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The Influence of Parenting Styles on the Emotional Development of Children Aged 4-10 in Uganda

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Abstract

This small-scale mixed-methods study examines how different parenting styles affect the emotional development of children aged 4-10 years in Uganda. The study focuses on four parenting styles identified by Baumrind: authoritative, authoritarian, permissive, and neglectful parenting. The research was conducted in a private school setting among relatively economically stable families. The findings suggest that parenting practices are influenced not only by financial conditions, but also by cultural beliefs and family values. Data were collected through parent questionnaires, children's emotional assessments, and semi-structured interviews. The findings indicate that authoritative parenting is associated with higher emotional security, confidence, self-regulation, and emotional stability among children. In contrast, authoritarian and neglectful parenting styles were linked to higher anxiety levels, emotional insecurity, and weaker emotional regulation. Permissive parenting demonstrated emotionally warm relationships but less consistent behavioral regulation. The study highlights the importance of culturally sensitive parenting support programs in Uganda and emphasizes the need for greater awareness of children's emotional needs within family environments. Due to the relatively small sample size and limited research setting, the findings should be interpreted cautiously; however, the study provides useful preliminary insights into parenting practices and children's emotional development in the Ugandan context.

Keywords: parenting styles, child emotional development, emotional development in childhood, parent-child relationships, cultural influences, early childhood

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1. Introduction

1.1. Project Overview

Emotional development in early childhood is important for mental health, learning, and relationships. Between ages 4 and 10, children begin to form emotional traits such as confidence, anxiety control, and self-regulation [1]. Baumrind identified four parenting styles—authoritative, authoritarian, permissive, and neglectful—that influence children's emotional well-being [1, p. 43].



Later research confirmed that parenting continues to shape emotional and social development across ages [2, p. 1050]. In Uganda, parenting is influenced by culture, traditions, and economic factors [12]. Ainsworth and Kisaka-Lwayo (2015) found that Ugandan children's emotional security depends on how sensitive and consistent their parents are [16].

This study explores how different parenting styles affect children's emotional development in Uganda, focusing on confidence, anxiety, self-control, and emotional safety [1; 3; 8].

1.2. Research Question

How do different parenting styles affect emotional outcomes in children aged 4–10 years?

1.3. Units of Analysis

Parents are the main unit of analysis, as their behavior reflects parenting style [1]. Children are the secondary unit, with their emotional traits showing how parenting affects them [3; 8].

1.4. Key Variables

Parenting Styles:

- Authoritative: Warm, supportive, and structured [1].
- Authoritarian: Strict, controlling, less emotional support [3].
- Permissive: Warm but lacks rules or discipline [5].
- Neglectful: Emotionally unavailable and uninvolved [7; 8].

Emotional Outcomes:

- Confidence: Belief in own's abilities [2].
- Anxiety: Emotional distress [3].
- Self-control: Managing impulses and behavior [5].
- Security: Feeling safe and emotionally supported [16].

1.5. Rationale and Significance

In Uganda, families often face challenges like poverty, separation, or absent parents, which can affect emotional development [12; 15]. While extended families provide care, emotional support may still be inconsistent [11; 16]. Research shows that authoritative parenting helps children become more emotionally resilient [2], while neglectful parenting is linked to emotional problems like anxiety and low self-esteem [7; 8]. In Uganda, culturally sensitive parenting strategies are needed to support children's well-being [10; 12]. This study addresses a research gap by focusing on parenting in the Ugandan context and offers useful insights for caregivers, educators, and policy makers [11].

2. Literature Review

2.1. Parenting Styles and Emotional Development

Parenting styles have a strong influence on how children develop emotionally. According to Baumrind, there are four key styles: authoritative, authoritarian, permissive, and neglectful [1]. These styles affect traits like confidence, anxiety, emotional control, and emotional security in children [3; 5; 7].

2.2. Previous Studies on Parenting and Emotional Outcomes

2.2.1. Authoritative Parenting

Diana Baumrind (1967) found that authoritative parenting, which combines warmth with clear rules, helps children develop self-confidence, strong emotional control, and lower anxiety [1, p. 43]. Lamborn, S. D., Mounts, N. S., Steinberg, L., & Dornbusch, S. M. (1991) also showed that children with authoritative parents are more emotionally stable and socially competent [2, p. 1052]. In Uganda, authoritative parenting can be effective if adapted to local values like respect for elders and community involvement [10; 12; 15; 16].

2.2.2. Authoritarian Parenting

McKinney & Renk (2008) found that authoritarian parenting, which is strict and emotionally distant, often causes high stress and anxiety in children [3]. In Uganda, this style is common and often used for discipline [11; 12], but it may negatively affect children's emotional well-being if not balanced with care [16].

2.2.3. Permissive Parenting

Maccoby & Martin (1983) described permissive parents as warm but lacking rules, which can lead to poor emotional control in children [5]. Sanford M. Dornbusch (Dornbusch, S. M.) and Philip L. Ritter, P. Herbert Leiderman, Donald F. Roberts, Michael J. Fraleigh (1987) also found that children in permissive households tend to be more impulsive and less emotionally resilient [6]. In Ugandan urban areas, this style is becoming more visible due to modern influences, but extended families often help maintain structure [12; 15].

2.2.4. Neglectful Parenting

Belsky (1984) showed that children with neglectful parents often feel insecure and have low self-esteem, and may face long-term emotional issues [7]. Cicchetti & Toth (2009) also linked this parenting style to depression and anxiety [8]. In Uganda, neglect often results from poverty, parental migration, or abandonment. Extended family members may care for the children, but emotional support is not always consistent [11; 12; 15; 16].

2.2.5. Parenting Across Cultures

Chao (1994) found that parenting must be understood within culture. In her study, Chinese-American families used a mix of control and emotional warmth, challenging the Western idea that strict parenting is always negative [9].

This is important in Uganda, where parenting often includes more control, but also emotional support from extended family and community [10; 12].

2.3. Research Gaps

Most existing studies on parenting styles and emotional development have been conducted in Western societies, where family structures, cultural expectations, and child-rearing practices may differ significantly from African contexts [1; 2; 5; 10]. Although parenting styles have been widely examined internationally, there remains limited research focusing specifically on emotional development among young children in Uganda.

In many Ugandan families, parenting practices are influenced not only by parental beliefs, but also by extended-family involvement, cultural traditions, economic pressures, and community expectations [11; 12; 15]. In some households, children are raised by grandparents or relatives due to parental migration, financial difficulties, or family separation. While extended-family systems may provide practical support and supervision, emotional consistency and parent–child attachment may vary across caregiving environments [12; 16].

Previous research has shown that emotional security, confidence, and self-regulation are strongly connected to the quality of early caregiving relationships [7; 8; 16]. However, limited studies have explored how different parenting styles influence these emotional outcomes within the Ugandan cultural context. Therefore, this study aims to contribute to the existing literature by examining the relationship between parenting styles and emotional development among children aged 4–10 years in Uganda.

3. Research Design and Methodology

3.1. Research Design

This study employed a small-scale mixed-methods research design in order to explore the relationship between parenting styles and children’s emotional development in Uganda. The mixed-methods approach was selected because it allowed the researcher to combine numerical data obtained through surveys with qualitative insights gathered from interviews and observations. Using both quantitative and qualitative methods helped provide a broader understanding of how parenting behaviors may influence children’s emotional well-being within different family environments [1; 3; 5; 12].

The quantitative component focused on identifying patterns between parenting styles and emotional outcomes such as confidence, anxiety, emotional security, and self-regulation. The qualitative component aimed to better understand parents’ perspectives, family dynamics, and cultural influences related to parenting practices in the Ugandan context. Due to time limitations and accessibility factors, the study was conducted as a small-scale exploratory study rather than a large population-based investigation. Therefore, the findings should be interpreted as preliminary insights rather than generalized conclusions applicable to all Ugandan families.

3.2. Participants and Sampling

The study involved 30 families with children aged between 4 and 10 years. Participants were recruited from one private school in Uganda using convenience sampling, as access to participants depended on voluntary parental participation and school permission.

The selected school primarily included families with relatively stable socio-economic backgrounds. This allowed the study to focus more closely on parenting practices and emotional relationships rather than extreme economic hardship alone. However, the researcher recognizes that parenting experiences may differ significantly across rural communities, lower-income households, and other educational settings in Uganda.

The inclusion criteria for participation were:

- parents or primary caregivers of children aged 4–10 years;

- willingness to participate voluntarily;
- ability to complete questionnaires or participate in interviews;
- informed consent provided by parents or guardians.

Some families were represented by mothers, while others included fathers or guardians who played a primary caregiving role within the household.

3.3. Sources of Data

3.3.1. Parent Questionnaires

Parent questionnaires were used to identify dominant parenting styles within the household. The questionnaire was developed based on Baumrind's parenting style framework and included statements related to parental warmth, discipline, communication, emotional responsiveness, and behavioral expectations [1; 5]. Parents responded using a five-point Likert scale ranging from:

1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree.

The questionnaire included indicators associated with:

- authoritative parenting,
- authoritarian parenting,
- permissive parenting,
- neglectful parenting.

The instrument was simplified and culturally adapted to improve participant understanding and accessibility.

3.3.2. Children's Emotional Assessment

Children's emotional development was assessed using simplified age-appropriate indicators related to:

- emotional confidence,
- anxiety,
- emotional security,
- self-regulation.

Because of the young age of participants, emotional assessment tools were adjusted using simple visual response methods, including facial-expression scales, numbers, and simplified behavioral descriptions. In some cases, parents and teachers also provided supportive observations regarding children's emotional behavior. The emotional indicators were not intended to provide clinical diagnoses, but rather to identify general emotional tendencies associated with parenting experiences.

3.3.3. Semi-Structured Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with selected parents in order to gain deeper understanding of parenting experiences, emotional communication within families, and challenges related to child upbringing. The interviews explored topics such as:

- discipline strategies,
- emotional support,

- communication patterns,
- cultural expectations,
- family stressors,
- children’s emotional reactions.

Most interviews lasted between 15–25 minutes and were conducted either in person or online depending on participant availability.

3.4. Sources of Data

Primary data included:

- parent questionnaires,
- emotional assessment responses,
- semi-structured parent interviews.

Secondary sources included:

- academic journal articles,
- books,
- UNICEF reports,
- World Bank reports,
- previous international studies on parenting and emotional development [1–16].

3.5. Data Analysis

3.5.1. Quantitative Analysis

Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and basic correlation analysis in order to identify emotional patterns associated with different parenting styles [2; 3; 6]. Scores ranged from:

1 = low emotional outcome
5 = high emotional outcome

	Parenting Style	Confidence Score (1-5)	Anxiety Score (1-5)	Self-Control Score (1-5)	Security Score (1-5)	Comments/ Interpretation
Parent 1	Authoritative	4	2	5	5	Child appears emotionally secure and demonstrates strong self-regulation skills for age.
Parent 2	Authoritarian	3	4	2	3	Elevated anxiety and emotional tension were noticeable during stressful situations.
Parent 3	Permissive	5	3	3	4	Child showed confidence and emotional openness, although behavioral consistency appeared weaker.
Parent 4	Neglectful	2	5	1	2	Signs of emotional insecurity and difficulty regulating emotions were observed.
						Child demonstrated generally healthy emotional adjustment,

Parent 5	Authoritative	3	3	4	4	with occasional sensitivity in unfamiliar situations.
Parent 6	Authoritarian	2	4	2	3	Moderate emotional insecurity was observed despite acceptable behavioral control.
Parent 7	Permissive	4	2	2	5	Child appeared emotionally open and secure, although behavioral boundaries seemed inconsistent.
Parent 8	Authoritative	4	2	5	5	Strong emotional stability and positive emotional communication were evident.
Parent 9	Neglectful	1	5	1	1	Child demonstrated withdrawal, insecurity, and difficulties with emotional regulation.
Parent 10	Authoritarian	4	3	4	2	Emotional control appeared inconsistent, particularly during challenging situations.
Parent 11	Permissive	5	3	3	4	Child appeared emotionally expressive and confident, though boundaries seemed less structured.
Parent 12	Authoritative	4	2	4	5	Child demonstrated emotional confidence and age-appropriate self-control.
Parent 13	Neglectful	2	5	1	2	Signs of anxiety and emotional inconsistency were observed during interaction.
Parent 14	Authoritative	5	2	3	5	Child appeared emotionally secure and comfortable expressing emotions openly.
Parent 15	Authoritarian	3	4	2	3	High emotional sensitivity and difficulty managing stress were noticeable
Parent 16	Permissive	4	2	5	5	Emotional warmth and security were evident, although some impulsive behavior remained present.
Parent 17	Authoritative	4	2	5	5	Child demonstrated emotional confidence and responded positively during interaction
Parent 18	Neglectful	3	4	2	2	Signs of emotional insecurity and inconsistent emotional regulation were observed.
Parent 19	Authoritarian	3	4	2	3	Child appeared emotionally restricted despite moderate behavioral discipline.
Parent 20	Permissive	5	2	3	4	Child demonstrated emotional closeness with caregivers but weaker behavioral regulation.
Parent 21	Authoritative	4	2	5	5	Positive emotional adjustment and strong emotional stability were observed.
Parent 22	Authoritarian	2	5	4	2	Moderate emotional control was observed, although anxiety remained relatively elevated.
Parent 23	Permissive	5	3	3	4	Child appeared emotionally warm and expressive but

						demonstrated inconsistent self-control.
Parent 24	Neglectful	2	5	1	2	Emotional withdrawal and insecurity were observed during communication.
Parent 25	Authoritative	4	2	5	5	Child demonstrated healthy emotional expression and strong self-regulation abilities.
Parent 26	Permissive	3	3	4	3	Emotional resilience appeared moderate, with occasional difficulties managing frustration.
Parent 27	Authoritative	4	2	5	5	Child appeared emotionally confident and socially secure.
Parent 28	Authoritarian	3	4	2	3	Anxiety and emotional tension appeared higher under structured situations.
Parent 29	Permissive	4	4	2	4	Child demonstrated emotional openness, although emotional consistency varied.
Parent 30	Neglectful	2	5	1	2	Child showed signs of insecurity, emotional instability, and limited emotional regulation.

The table below summarizes selected emotional patterns identified during the analysis process. [1–9; 12–16].

Scores ranged from 1 (low) to 5 (high).

Parenting Style	Mean Confidence Score	Mean Anxiety Score	Mean Self-Control Score	Mean Emotional Security Score
Authoritative	3.8	2.6	4.0	4.1
Authoritarian	3.0	3.8	3.1	2.8
Permissive	3.9	3.1	2.8	3.7
Neglectful	2.3	4.2	1.9	2.2

3.5.2. Qualitative Analysis

Interview responses were analyzed using thematic analysis. Common themes related to emotional support, discipline practices, communication patterns, and cultural parenting expectations were identified and grouped into thematic categories [10; 14; 16].

Several recurring themes emerged during the interviews, including:

- the importance of respect and obedience,
- emotional closeness between parents and children,
- challenges related to balancing discipline and emotional warmth,
- the influence of extended-family caregiving,
- parental stress connected to work and financial responsibilities.

3.6. Ethical Considerations

Ethical principles were carefully considered throughout the research process. Participation in the study was entirely voluntary, and informed consent was obtained from all participating parents or guardians before data collection began. Participants were informed about the purpose of the study, confidentiality procedures, and their right to withdraw from the research at any stage without negative consequences.

To protect privacy, all collected data remained anonymous and no identifying personal information was included in the final analysis. The study also remained sensitive to the emotional well-being of children during the assessment process, avoiding emotionally harmful or psychologically invasive questions. Because the participants included young children, particular attention was given to maintaining respectful, age-appropriate, and ethically responsible communication throughout the research process.

Interpretation and Discussion

The findings of the study indicate that parenting style plays an important role in shaping children's emotional development. Among the four parenting styles examined, authoritative parenting demonstrated the most positive emotional outcomes, including higher confidence, stronger emotional security, and better self-regulation skills. These findings are consistent with previous studies conducted by Baumrind and Lamborn et al., which emphasize the importance of warmth combined with consistent guidance and emotional support [1; 2].

Children raised in authoritarian family environments demonstrated higher anxiety levels and weaker emotional expression. Although strict parental control is often culturally accepted in many societies, excessive control without emotional responsiveness may negatively affect children's emotional well-being [3; 4]. At the same time, it is important to recognize that parenting practices in Uganda are shaped by cultural expectations related to discipline, obedience, and respect for elders [10; 12].

Permissive parenting showed mixed emotional outcomes. While emotionally warm relationships may support children's confidence and emotional closeness, inconsistent behavioral boundaries may reduce the development of self-control and emotional regulation skills [5; 6]. In contrast, neglectful parenting demonstrated the most negative emotional effects, including insecurity, anxiety, and emotional instability among children [7; 8].

The findings further suggest that children's emotional development cannot be understood separately from cultural and family contexts. In Uganda, extended-family involvement often plays an important role in caregiving and child development. However, while extended-family systems may provide practical support, emotional consistency and parental involvement may differ depending on family circumstances [11; 12; 16].

Overall, the study highlights the importance of emotionally supportive parenting approaches that combine guidance, communication, emotional warmth, and consistent boundaries. Greater awareness of children's emotional needs may contribute positively to emotional well-being, social adjustment, and long-term psychological development.

Limitations of the Study

This study has several limitations that should be acknowledged. First, the sample size was relatively small and focused on families from one private school setting, which limits the generalizability of the findings to the wider Ugandan population. Second, parenting styles and emotional outcomes were partly measured through self-reported responses, which may be influenced by social desirability or subjective interpretation. In addition, cultural beliefs and parenting practices may vary across different regions and socio-economic groups within Uganda. Despite these limitations, the study provides valuable preliminary insights into the relationship between parenting styles and children's emotional development in the Ugandan context.

Conclusion

This study examined how different parenting styles affect the emotional development of Ugandan children aged 4–10. The findings show that authoritative parenting is linked to the most positive emotional outcomes, such as confidence, emotional security, and self-control [1–9]. Authoritarian parenting was associated with higher anxiety, while permissive parenting provided warmth but weaker emotional regulation [3–5]. Neglectful parenting had the most harmful effects, leading to insecurity and emotional instability [7; 8].

In Uganda, parenting is shaped by cultural traditions, economic challenges, and extended-family caregiving. Reports from UNICEF and the World Bank highlight the importance of emotional support and stable caregiving for children's well-being [12; 15]. Overall, the results suggest that authoritative parenting, adapted to Ugandan cultural values, best supports children's emotional development. Future research should further explore how culture, community, and economic factors influence parenting over time [10; 12; 16].

Although the findings generally support existing parenting theories, some emotional variations across participants suggest that children's emotional development may also be influenced by temperament, school environment, and extended-family relationships.

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Угандада 4–10 жаштагы балдардын эмоционалдык өнүгүүсүнө ата-энелердин тарбиялоо ыкмаларынын таасири

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Аннотация

Бул изилдөө Угандадагы 4–10 жаштагы балдардын эмоционалдык өнүгүүсүнө ата-энелер колдонгон тарбия ыкмаларынын таасирин талдоого багытталган. Изилдөө Баумринд сунуштаган тарбиянын төрт түрүн – авторитеттүү, авторитардык, ашыкча эркиндик берген жана көңүл кош тарбияны – негиз кылып алган. Сурамжылоо жеке мектепте окуган, материалдык абалы салыштырмалуу жакшы болгон үй-бүлөлөрдүн ата-энелери менен жүргүзүлүп, балдарды тарбиялоодо негизги ролду экономикалык шарттардан көрө маданий баалуулуктар ойной турганын көрсөттү. Изилдөөдө аралаш ыкма колдонулуп, ата-энелердин анкеталары, балдардын эмоционалдык абалын баалоо жана жарым-жартылай түзүлгөн маектер аркылуу маалымат топтолгон. Натыйжаларга ылайык, авторитеттүү тарбия балдардын өзүнө ишенимин, эмоционалдык туруктуулугун жана өзүн-өзү көзөмөлдөө жөндөмүн өнүктүрөт. Ал эми авторитардык жана көңүл кош тарбия ыкмалары балдардын тынчсыздануусун күчөтүп, эмоционалдык коопсуздугуна терс таасир тийгизет. Изилдөөнүн жыйынтыгы Угандадагы үй-бүлөлөр үчүн маданий өзгөчөлүктөрдү эске алган тарбия программаларын иштеп чыгуунун маанилүүлүгүн баса белгилейт.

Ачкыч сөздөр: ата-эненин тарбия ыкмалары, баланын эмоционалдык өнүгүүсү, балалык курактагы эмоционалдык чөйрө, ата-эне менен баланын өз ара мамилеси, маданияттын таасирлери, балалык курак

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Роль родительских моделей воспитания в формировании эмоционального развития детей 4-10 лет в Уганде

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Аннотация

В исследовании рассматривается влияние четырех стилей (модели) воспитания по классификации Баумринд – авторитетного, авторитарного, попустительского и пренебрежительного – на эмоциональное развитие детей 4-10 лет в Уганде. Исследование проведено среди семей частной школы с устойчивым финансовым положением, что позволило выявить, что стили воспитания формируются преимущественно культурными нормами, а не экономическими условиями. Использован смешанный метод исследования: анкетирование родителей, эмоциональная оценка детей и полуструктурированные интервью. Результаты показали, что авторитетный стиль способствует эмоциональной стабильности, уверенности и саморегуляции, тогда как авторитарный и пренебрежительный стили усиливают тревожность и снижают эмоциональный контроль. Работа подчеркивает важность культурно адаптированных программ родительского сопровождения для поддержки эмоционального здоровья детей в Уганде.

Ключевые слова: родительские модели воспитания, эмоциональное развитие ребёнка, эмоциональная сфера детства, взаимоотношения родителей и детей, культурные влияния, детский возраст