

The Relationship between Parenting Styles and Preschool Children's Self-Regulation from Parents' Perspectives in Lanzhou City, Gansu Province, China

Wei Bingqing, Loy Chee Luen

Sultan Idris Education University

Email: P20202001148@siswa.upsi.edu.my

Corresponding Author Email: loy.cl@fpm.upsi.edu.my

DOI Link: <http://dx.doi.org/10.6007/IJARPED/v15-i4/28980>

Published Online: 06 October 2026

Abstract

This study examined the relationship between four parenting styles and preschool children's self-regulation based on perspectives from parents in Lanzhou City, Gansu Province, China. A quantitative correlational design was used, and questionnaire data were collected from 709 parents. Parenting Style was examined through four separate constructs include (i) Authoritarian, (ii) Authoritative, (iii) Permissive, and (iv) Uninvolved parenting. Self-Regulation was measured through (i) Behavioural, (ii) Attentional, and (iii) Emotional Regulation. This study employed a quantitative correlational research design. Descriptive statistics and structural path analysis were used to test the proposed relationships. The findings showed that Authoritative parenting had a significant positive relationship with preschool children's Self-Regulation ($\beta = .162, p < .001$). Permissive parenting showed a small positive relationship, but it was not statistically significant ($\beta = .048, p = .058$). Authoritarian and Uninvolved parenting also did not show significant direct relationships with Self-Regulation. Therefore, only the proposed relationship between Authoritative parenting and Self-Regulation was supported. The findings provide partial support for Social Learning Theory and Self-Regulation Theory. Authoritative parenting may help children develop self-regulation by combining warmth, communication, clear expectations, and consistent guidance. This suggests that preschool children may benefit more when emotional support and appropriate structure are provided together. At the same time, the non-significant findings for the other parenting styles suggest that the effects of parenting may differ across areas of self-regulation and cultural settings. The study therefore supports examining the four parenting styles as separate constructs rather than combining them into a single overall measure. Parents and educators are encouraged to use positive discipline, emotional coaching, consistent routines, and age-appropriate expectations. Future research should include longitudinal designs, multiple informants, direct observations, and samples from other regions of China to better understand the direction and conditions of these relationships.

Keywords: Parenting Style, Self-Regulation, Parents

Introduction

Parenting plays an important role in preschool children's behavioural, attentional, and emotional development. Recent research in China indicates that parenting styles are associated with children's self-control and emotion-management skills (Li et al., 2023). However, these relationships may differ according to the specific parenting style and dimension of Self-Regulation being examined (Sun et al., 2025). Evidence concerning these relationships in Lanzhou City, Gansu Province, remains limited, particularly from parents' perspectives. Therefore, treating Parenting Style as a single overall construct may conceal important differences among parenting approaches. The purpose of this study to examine the relationships between four parenting styles and preschool children's self-regulation based on parents' perspectives

Literature review

This section reviews the literature on Parenting Style and preschool children's Self-Regulation. It begins by discussing the four parenting styles include Authoritarian, Authoritative, Permissive, and Uninvolved parenting. Self-Regulation include Behavioural, Attentional, and Emotional Regulation. Relevant studies are reviewed to highlight previous findings and identify gaps for this study. Finally, Social Learning Theory and Self-Regulation Theory are discussed to explain how parenting practices may relate to preschool children's development of self-regulation and to provide theoretical support for the study's conceptual framework.

Parenting Style

Parenting style refers to the general emotional environment and pattern of behaviour that parents use when raising their children. Based on the two dimensions of parental demandingness and responsiveness, parenting is commonly grouped into four styles include Authoritarian, Authoritative, Permissive, and Uninvolved (Maccoby & Martin, 1983). Authoritarian parents tend to place strong emphasis on obedience, strict rules, and control, while showing relatively low emotional responsiveness. In contrast, Authoritative parents combine clear expectations and suitable monitoring with warmth, open communication, and support. Permissive parents are usually warm and responsive but set fewer rules and behavioural demands. Uninvolved parents, on the other hand, show low levels of both responsiveness and control.

Recent studies suggest that these four parenting styles should be examined separately because each style may be linked to different developmental outcomes. McWhirter et al. (2023) found differences in parenting stress and preschool children's behavioural problems across the four parenting styles. Similarly, Sun et al. (2025) reported that the relationship between parenting styles and preschool children's self-regulation differed across specific areas of regulation. These findings suggest that parental warmth and behavioural control may influence preschool children differently depending on how they are combined within a particular parenting style and family context. Therefore, combining all four parenting styles into one overall score may hide important differences in their relationships with preschool children's behavioural, attentional, and emotional development.

Self- Regulation

Self-Regulation refers to preschool children's ability to manage their behaviour, attention, and emotions according to their goals and the demands of the situation. It is generally viewed

as a multidimensional construct that include Behavioural, Attentional, and Emotional Regulation. Behavioural Regulation involves preschool children's ability to control impulses, follow rules, and adjust their behaviour when necessary. Attentional Regulation refers to the ability to focus, maintain attention, shift attention when needed, and avoid distractions. Emotional Regulation involves recognising, managing, and expressing emotions in ways that are appropriate to the situation.

During early childhood, these abilities are important for learning, building relationships, dealing with frustration, and adjusting to changes in daily situations. Difficulties with self-regulation may be seen through impulsive behaviour, poor concentration, emotional outbursts, or difficulty following expectations. Although Behavioural, Attentional, and Emotional Regulation are closely connected, they represent different regulatory abilities and should therefore be clearly defined and measured separately (Ross & Ascetta, 2025).

Recent studies in China have also shown that preschool children's self-regulation include control and ability to manage emotions are related to parenting practices (Li et al., 2023). In addition, negative family environments may weaken children's self-regulation, while mindful parenting may help reduce these effects (Zhu et al., 2025). Examining the three dimensions separately may provide a clearer understanding of whether certain parenting styles are more strongly related to specific areas of self-regulation. Therefore, this study examines Self-Regulation through its Behavioural, Attentional, and Emotional dimensions.

Related Research

Previous studies generally show that parenting is related to preschool children's self-regulation, although the strength and direction of these relationships are not always consistent. Irwin (2022) conducted a systematic review and meta-analysis involving 8,854 children and found that supportive parenting was positively related to adaptive emotional regulation, although the overall effect was relatively small. Similarly, Goagoses et al. (2023) reported that positive parenting was associated with lower levels of emotional dysregulation, while authoritarian and psychologically controlling parenting were linked to higher levels of dysregulation.

In the Chinese context, Li et al. (2023) found that Authoritative parenting positively predicted preschool children's self-control and emotional management, whereas Authoritarian parenting was negatively related to these abilities. However, Sun et al. (2025) found that the relationship between parenting styles and children's self-regulation varied depending on the specific dimension of self-regulation and the level of parenting stress. These differences suggest that the effects of parenting may not be the same across all areas of children's regulatory development.

Previous studies also differ in terms of samples, research settings, informants, study designs, and measurement tools. These differences may help explain the inconsistent findings and may limit the extent to which the results can be generalised across different populations. In addition, some studies have focused mainly on Authoritative and Authoritarian parenting without considering Permissive and Uninvolved parenting. Therefore, there is a need to examine all four parenting styles separately. Research that investigates Authoritative, Authoritarian, Permissive, and Uninvolved parenting together with children's Behavioural,

Attentional, and Emotional Regulation remains limited, particularly from parents' perspectives in Lanzhou City. This gap provides the basis for the present study.

Previous research generally suggests that parenting is related to preschool children's self-regulation, although the strength and direction of the relationship are not always the same. Irwin (2022) carried out a systematic review and meta-analysis involving 8,854 children. The study found that supportive parenting was positively related to adaptive emotional regulation, although the overall effect was small. In a similar review, Goagoses et al. (2023) found that positive parenting was linked to lower emotional dysregulation, while authoritarian and psychologically controlling parenting were associated with higher levels of dysregulation.

In China, Li et al. (2023) reported that Authoritative parenting positively predicted preschool children's self-control and emotional management, while Authoritarian parenting was negatively related to these abilities. However, Sun et al. (2025) found that the relationship between parenting styles and children's self-regulation differed across specific areas of self-regulation and levels of parenting stress. This suggests that different parenting styles may influence children's regulatory abilities in different ways.

Previous research has investigated the relationship between parenting and preschool children's self-regulation but a number of gaps remain in the current study. First, most previous studies investigated single parenting styles instead of all four parenting styles. In addition, most previous studies regarded preschool children's self-regulation as a global characteristic instead of analyzing the three dimensions of behavioral, attentional and emotional regulation separately. By investigating the four parenting styles as four distinct categories within one analytical framework, the present study can investigate the specific relations between the four parenting styles and children's self-regulation. By analyzing the three dimensions of children's self-regulation separately, the study also can provide a more detailed understanding of preschool children's regulatory development.

The study is theoretically based on Social Learning Theory (Bandura, 1977) and Self-Regulation Theory (Zimmerman, 2000). Social Learning Theory explained how children acquire behaviors and emotions from observing others and acquiring new behaviors by interacting with others including parents. The other theory examined in this study is the Self-Regulation Theory which explained how children acquired self-regulation in gradual developmental processes. By integrating these two theories with four parenting styles and three dimensions of self-regulation, this study examined whether parental behaviors including responsiveness, control, communication, modeling, and guidance were associated with children's self-regulation in different ways. Relationships between three dimensions of self-regulation and four parenting styles were examined, and whether these relationships were consistent or not were explored. Additionally, this study explored how the relationships between three dimensions of children's self-regulation and four parenting styles were manifested in the Chinese sociocultural context in which meanings of parenting practices varied from one culture to another. Hence, the study not only filled the gaps of the limited studies that were conducted in Lanzhou City but also provided an integrated study that had not been conducted previously.

Methodology

This study used a quantitative correlational research design to examine the relationship between parenting styles and preschool children's self-regulation. A quantitative approach was suitable because it allowed the researcher to collect numerical data, analyse relationships between variables statistically, and test the proposed hypotheses in an objective manner (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Data were collected through a structured questionnaire distributed to parents in Lanzhou City, Gansu Province, China. After the responses were screened and cleaned, 709 valid questionnaires were included in the final analysis.

Parenting Style was examined as a multidimensional construct with four separate dimensions include Authoritarian, Authoritative, Permissive, and Uninvolved parenting. Each parenting style was analysed separately to identify its relationship with children's self-regulation. Self-Regulation was measured using three dimensions include Behavioural Regulation, Attentional Regulation, and Emotional Regulation. These dimensions reflected children's ability to control their behaviour, focus and shift their attention when needed, and manage their emotional responses.

The questionnaire data were analysed using both descriptive and inferential statistical methods. Descriptive statistics were used to describe the demographic characteristics of the respondents and provide an overview of the main study variables. Correlational and structural analyses were then used to examine the direction, strength, and statistical significance of the relationships between each parenting style and preschool children's self-regulation. Since the study followed a correlational design, the findings show associations between the variables but cannot be used to confirm cause-and-effect relationships.

Findings

This section presents the findings on the direct relationships between the four parenting styles include Authoritative, Authoritarian, Permissive, and Uninvolved and preschool children's Self-Regulation. The analysis was conducted using 709 valid questionnaire responses collected from parents in Lanzhou City, Gansu Province, China. Path coefficients and p-values were used to examine the direction and significance of each relationship. Demographic characteristics are summarised in Table 1. The structural model results are presented in Table 2 and illustrated in Figure 1.

Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

This subsection presents the demographic characteristics of the respondents and preschool children. The distributions of parent gender, parent age, monthly household income, residential area, kindergarten type, number of children, and child age are presented in Table 1.

Table 1

Demographic Characteristics of Respondents and Their Children (N = 709)

Variable	Category	<i>n</i>	%
Parent gender	Male	335	47.2
	Female	374	52.8
Parent age	20-25 years	42	5.9
	26-30 years	69	9.7
	31-35 years	253	35.7
	36-40 years	202	28.5
	41-45 years	86	12.1
	46-50 years	57	8.0
Monthly household income	Below RMB 4,000	144	20.3
	RMB 4,000-6,000	188	26.5
	RMB 6,000-8,000	134	18.9
	RMB 8,000-10,000	100	14.1
	Above RMB 10,000	143	20.2
Residential area	Chengguan District	709	100.0
Kindergarten type	Public	583	82.2
	Private	126	17.8
Number of children	One child	383	54.0
	Two children	292	41.2
	More than two children	34	4.8
Child age	3 years	172	24.3
	4 years	165	23.3
	5 years	176	24.8
	6 years	196	27.6

Note. Percentages may not total 100.0 because of rounding.

Table 1 shows the demographic characteristics of the 709 respondents. The gender distribution of parents was fairly balanced, with Category 2 accounting for a slightly higher percentage (52.8%). Most parents were in age Categories 3 and 4, making up 64.2% of the sample. Monthly household income was spread across the different categories without a strong concentration in one group. Table 1 shows the demographic characteristics of the 709 respondents and their children. The sample was relatively balanced in terms of parent gender, with females accounting for 52.8% of the respondents and males accounting for 47.2%. Most parents were between 31 and 40 years old (64.2%). Monthly household income was distributed across five categories, with the largest proportion reporting an income between RMB 4,000 and RMB 6,000 per month (26.5%). All respondents were from Chengguan District, Lanzhou City. Most children attended public kindergartens (82.2%), while 95.2% of the

participating families had one or two children. Child age was relatively evenly distributed across the four age groups, although six-year-old children accounted for the largest proportion (27.6%).

Relationships Between Parenting Styles and Preschool Children's Self-Regulation

This subsection reports the direct relationships between the four parenting styles and preschool children's Self-Regulation. Authoritative, Authoritarian, Permissive, and Uninvolved parenting were analysed separately. Statistical significance was assessed at the .05 level using the structural model results. The path coefficients, t values, p values, and hypothesis decisions are presented in Table 2.

Table 2

Summary of the Relationships Between Parenting Styles and Self-Regulation

Parenting style	Path coefficient (β)	t value	p value	Statistical decision
Authoritative	.162	5.472	< .001	Significant; H1a supported
Authoritarian	.011	0.487	.627	Not significant; H1b not supported
Permissive	.048	1.896	.058	Not significant; H1c not supported
Uninvolved	.022	0.759	.448	Not significant; H1d not supported

Note. Statistical significance was assessed at $p < .05$.

Table 2 presents the direct relationships between the four parenting styles and preschool children's Self-Regulation. Authoritative parenting had a statistically significant positive relationship with children's Self-Regulation ($\beta = .162$, $t = 5.472$, $p < .001$); therefore, H1a was supported. In contrast, Authoritarian parenting ($\beta = .011$, $t = 0.487$, $p = .627$), Permissive parenting ($\beta = .048$, $t = 1.896$, $p = .058$), and Uninvolved parenting ($\beta = .022$, $t = 0.759$, $p = .448$) were not significantly related to children's Self-Regulation. Therefore, H1b, H1c, and H1d were not supported. Overall, Authoritative parenting was the only parenting style that showed a statistically significant direct relationship with preschool children's Self-Regulation.

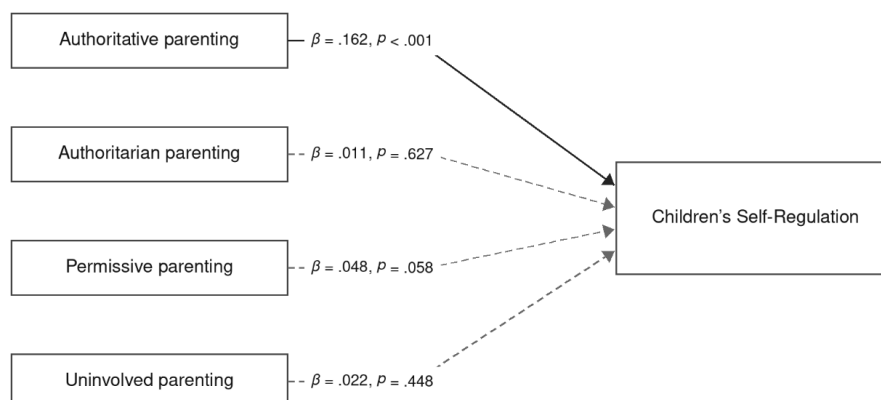


Figure 1 Direct Relationships Between Parenting Styles and Children's Self-Regulation

Figure 1 shows the direct relationships between the four parenting styles and preschool children's Self-Regulation. From the four styles, only Authoritative parenting had a significant positive relationship with Self-Regulation. In contrast, Authoritarian, Permissive, and Uninvolved parenting did not show any significant direct relationships with preschool children's Self-Regulation.

Discussion

The findings provide partial support for the proposed relationship between Parenting Style and preschool children's Self-Regulation. Authoritative parenting had a significant positive relationship with Self-Regulation ($\beta = .162, p < .001$). This finding is consistent with Li et al. (2023), who found that Authoritative parenting positively predicted children's self-control and emotion-management abilities. Social Learning Theory explains that children develop regulatory behaviours by observing, imitating, and internalising parental models (Bandura, 1977). Authoritative parents provide warmth, clear expectations, explanations, and consistent guidance, which may help children regulate their behaviour, attention, and emotions. This interpretation is also consistent with Self-Regulation Theory, which emphasises the gradual internalisation of external guidance.

Permissive parenting showed a small but non-significant relationship with Self-Regulation ($\beta = .048, p = .058$). Although permissive parents may provide warmth, insufficient structure may limit the development of stable regulatory abilities. Authoritarian and Uninvolved parenting also showed no significant direct relationships. These findings differ from some previous research associating negative parenting with emotional dysregulation (Goagoses et al., 2023). However, Sun et al. (2025) similarly demonstrated that relationships between parenting styles and Self-Regulation can vary across regulatory dimensions and family contexts. Overall, the results confirm that the four parenting styles should be examined separately rather than combined.

Implications and Suggestions

The findings of this study have several theoretical, practical, and research implications. From a theoretical perspective, the significant positive relationship between Authoritative parenting and preschool children's Self-Regulation supports both Social Learning Theory and Self-Regulation Theory. This finding suggests that preschool children are more likely to develop self-regulation skills when parents provide clear expectations while also showing warmth, offering explanations, communicating openly, and giving consistent guidance. In contrast, Authoritarian, Permissive, and Uninvolved parenting did not show significant relationships with Self-Regulation. This also indicates that the four parenting styles should be considered as separate constructs instead of being combined into a single overall Parenting Style variable.

From a practical perspective, parents should be encouraged to use more Authoritative parenting practices. This may include setting suitable rules, explaining behavioural expectations clearly, listening to their children, and responding to their emotional needs in a supportive way. Preschool and family education organisations in Lanzhou City could also organise parent-training programmes that focus on positive discipline, emotional coaching, strategies for supporting preschool children's attention, and maintaining consistent routines at home. Teachers can also work closely with parents to identify children who may have

difficulties with behavioural, attentional, or emotional regulation and provide appropriate support.

For future research, longitudinal or experimental studies are recommended to better understand the direction of the relationship between parenting styles and preschool children's Self-Regulation. Future studies could also collect information from different sources, including parents, teachers, children, and direct observations, to reduce common-method bias. It would also be useful to examine possible mediating and moderating factors and to analyse the three dimensions of Self-Regulation separately. Finally, similar studies should be carried out in other regions of China to determine whether the findings are consistent across different social and cultural settings.

References

- Bandura, A. (1977). *Social learning theory*. Prentice-Hall.
- Baumeister, R. F., & Vohs, K. D. (Eds.). (2004). *Handbook of self-regulation: Research, theory, and applications*. Guilford Press.
- Creswell, J. W., & Creswell, J. D. (2018). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches* (5th ed.). SAGE Publications.
- Goagoses, N., Bolz, T., Eilts, J., Schipper, N., Schütz, J., Rademacher, A., Vesterling, C., & Koglin, U. (2023). Parenting dimensions/styles and emotion dysregulation in childhood and adolescence: A systematic review and meta-analysis. *Current Psychology*, 42, 18798–18822. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12144-022-03037-7>
- Irwin, A. (2022). *Parenting correlates of children's emotion regulation: A systematic review and meta-analysis* [Doctoral dissertation, Ryerson University]. Toronto Metropolitan University Research Repository. <https://doi.org/10.32920/26052868>
- Li, D., Li, W., Lin, X., & Zhu, X. (2025). Parenting pathways to friendship: How self-control and emotion management skills mediate preschoolers' social lives in China? *BMC Psychology*, 13, Article 325. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s40359-025-02641-z>
- Li, D., Li, W., & Zhu, X. (2023). Parenting style and children emotion management skills among Chinese children aged 3–6: The chain mediation effect of self-control and peer interactions. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 14, Article 1231920. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2023.1231920>
- Maccoby, E. E., & Martin, J. A. (1983). Socialization in the context of the family: Parent–child interaction. In P. H. Mussen (Series Ed.) and E. M. Hetherington (Vol. Ed.), *Handbook of child psychology: Socialization, personality, and social development* (Vol. 4, pp. 1–101). Wiley.
- McWhirter, A. C., McIntyre, L. L., Kosty, D. B., & Stormshak, E. (2023). Parenting styles, family characteristics, and teacher-reported behavioral outcomes in kindergarten. *Journal of Child and Family Studies*, 32(3), 678–690. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10826-023-02551-x>
- Ross, R. A., & Ascetta, K. E. (2025). Methodological overlap in early childhood education self-regulation research: An interdisciplinary systematic review. *Early Childhood Education Journal*, 53(5), 1755–1767. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10643-024-01715-8>
- Sun, J., Xu, X., Lee, K., Chow, S. S., Wang, Y., & Zhang, L. (2025). Parenting styles

and children's hot and cool self-regulation: The moderating role of parenting stress. *Early Childhood Education Journal*, 53(1), 195–207. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10643-023-01579-4>

Zhu, H., Shu, L., Wang, X., & Xu, Z. (2025). Household chaos and preschool migrant children's self-regulation: The mediating role of parent–child conflict and the moderating role of mindful parenting. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 16, Article 1416040. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2025.1416040>

Zimmerman, B. J. (2000). Attaining self-regulation: A social cognitive perspective. In M. Boekaerts, P. R. Pintrich, & M. Zeidner (Eds.), *Handbook of self-regulation* (pp. 13–39). Academic Press.