. These findings contribute to the understanding of how familial influences and individual traits combine to impact academic performance in non-English major students.

Keywords: Parenting styles, English learning engagement, Self-control, Family systems

1. Introduction

Learning engagement refers to the time and effort students invest in thinking about, acquiring, and mastering knowledge during the learning process (Barkley & Major, 2020). Learning engagement is closely related to learning persistence (Jung & Lee, 2018), learning satisfaction, and academic performance (Cheong & Ong, 2016), and it is a crucial factor influencing academic achievement. English learning engagement encompasses learners' behavioural engagement, the quality of their emotional experiences, and their level of strategy use in English learning (Wang, 2023). The process of learning English language involves individuals acquiring the ability to use English for communication. Foreign language learning motivation as well as the degree of learning engagement, are critical in influencing English

learning (Zhang et al., 2020). Thus, focusing on students' English learning engagement is fundamental and essential for improving students' English performance and enhancing the quality of English education. Studies have identified several key factors affecting English learning engagement, including teaching strategies (Zohud, 2015), English learning motivation (Wang, 2022), self-concept (Jiang, 2023), psychological capital (Lin, 2020), and mindful learning (Wu & Zhao, 2023).

Currently, there is a paucity of research examining the impact of parenting styles on students' English learning engagement. According to the ecological systems theory, the family is a microsystem closely related to student development (Bronfenbrenner & Ceci, 1994). Parenting styles, as a component of the family environment, represent the attitudes or parenting methods parents exhibit towards their children, encompassing both verbal and non-verbal behaviours or the emotional atmosphere created by parents (Zakeri et al., 2013). These styles have direct and profound effects on individual learning and growth. Moreover, as the primary agents of the learning process, students' self-control can lead to differences in their English learning engagement. For example, higher engagement often associated with stronger self-control (King & Gaerlan, 2014). While studies on parenting styles and individual self-control are relatively extensive, there is a lack of studies exploring the impact of parenting styles on English learning engagement among non-English major students. The influence of parenting styles on the English learning engagement of non-English major students remains unclear. Additionally, no studies have examined individual self-control as a mediating variable between parenting styles and English learning engagement. Consequently, this study investigates the impact of parenting styles on English learning engagement among non-English major students and explores the mechanisms by which individual self-control influences English learning engagement.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Parenting Style

The family is a social unit composed of relatives within a certain scope. According to the ecological systems theory, the family is a critical environment for individual survival and development, playing a significant role in the process of individual social adaptation and development (Bronfenbrenner & Ceci, 1994). Also, family systems theory posits that the family functions as a system, with members influencing and connecting with each other (Whitchurch & Constantine, 1993). The shaping of individual personalities, formation of values, cultivation of self-awareness, and interpersonal communication are all closely related to the primary family. Parenting style, an essential aspect of the family system, refers to the collection of concepts, attitudes, emotions, and all verbal and behavioural expressions reflected by parents in the process of raising their children, occupying a pivotal position in individual development (Darling & Steinberg, 2017). Parenting styles affect the family atmosphere, creating different types of family educational fields (Jankowska & Gralewski, 2022). According to Bourdieu's field theory (Bourdieu, 2002), a favourable field is the physical environment for the shaping and formation of good habits. Students' habits are formed through long-term practice and are closely related to their living field. Different family environments significantly influence middle school students' personalities, behavioural attitudes, and learning habits (Pandey; Parveen, 2007). In a positive living field filled with respect, democracy, warmth, and love, parents are more likely to provide understanding and support to their children, helping them when they encounter difficulties, which is conducive to forming positive personality traits that can positively impact students' English learning. Research has found that parenting styles are significantly related to learning engagement; specifically,

parental warmth positively influences learning engagement, while parental rejection negatively influences it (Liu et al., 2024; Tian & Chen, 2020). Other studies have shown that positive parenting styles can make students more confident, reducing academic burnout, whereas negative parenting styles (e.g., punishment and rejection) are more likely to lead to burnout (Shin et al., 2012). Overall, positive parenting styles are beneficial for children's development, while negative styles increase the likelihood of students encountering learning difficulties. The differences in parenting styles manifest in gender differences among children and differences between parents (Gordon, 1999). Research on the relationship between interpersonal trust and parenting styles in junior high school students has shown that positive and negative parenting styles are positively and negatively correlated with high school students' learning engagement, respectively, and positively and negatively predict learning engagement. In addition, positive parenting styles can significantly positively predict children's prosocial behaviours, while negative styles can significantly negatively predict prosocial behaviours (Fatima et al., 2020). Therefore, this study hypothesized:

H1: Positive parenting styles have a significant positive impact on English learning engagement among non-English major students.

H2: Negative parenting styles have a significant negative impact on English learning engagement among non-English major students.

2.2 Self-control

Self-control is the ability to regulate and overcome one's original responses by adjusting thoughts, behaviours, and emotions, which involves resisting temptations (Gillebaart, 2018). It generally manifests in whether an individual is good at restraining desires, emotions, and impulsive behaviours contrary to reasonable external demands. It affects individual social adaptation and mental health as well as learning engagement (Amaya, 2020; Miller et al., 2015). The level of self-control can determine psychological quality, health status, and the degree of intellectual performance (Boals et al., 2011). Individuals with poor self-control are often impulsive, unable to restrain themselves, and fail to correct mistakes, while those with strong self-control typically exhibit stronger willpower, patience, and better control over impulses and the ability to endure setbacks. Self-control theory posits that parental self-control can influence children's self-control through parenting styles (Beaver et al., 2010; Phythian et al., 2008). As a crucial factor in influencing adolescent self-control, effective parenting styles can help adolescents internalize external rules, promoting the establishment of self-control. Under positive parenting styles, children are more likely to have higher career planning, prosocial abilities, and self-control, exhibiting better social adaptability (Beaver et al., 2010). Self-control is a broad psychological concept that can refer to any goal-directed behaviour. Specifically, self-control is the ability to control or change behaviour responses to meet established standards (Baumeister & Vohs, 2004). The essential premise for individuals to achieve self-regulation is self-control. Individuals with stronger self-control are more inclined to allocate more resources toward their goals (Yang et al., 2019). Furthermore, in the process of pursuing goals, motivating individuals to take more actions to achieve goals belongs to initiatory self-control, while motivating individuals to resist temptations and competition for long-term goals belongs to inhibitory self-control (de Ridder et al., 2011). Therefore, individuals with strong self-control may experience fewer motivational conflicts (Hofmann et al., 2014). Based on the above, this study proposes the following research hypotheses:

H3: Individual self-control has a significant impact on English learning engagement among non-English major students.

H4: Individual self-control serves as a mediating variable between parental rearing styles and English learning engagement.

3. Method

3.1 Participants

This study utilized an online platform to distribute questionnaires to non-English major students at S University. A total of 500 questionnaires were collected. After excluding respondents who took less than 90 seconds to complete the survey, data from 429 participants were included in the final analysis, yielding an effective rate of 85.8%.

3.2 Measurement

This study utilized the Chinese edition of Short Egna Minnen av Barndoms Uppfostran (S-EMBU-C) (Qiu, 2023), with some modifications to eliminate redundant items. Removed items included "I am often considered the scapegoat or black sheep at home," "My father always tries to encourage me to be the best," and "I feel that my parents' worries about me getting into trouble are exaggerated and excessive." This questionnaire uses a 4-point scale, ranging from "1-Never" to "4-Always," and includes 14 items. In this study, the Cronbach's α coefficient for the scale was 0.74.

In order to measure the English learning engagement, this study adapted the Language Engagement Scale (Eerdemutu et al., 2024). The scale consists of three dimensions: behavioural engagement, emotional engagement, and cognitive engagement, each of which contains 8 items. In the items, the "language class" was replaced by "English language class". The scale uses a 5-point Likert format, where "1" represents "completely disagree" and "5" represents "completely agree." The reliability coefficient for this scale was 0.92, meeting statistical standards.

The Self-Control Scale (Unger et al., 2016) was used to measure self-control. After reduction, the final scale included 9 items, scored on a 6-point scale, with "1" representing "completely disagree" and "6" representing "completely agree." In this study, the Cronbach's α coefficient for this scale was 0.77.

3.3 Data Analysis

In this study, statistical analysis was performed using SPSS 27.0. Mediation effects were analysed using the tool of PROCESS in SPSS, and structural equation modelling was employed to analyse various fit indices.

4. Results

4.1 Common Method Bias Test

Given that this study utilized three self-report scales, there may be a potential for common method bias. To address this, Harman's single-factor test was employed to examine the presence of common method bias in the questionnaires. An exploratory factor analysis of all the items from the scales revealed that there were six factors with eigenvalues greater than 1. Variance of the first factor is 25.81%, which is below 40%, indicating that common method bias is unlikely to significantly influence the data results.

4.2 Descriptive Statistics and Correlation Analysis

Descriptive statistics and correlation analysis were conducted for the variables of English learning engagement, parental rearing styles, and self-control among non-English major students. The results are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Mean, standard deviation, and correlation coefficients of each variable

Variable	M	SD	1	2	3	4
1.Positive parenting style	1.65	0.70				
2.Negative parenting style	2.70	0.91	-0.28**			
3.English Learning Engagement	3.87	1.23	0.37**	-0.12**		
4.Self-control	3.59	1.19	0.22**	-0.17**	0.41**	

Note: n = 429, **p < 0.01, ***p < 0.001.

As seen in Table 1, English learning engagement among non-English major students is significantly correlated with parenting styles and self-control ($p < 0.01$). Specifically, English learning engagement is positively correlated with positive parenting styles, indicating that students who experience positive parenting styles are more engaged in English learning. Conversely, English learning engagement is negatively correlated with negative parenting styles ($p < 0.01$), suggesting that students exposed to negative parenting styles are less engaged in English learning. Additionally, self-control is significantly positively correlated with English learning engagement ($p < 0.01$), indicating that students with higher self-control are more engaged in English learning.

4.3 Mediating Effect of Self-Control on the Relationship Between Parental Rearing Styles and English Learning Engagement Among Non-English Major Students

The correlation analysis in Table 1 shows that English learning engagement among non-English major students is significantly related to parenting styles and self-control. In this study, structural equation modelling (SEM) was used to analyse the data, with parenting styles and English learning engagement treated as latent variables and self-control as an observed variable. Positive and negative parenting styles were analysed as separate latent variables.

According to the SEM direct effect analysis: $X^2/df = 2.00$, RMSEA (95% CI) = 0.55 (0.52 - 0.99), $t = 6.12$, LLCI = 0.23, ULCI = 0.45, it indicates a satisfactory fit, with the path coefficient of positive parenting style to English learning engagement being significant ($\beta = 0.34$, $p < 0.01$). Similarly, the path coefficient of negative parenting style to English learning engagement was significant ($\beta = -0.16$, $p < 0.01$).

When considering the effect of self-control, the fit indices for the SEM were: $X^2/df = 1.00$, RMSEA (95% CI) = 0.15 (0.14 - 1.21), $t = 2.46$, LLCI = -0.36, ULCI = -0.04. It indicates a satisfactory model fit, confirming the model's validity. As shown in Figure 1, the path coefficient between positive parenting style and self-control was significant ($\beta = 0.14$, $p < 0.01$), and the path coefficient between negative parenting style and self-control was also significant ($\beta = 0.43$, $p < 0.01$). The relationship between self-control and English learning engagement among non-English major students was also significant ($\beta = 0.49$, $p < 0.01$), indicating that self-control mediates the relationship between parenting styles and English learning engagement.

5. Conclusion

This study used questionnaire to analyse the impact of parenting styles on English learning engagement and its mechanisms. The analysis revealed that positive parenting styles have a positive predictive effect on non-English major students' English learning investment, verified hypothesis 1. Overall, compared to negative parenting styles, parents of non-English major students tend to adopt more positive parenting styles. Children's good development relies on positive parenting styles. Positive parenting styles have a significant positive impact on non-English major students' English learning engagement. Additionally, negative parenting styles have a negative predictive effect on non-English major students' English learning engagement, verified hypothesis 2. The significant negative impact of negative parenting styles on English learning engagement is a new finding that was not highlighted in previous research. These results support the ecological systems theory, which posits that parenting styles, as an important component of the family microsystem, affect children's learning engagement and academic achievement. In addition, there is a positive correlation between self-control and English learning engagement among non-English major students. The stronger the self-control, the more engagement in English learning. Hypothesis 3 is verified. The study also found that parenting styles not only directly affect English learning engagement but can also indirectly promote it by enhancing individual self-control. According to Hierarchy of Needs, when children perceive more warmth emotion from their parents, their psychological needs are more easily met, leading to a higher academic self-concept, greater interest in learning, better resistance to temptation, and increased self-control, resulting in greater engagement in English learning. Therefore, parenting styles can influence English learning engagement through the mediation of self-control, verified hypothesis 4.

This study underscores the importance of parenting styles in shaping the English learning engagement of non-English major students, confirming and expanding upon existing research. Consistent with previous studies, the findings demonstrate that positive parenting styles significantly enhance learning engagement, while negative parenting styles have the opposite effect (Liu et al., 2024; Tian & Chen, 2020). Furthermore, the study highlights the mediating role of self-control in this relationship, aligning with the work of King and Gaerlan (2014) and Beaver et al. (2010), which emphasized the importance of self-control in academic achievement and social adaptation. These results not only support Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory, which posits that the family microsystem is crucial in children's development, but also extend the theory by showing that self-control acts as a critical intermediary between parenting styles and learning outcomes. The significant negative impact of negative parenting styles on English learning engagement, a relatively underexplored area, adds new insights to the field, suggesting that interventions aimed at improving parenting practices could lead to better academic outcomes. In conclusion, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of how familial influences and individual traits interact to impact academic performance, particularly in non-English major students. Future research could further explore these dynamics by examining additional mediating factors such as peer relationships and teacher influences, as well as the potential moderating effects of gender and ethnicity.

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