

## Original Paper

# Correlation between Parenting Styles and Learning Stress Junior High School Chinese class Students in Zibo City, China

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### **Abstract**

*In this study, we investigate the significance of parenting styles in the educational development of junior high school students, recognizing the vital role of family education during this formative period. As the primary educators of their children, parents wield considerable influence on their offspring's lives, with family education offering distinct advantages over other forms of education. The status and role of family education remain undisputed. Parenting styles encompass a combination of upbringing concepts, behaviors, and emotional expressions toward children. We examine the characteristics and determining factors of different parenting styles, focusing on three typical family upbringing patterns: authoritative, Authoritarian, and democratic. Additionally, we explore the significant impact of these diverse parenting styles on students' stress levels related to learning Chinese. The paper delves into the essential role of effective and suitable parenting styles in fostering comprehensive and healthy development in students. Furthermore, we elucidate the strategies and methods for establishing positive parenting styles. This quantitative correlational research involved a random sample of 330 participants, collected from three junior middle schools in Zibo City. Utilizing SPSS, we analyzed the relationship between parenting styles and Chinese learning stress among junior high school students*

### **Keywords**

*Junior School Students, Parenting Style, Learning Stress*

## **1. Introduction**

In today's rapidly advancing society, there is a growing emphasis on the education of younger generations, which is accompanied by increasing academic stress on students (Mary et al., 2018). In daily life, many parents prioritize their children's scores and rankings, using these metrics as the sole

measure of success (Nermeen et al., 2010). This approach can inadvertently exacerbate students' learning stress. However, when parents disregard their children's emotional well-being and impose unrealistic expectations, they risk causing severe anxiety and even mental illness.

Jin (2019) posits that learning stress and anxiety among middle school students constitute a specific psychological reaction experienced when facing tests. This reaction is characterized by concerns about unsatisfactory test scores and emotional tension as the primary psychological state. Test anxiety is influenced by students' self-cognition, evaluation, and personality, with its primary characteristics including worry about self-image and a decline in the sense of self-achievement, accompanied by considerable physical and mental discomfort.

Moderate learning stress and exam anxiety can stimulate students' learning potential and enhance learning efficiency (Susanne et al., 2016). However, excessive stress and anxiety can have detrimental effects on students' physical and mental development. Numerous domestic scholars have discovered through surveys that nearly 50% of middle school students experience varying degrees of stress and anxiety. Students exhibiting such psychological states may experience physiological reactions during exams, such as frequent urination, palpitations, dyspnea, and tachycardia. In severe cases, these reactions can escalate to restlessness, decreased concentration, extreme discomfort, and mental disorders.

Junior high school represents a critical transitional stage in an individual's development. As students enter this new phase of life, changes in identity, sudden increases in academic workload, and challenges adapting to their new environment can readily contribute to learning stress. Consequently, there is a pressing need for family education to provide support during this time. Research conducted by Chen Lei, Liao Hong, Luo Jiayi, and others has demonstrated that family education directly or indirectly influences an individual's physical and mental health, as well as their overall development. One crucial aspect of family education is the parenting style adopted by parents, who serve as their children's first teachers. Parenting styles have a lasting impact on children, shaping their lives in various ways. These styles represent a summary of the characteristics of diverse parenting behaviors and constitute a relatively stable behavioral approach that directly and continuously affects children's cognitive development, mental health, and other aspects. The primary objective of this study is to examine the effects of parenting styles on learning stress experienced by junior high school students in the Chinese language discipline. By doing so, we aim to provide valuable insights for family education.

## **2. Parenting Style**

Parents serve as the first teachers in their children's lives, and they directly or indirectly influence their offspring's character and behavior in everyday life. Researchers have proposed various perspectives on parenting styles. Among foreign scholars, the concept of "parenting style" can be traced back to Baumrind, who defined it as a comprehensive set of attitudes, behaviors, and nonverbal expressions displayed in parental education. This fixed behavior pattern reflects the essence of the parent-child

relationship and exhibits cross-situational stability, as it represents parents' tendency to influence their children in daily life and activities. Baumrind (1971) contended that parenting patterns should be analyzed in terms of the demands parents place on their children and their behavioral feedback.

Nancy and Sternberg (1993) posited that parenting style constitutes the sum of parents' attitudes and emotions toward their children. Chinese scholars have also offered differing interpretations of parenting styles. Wang and Sang (2009) argued that parenting styles are closely linked to the family atmosphere and family education, primarily referring to parents' fixed behavior patterns and tendencies in daily parenting, which reflect their attitudes towards children and are often expressed through corrective behavior. Zhang (1997) suggested that parenting styles represent a relatively stable behavior pattern demonstrated by parents throughout the child-rearing process.

In summary, this study defines parenting styles as the educational ideologies and nurturing methods employed by parents when raising and educating junior high school students, as well as the emotional tendencies and behavior patterns exhibited.

Scholars across the globe have proposed varying perspectives on the classification of parenting styles. By synthesizing the current state of research, four primary categories can be discerned. Symonds (1939), an American researcher, was the first to study parenting styles internationally, dividing them into "acceptance-rejection" and "domination-obedience." Symonds' research demonstrated that children raised with an "acceptance" approach tend to exhibit stable temperaments and effective communication skills, whereas those raised with a "rejection" approach may develop moody temperaments, rebellious psychology, and a propensity to defy their parents. "Domination" signifies strict parenting, expecting children to adhere to parental demands, which can lead to timidity, poor independence, and diminished autonomy and initiative. In contrast, "obedience" involves catering to children's desires, which, if not moderated, may foster a domineering character in the child. Therefore, the optimal parenting style should strike a balance between these two dimensions, positioning parents as friends and guides rather than leaders and masters.

Baumrind (1971) conducted the most comprehensive and influential research on parenting styles, categorizing them into authoritative, Authoritarian, and laissez-faire. Generally, the authoritative style proves most beneficial for children's learning and growth, characterized by rationality, pragmatism, and well-founded principles. Authoritative parents gain their children's respect through understanding and consideration. Guided by Vygotsky's "zone of proximal development" theory, these parents establish suitable goals for their children in daily life and academics, reinforcing or constraining their behavior with clear rewards and punishments. Children raised under authoritative parenting generally exhibit confidence, self-discipline, proactivity, responsibility, diligence, and the ability to self-regulate and problem-solve independently. In contrast, Authoritarian parents demand complete obedience and compliance from their children, employing stringent communication methods and unscientific punishments. Children raised in this manner often display cowardice, anxiety, insecurity, depression, lack of self-discipline, and adaptability, as well as impaired communication skills. Over time, they may

become alienated from their parents, develop disagreements, or even harbor rebellious feelings. The laissez-faire style involves a hands-off approach, with parents providing little guidance, expectations, or behavioral norms for their children. Consequently, children raised in laissez-faire households may lack discipline, facing challenges when attempting to impose self-control later in life.

Yue (1993) further classified parenting styles and revised the Parental Rearing Pattern Scale based on EMBU. The father's parenting style was divided into six dimensions with 58 items, while the mother's parenting style was divided into five dimensions with 57 items. The scale encompasses emotional warmth and understanding, overprotection, excessive interference, punishment and severity, favoritism, and rejection and denial. Two classification methods have gained broader recognition within the field: the first is the binary method, which divides family-rearing patterns into positive and negative based on their consequences; the second is the four-category method, which, building upon Baumrind's theory, was proposed by American scholar McBee and others, distinguishing between democratic, indulgent, Authoritarian, and neglectful parenting styles (Wu, 2015). Researchers primarily assess parenting styles through questionnaires and scales, employing quantitative analysis methodologies. For instance, Swedish scholar Perris (1980) developed the Parental Rearing Style Evaluation Scale, which evaluates parental rearing behaviors and attitudes using 81 items representing 15 distinct rearing styles. Lamborn (1991) created the Parental Style Questionnaire (PSQ), while Buri (1991) developed the Parental Authority Questionnaire (PAQ) based on Baumrind's theory, encompassing 30 questions covering authoritative, laissez-faire, and Authoritarian dimensions. Domestic scholar Yue Dongmei later revised the EMBU scale, incorporating 66 items, including six dimensions for fathers and five dimensions for mothers, yielding a reliable and valid research tool (Panther, 2021).

In recent years, domestic scholars have continued to explore parenting styles. Panther (2021) analyzed the sources and differences in junior high school students learning stress and categorized parenting styles within the context of the relationship between middle school students learning stress and their parents. They assessed the corresponding motives and proposed feasible recommendations to enhance parenting education. Feng (2007) examined the impact of parenting styles on students' learning in the context of the relationship between middle school students learning strategies and parenting styles, revealing more suitable rearing patterns for students through data analysis.

### **3. Learning Stress**

Stress exists within the interplay between individuals and their environment. For middle school students, academic stress is the most significant stressor, serving as one of the crucial factors affecting their mental health and representing an internal reflection and feeling beyond their coping abilities (Chen, 2004). Academic stress refers to the psychological strain experienced by individuals when confronted with learning challenges and difficulties, specifically reflecting the conflict between various external learning demands from schools, families, and society and students' learning capabilities (Lu, 2008). Excessive academic stress can not only result in a decline in academic performance and a loss of

interest in learning but may also lead to serious fatigue and depression, adversely affecting children's physical and mental well-being. However, in the education and teaching process, necessary and appropriate stress should be provided to enhance children's resilience and promote their learning and growth.

Based on Lu Haidong's definition of academic stress, it can be inferred that students themselves, schools, families, and the social environment are the sources of excessive academic stress. Zhang and Huang (2012) posit that the academic burden of primary and secondary school students depends on the objectives to be achieved in primary and secondary education, namely, who to train and how to train individuals, which is closely related to students' ability level, self-expectations, family expectations, and school learning atmosphere, among other factors. Yin and Li (2004) suggest that learning stress is related to students' self-system, referring to intelligence, non-intelligence, and other factors associated with students' learning, such as personal attributes like skills, ambitions, cognitive levels, preferences, moral standards, and values.

As the primary task of students is learning and schools are the main educational settings, most students' learning stress originates from school. Zhao (2020) discovered that stress impacting students' learning stems from school-based competition among students, teachers' teaching methods, academic tasks, examination evaluations, and the implementation of workload reduction policies. Under the influence of exam-oriented education, some schools and teachers utilize scores as the criterion for assessing students' quality, which can inadvertently create a particular atmosphere among students, subsequently heightening students' academic stress and impeding the development of their physical and mental health. Selye (1956), a foreign scholar, introduced the stress response theory, positing that stress represents an individual's autonomous response to any demand and categorizing an individual's stress into three stages: alarm, resistance, and exhaustion. Thomas Holmes, Richard, and others proposed the stress stimulation theory, suggesting that work stress represents a force or stimulus acting on individuals, an external force that amplifies people's needs and leads to stress reactions, resulting in nervous psychological responses. The stress in the stress stimulation theory is considered physiological tension and anxiety induced by external stimuli (Li, 2008). Zubin and Spring (1977) introduced a stress vulnerability model, which posits that different individuals perceive stress differently, and a range of physiological, psychological, and social factors determine the variations in individual stress perception. Chen (2004) described in his article that academic stress encompasses endogenous and exogenous stressors, comprising nine primary factors, such as tasks, time, others' demands, frustration, and self-development stress, as well as five secondary factors, including task demand stress and competitive stress.

In recent years, with the student-centered demands of the new curriculum and the ongoing advancement of quality education, increasing attention has been paid to students' learning situations and mental health. Xu (2010) developed a questionnaire on middle school students' learning stress, based on self-determination theory, to measure the level of learning stress among middle school

students and evaluate their stress status. The questionnaire consists of 21 items across four dimensions, assessing students' learning stress from four perspectives: parental stress, self-stress, teacher stress, and social stress. Scholar Tian (2016) designed a questionnaire on middle school students' stress to explore the learning stress levels of junior high school students. The questionnaire comprises four dimensions: time, environment, requirements, and tasks. Previous studies indicate that learning stress has a significant and far-reaching impact on junior high school students who have just entered puberty. Therefore, its scientific application can yield more benefits than drawbacks, promoting the learning and growth of junior high school students.

#### **4. Parenting Style and Learning Stress**

In investigating the connection between parenting styles and students' learning stress, researchers have drawn various conclusions. Parenting style, characterized as a stable tendency exhibited by parents during child-rearing, can significantly influence adolescents' ability to manage stress (Liu et al., 2021). Divergent parenting approaches may result in distinct coping behaviors among individuals. Wang's (2022) research reveals a negative correlation between parenting styles and students' learning stress, suggesting that a positive parenting approach fosters a supportive environment, minimizing academic stress and promoting healthy learning and personality development. In contrast, negative parenting styles can exacerbate stress, hindering students' well-being. Peng et al. (2011) argue that middle school students learning stress is significantly associated with indulgent, authoritarian, and neglectful parenting styles, impacting their learning motivation, behavior, psychological state, and social adaptation. Zhang et al. (2004) discovered that parental warmth, preference, and understanding positively correlate with students' academic performance, while harshness, punishment, rejection, and denial have negative associations. Liao's (2015) study indicates that a warm and understanding parenting style results in lower academic stress for students, whereas excessive interference, overprotection, and strict punishment contribute to heightened stress. In conclusion, identifying a parenting style that suits a particular student is crucial for optimal learning and growth outcomes.

#### **5. Methods**

To examine the association between parenting styles and learning stress among Chinese students, this study employs a simple random sampling approach to investigate the prevailing parenting styles of junior high school students in Zibo. Three junior high schools within the city were selected for data collection, with participating students aged between 11 and 16 years. A total of 350 questionnaires were distributed, and after excluding invalid responses, 338 valid questionnaires were retrieved, yielding an effective response rate of 96.6%.

This correlational research utilizes three investigative techniques: (1) questionnaire survey methodology, (2) quantitative analysis, and (3) literature review. The primary focus of the study is to analyze the relationship between parenting styles and learning stress in the Chinese context.

Accordingly, the research instruments include the “Parenting Style and Learning Stress Questionnaire” and the statistical software SPSS for data analysis.

## 6. Results

According to Table 1, the parenting styles of junior high school students’ fathers in Zibo City are authoritative  $M=2.699$   $SD=0.629$ , Authoritarian  $M =2. 208$   $SD=0.614$ , and democratic  $M =2. 416$   $SD=0.258$ . It can be seen that the average scores of these three parenting styles are higher than 2 points; that is, the parenting styles of junior high school students’ fathers are more authoritative, followed by democratic and Authoritarian;  $M =2. 963$   $SD=0.534$ ,  $M =2. 473$   $SD=0.642$ , and  $M =2. 166$   $SD=0.422$ . Mothers of junior high school students adopt more authoritative parenting styles and less democratic parenting styles.

From the Table 1, it can be seen that fathers of junior high school students in Zibo City adopt less authoritative and authoritarian parenting styles than mothers, while adopting more democratic parenting styles than mothers. As a result, junior high school students feel more stress from their mothers.

**Table 1. Descriptive Statistics of Parenting Style and Students’ Chinese Learning Stress**

	Participants	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Authoritative parenting style	Father	128	2.699	. 629
	Mother	210	2.963	. 534
Authoritarian parenting style	Father	128	2.208	. 614
	Mother	210	2.473	. 642
Democratic parenting style	Father	128	2.416	. 528
	Mother	210	2.166	. 422
Learning stress	Father	128	2.348	. 669
	Mother	210	2.613	. 666

As can be seen from the Table 2, there are also significant differences in parenting styles and learning pressure among different interviewees. The t-test values for authoritarian, authoritarian, and democratic parenting styles and learning pressure were -4.118, -3.737, 4.798, and -3.543, respectively. It can be seen that there are significant differences among different in the above four aspects

The results show mother has a higher authority and autocracy than the father. So, the mother also shows high learning stress to their children than the fathers group.

According to the research results, we can also see the real problems such as the father’s absence in the growth of students’ education.

**Table 2. Differences between Parenting Style and Students' Learning Stress among Different Respondents**

	Interviewee	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>T</i>
Authoritative parenting style	Father	2.699	.629	-4.118***
	Mother	2.963	.534	
Authoritarian parenting style	Father	2.208	.614	-3.737***
	Mother	2.473	.642	
Democratic parenting style	Father	2.416	.528	4.798***
	Mother	2.166	.422	
Learning stress	Father	2.348	.669	-3.543***
	Mother	2.613	.666	

Note. \* $p < 0.05$ , \*\* $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\* $p < 0.001$

The Pearson correlation coefficient method, which is a statistical method to accurately measure the proximity of the relationship between two variables (Li et al., 2022). The significance of correlation analysis among authority, autocracy, and learning stress are 0.422, 0.867, and -0.649 respectively. There is a positive significant relationship between authoritative and Authoritarian parenting styles on students' learning stress in Chinese Junior High School Students. That is, the higher the parental authority or special system, the greater the children's learning stress. However, the negative relationship between democracy and learning stress, is that higher democracy reduces learning stress see Table 3.

**Table 3. Correlation between Different Parenting Styles of Parenting Style and Learning Stress**

Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Authoritative parenting style	Authoritarian parenting style	Democratic parenting style	Learning stress
Authoritative parenting style	2.86	0.58				
Authoritarian parenting style	2.37	0.64	.356**			
Democratic parenting style	2.26	0.48	-.732**	-.610**		
Learning stress	2.51	0.68	.422**	.867**	-.649**	

Note. \* $p < 0.05$ , \*\* $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\* $p < 0.001$

Correlation analysis shows a significant correlation between the parenting styles of fathers and mothers and their children's learning stress. To further explore the influence of Parenting style on junior high school students Chinese learning stress, this paper takes Parenting style, gender, and family structure as independent variables and students' Chinese learning stress as dependent variables, and makes a regression analysis of them.



In Table 4, Model 1, taking students' gender and family structure as independent variables and students' learning stress of Chinese as dependent variables, the regression analysis of unary constant covariates is carried out. According to the data of Table 4, Model 1, it is found that there is a significant relationship between students' family structure ( $t=4.601$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) and junior high school students learning stress, which can predict students' learning stress even positively;  $F=12.110$  ( $p < 0.001$ ) in the ANOVA model, which shows that there is at least one independent variable, that is, family structure, which will affect the dependent variable learning stress; It can be seen from the above table that the  $R$  of Model 1 is 0.067, indicating that gender and family structure can explain the change of students' learning stress by about 6.7%.

In Table 4, Model 2, the regression analysis is carried out with various parenting styles and dimensions of Parenting style as independent variables and students' learning stress in Chinese subjects as dependent variables. The final data show that students' gender ( $t=-2.156$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ), family structure ( $t=2.695$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), and Parenting style ( $t=23.988$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) have a significant relationship with students' learning stress, and the significant increase is made;  $R^2 = 0.658$  of Model 2, which shows that parents' rearing style can explain about 65.8% of students' learning stress changes; Parenting style can also significantly predict the learning stress of junior high school students in Zibo.

**Table 4. Regression Relationship between Parenting Style and Junior High School Students Chinese Learning Stress**

Variable	Model 1		Model 2	
	Beta	T	Beta	T
Gender	-.084	-1.597	-.069	-2.156*
Family structure	.243	4.601***	.088	2.695**
Parenting style			.784	23.988***
Global model F	12.110***		213.730***	
R	.067		.658	

Note. \* $p < 0.05$ , \*\* $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\* $p < 0.001$

## 7. Discussion and Conclusions

Family is the smallest unit in society and the most important environment in the process of children's growth and development. Parenting style profoundly affects children's adaptation to the environment and healthy development of body and mind (Luo, 2019). From the above data, we can find that:

First of all, the learning stress of junior high school students in Zibo is generally at a medium level. In the age of the subjects, the students in grade three and grade four have higher learning stress in various subjects, while the students in grade one and grade two have lower learning stress; In terms of gender, girls in junior high school have higher learning stress than boys; In terms of the gender of the

respondents, the mothers of junior high school students generally pay more attention to their children's study than their fathers, and adopt stricter parenting methods. Secondly, the Parenting style of junior high school students in Zibo deeply affects their learning. Those children who grow up under the warmth, understanding, and preference of their parents will feel moderate learning stress, which will help students enhance their ability to resist stress and help their academic level improve; Children who grow up under excessive interference and protection generally do not have appropriate stress levels, some are too large and some are too small; However, those children who grow up in a severe, punishing, rejecting and denying family environment will feel heavier study stress and psychological burden, which is not conducive to their growth and progress.

According to a large number of research statistics by researchers, positive and positive parenting styles such as parents' care, participation, acceptance, and support can enhance children's confidence and learning motivation, improve their learning ability and achievement, and reduce their learning stress (Lowe & Dotterer, 2013). Frequent parent-child communication and appropriate parenting patterns help parents pass on the correct scientific world outlook, outlook on life, and values to their children, to promote their academic progress and healthy growth (Spera, 2005).

Further, improve Parenting style and reduce students' learning stress on Chinese subjects. In this study, we can find that for most students, and we should adopt a more moderate and democratic parenting style, encourage students more, give students more support and trust, and let students feel more warmth and care from their families; For students with weak self-control, parents can adopt a controlled parenting style, which should not be too Authoritarian or too inaction. They should accept their children's views and emotions, and put forward requirements and supervision to their children in a timely and appropriate manner; For a small number of "problem students" and underachievers, parents should guard against arrogance and rashness, slowly find the bright spots in their children and gradually carry them forward, and communicate more to find a more suitable parenting style. First, give full play to the role of family education. In the process of educating children, the most important thing is to understand that parenting patterns have a great influence on children's ability to adjust their emotions and improve their meaning in life. On the one hand, parents should give their children more emotional warmth, understanding, and support, establish a good and close parent-child relationship, and create a harmonious and equal family atmosphere; on the other hand, they should learn positive emotional regulation methods and play the role of role models (Liu, 2021).

Adhering to home-school cooperation, forming educational synergy. Teachers should pay more attention to and measure students' mental health levels in school, and arrange extracurricular activities and thematic class meetings properly, such as spiritual communication, stress release classes, and so on. Teachers and schools should communicate with parents in time. Parents should also actively cooperate with schools, have equal heart-to-heart and help with their children in life, start with their families, find the most suitable family-rearing style for their children, and guide their children to improve their learning ability and relieve stress.

Focus on all-around development, develop correct learning concepts and habits, and improve the cognitive level and psychological stress resistance. You need to be hard while the iron is hot. Junior high school is an important growth transition for students from small to large, and it is also an important stage for students to develop good study habits, establish scientific learning concepts and form healthy and scientific values. There is still a long way to go in the future. Students must focus on their improvement and all-round development, and constantly improve their cognitive level, expand their knowledge, and broaden their horizons in learning; In life, we should strive to build our ability to resist stress and keep a dynamic balance between them to promote students' learning and growth more effectively.

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