

MATERNAL PARENTING STYLES, GENDER DIFFERENCES AND EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE: A CORRELATIONAL STUDY OF NIGERIAN ADOLESCENTS

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Abstract

This study investigated how emotional intelligence of selected Nigerian adolescents relates to their perceptions of maternal parenting styles while also exploring potential gender-based variations in these perceptions. The sample was selected across twelve (12) randomly chosen government secondary schools in 2 states in South West Nigeria, namely Osun State and Ondo State. Utilizing a descriptive correlational survey design, 325 students (119 males and 206 females) were purposively sampled. Data collection relied on two validated instruments: an adapted 24-item version of Buri's (1991) Parental Authority Questionnaire and a 28-item Emotional Intelligence Scale structured around Goleman's (1998) four-component framework. Data collected were analysed using descriptive, t-test of independent samples and Pearson Product Moment Correlation statistics. The hypotheses were tested at .05 level of significance. Findings of the study revealed that the adolescents perceived their mothers as predominantly authoritative though elements of authoritarian and permissive styles were also recognised. Significant gender differences were found in the adolescents' perception of mothers as authoritative in favour of the girls, whereas male participants reported higher levels of maternal permissiveness. There was no significant gender difference in the perception of mothers as authoritarian. Crucially, correlation analyses revealed that adolescents' emotional intelligence shared a significant positive relationship with both authoritative and authoritarian maternal styles, whereas a significant negative relationship was observed with maternal permissiveness. The study concluded that maternal child-rearing practices and parenting styles play a distinct role in shaping adolescents' emotional capabilities within the studied environment. Based on these dynamics, parents, education practitioners and school guidance counselors in particular, must develop a deep understanding of the importance of emotional intelligence and its characteristics alongside practical intervention strategies. Such expertise is essential for equipping both parents and students with the necessary support systems to actively enhance students' social-emotional development and improving the emotional intelligence levels of students.

Keywords: Maternal Parenting Styles, Emotional Intelligence, Adolescence, Gender, Nigeria.

INTRODUCTION

Emotional intelligence is the ability to understand, accept and recognise our own emotions and feelings including their impact on ourselves and other people and to use this knowledge to improve our behaviour as well as to manage and improve our relationship with others (Cartwright & Solloway, 2017). In contemporary developmental psychology, emotional intelligence (EI) is no longer viewed merely as a fixed, internal talent that an individual is born with (Brackett et al., 2011). Instead, modern 21st-century frameworks look at it as a flexible, environmentally responsive set of emotional and social skills that can grow and change based on a person's surroundings (Mayer et al., 2008). Our emotions are deeply complex phenomena; they are not just transient feelings, but an integrated mix of how our brains process information,

how our bodies react physically, and what drives our daily behavior. Ultimately, true emotional competence means more than just keeping one's own feelings under control; it requires a real capacity to read social situations, show genuine empathy, and use emotional awareness to solve problems and build healthy, lasting relationships with others (Joseph & Newman, 2010). An individual's ability to manage his/her emotions in a healthy way will therefore determine the quality of his/her life and relationship with other people. While emotional intelligence confers on an individual the ability to recognise, understand and manage his/her emotions, it also involves the ability to take the perspective of others, showing sensitivity and empathy and being able to solve problems in relationships. Emotional intelligence helps a person perceive, understand, regulate and harness emotions in an adaptive way in personal relationships (Fitness, 2021). Research has revealed that emotional intelligence, more than intelligence quotient (IQ) determines school success and indeed success in all aspects of life including family relationships (Bar-On, 2001). Individuals with high emotional intelligence have been found to be more successful than their counterparts with low emotional intelligence. . For adolescents navigating the sudden psychological and academic pressures of growing up, the ability to manage these emotional states serves as a vital foundation for their mental well-being and overall success in life (Guerra & Bradshaw, 2008).

Academic performance among school children is influenced by complex and diverse factors, both external and internal. The factors resident in the learners are the most important because the psychological disposition of the learner affects to a large extent what he learns, how he learns and his/her general attitude towards learning. According to Akinboye (2002), emotional intelligence is associated with school success because social and emotional skills have been found to create higher educational performances.

Though no direct link has been found between students' retentive capacity and emotional intelligence, students with high emotional intelligence are more likely to succeed academically than those who have relatively high intelligence quotient and lack emotional intelligence. Individuals with higher emotional intelligence perform better academically because they have developed empathy and social skills which are components of emotional intelligence (Gardener, 2013). Emotional intelligence has been positively correlated with life satisfaction and also found to be a predictor of violent behaviour, as individuals with low emotional intelligence have the potential to demonstrate violent behaviour. Emotional intelligence is largely learnt, not genetically fixed and is predominantly determined by the environment. One of the major factors influencing the development of emotional intelligence is parenting.

The home is the first social environment of the individual. It is within the home that an individual learns who he/she is and how to interact with others. The emotional expressiveness of parents and the general emotional climate of the home provide guidelines for children's formulation of rules about everyday social/emotional interactions. Early socialization and interactions with sensitive maternal caregivers serve as the foundational bedrock for an adolescent's developing emotional regulation and expressiveness capabilities (Paulus et al., 2021). Children therefore not only learn emotional lessons from parents but also transfer their expressive style in their interactions with others.

Parenting styles refer to the standard strategies employed by parents in raising their children. Contemporary socialization frameworks continue to map maternal behaviors across the foundational axes of demandingness and responsiveness, categorizing them into authoritative, authoritarian, and permissive typologies (Power, 2023; Saeed & Hanif, 2020). In modern adolescent development paradigms, authoritative mothers balance structural behavioral boundaries with open psychological warmth, whereas authoritarian practices lean heavily on rigid compliance, and permissive styles fail to establish stable regulatory limits for the developing child (Power, 2023). Each parenting style creates a different emotional climate thereby contributing differentially to the development of emotional intelligence.

Perceptions of parenting styles refer to the opinions of individuals about styles of parental behaviour. These assessments are very important. Literature on the effects of parenting styles on children's outcomes establishes the benefits to children of the authoritative parenting style as opposed to the negative outcomes produced by authoritarian and permissive parenting. Whether parents use harsh discipline, empathic understanding, indifference or warmth, can have a lasting influence on one's emotional life.

Recent empirical work across developing contexts demonstrates that an adolescent's emotional intelligence is highly sensitive to these domestic environments (Saeed & Hanif, 2020). Studies looking closely at maternal dynamics find that positive emotional expressiveness and structured communication from the mother foster robust emotional competence, self-regulation, and relational skills in secondary school students (Eyiah-Bediako et al., 2021). A close emotional bonding and adequate communication between children and parents make children emotionally and socially competent, responsible, independent and confident.

Statement of the Problem

The relationship between perceived parenting style and children's outcomes has been largely researched but with diverse results. Studies have also shown the type of parenting style predominantly adopted to be reflective of the culture inherent in the society. Within the West African sub-regions, the perception of maternal authority, structural discipline, and collective family expectations serves as a protective mechanism or moderator against external negative influences like peer pressure (Eyiah-Bediako et al., 2021). Subsequent reactions or outcomes in children, with regards to perceived parenting styles, may differ based on the cultural values of the society. Thus, the demand for obedience may be seen as warmth and concern in a collectivist African culture as opposed to the individualistic western world where it may be viewed as emotional violence.

Emotional intelligence has been found to play a key role in the lives of individuals. It serves as a predictor of life satisfaction, healthy psychological adaptation, positive interaction with family and others, and higher parental warmth. Within the West African socio-cultural matrix, gender roles heavily dictate caregiving dynamics; mothers remain primarily responsible for the immediate emotional and behavioral socialization of children within the domestic sphere. While international literature is vast, there remains a critical gap in contemporary Sub-Saharan and Nigerian data specifically linking how secondary school adolescents process these distinct

maternal parenting styles and how it dictates their measured emotional intelligence in rapidly urbanizing environments. Considering the importance of emotional intelligence and the significant roles of mothers in the upbringing of children, the present study is designed to determine the relationship between secondary school adolescents' perception of maternal parenting styles and their emotional intelligence.

Objectives of the Study

The main aim of the study is to assess the relationship between perceived maternal parenting styles and emotional intelligence of secondary school adolescents. Specifically, the objectives are to:

- 1) Examine the adolescents' perception of maternal parenting style.
- 2) Examine the difference in adolescents' perception of maternal parenting styles based on gender.
- 3) Assess the relationship between perceived parenting styles and the emotional intelligence of the adolescents.

Research Question

- 1) What is the adolescents' perception of maternal parenting style?

Hypotheses

- 1) There is no significant gender difference in the adolescents' perception of their mothers as authoritative.
- 2) There is no significant gender difference in the adolescents' perception of their mothers as authoritarian.
- 3) There is no significant gender difference in the adolescents' perception of their mothers as permissive.
- 4) There is no significant correlation between perceived maternal authoritative and emotional intelligence of the adolescents.
- 5) There is no significant correlation between perceived maternal authoritarianism and emotional intelligence of the adolescents.
- 6) There is no significant correlation between perceived maternal permissiveness and emotional intelligence of the adolescents.

METHODOLOGY

The correlational survey research design was adopted for the study. All secondary school students in Osun State and Ondo state formed the population for the study. Stepwise random sampling technique was employed to select the schools. Students who participated in the study were selected purposively to have a relatively equal representation between genders. The sample of the study therefore comprised three hundred and twenty-five (325) secondary school

students (206 females and 119 males) from twelve randomly selected secondary schools. Two research instruments were used to generate data for the study. They included:

i) Perceived Parental Authority Questionnaire

The perceived parental authority questionnaire, a 24-item, 4-point Likert Scale adapted from the classic Parental Authority Questionnaire framework (Buri, 1991; validated for modern use by Power, 2023) was used to measure participants' perception of maternal parenting styles (permissive, authoritarian and authoritative). The original instrument is a 30-item 5-point Likert Scale in which responses ranged from 10-30 with higher scores reflecting more of the parenting style and lower scores not reflecting the parenting style. The language was modified to address the present rather than the past (as found in the original scale) e.g., an item on the original scale reads "whenever my mother told me to do something when I was growing up, she expected me to do so immediately without asking any questions", the scale used in the study reads "my mother expects me to obey every instruction without asking any questions".

Each of the three maternal parenting styles consisted of eight items. The items were responded to on a 4-point scale ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree. To determine the predominant parenting style, response scores were calculated by dividing the mean scores obtained by the number of items in each subscale. Response scores of 1.00-1.99 were regarded as not representative of the parenting style, response scores of 2.00-2.49 were regarded as low on the parenting style while response scores of 2.50 - 2.99 and response scores above 3.0 were regarded as moderate and high respectively, on the parenting style being considered. Using Cronbach Alpha to analyse responses on a pre-test of the instrument yielded an internal consistency value of .73.

ii) The Emotional Intelligence Scale

The Emotional Intelligence Scale, a 28-item instrument constructed based on the classic four-component framework of emotional intelligence (Goleman, 1998); and contemporary dimensions expanded by Paulus et al., (2021),—self-awareness, self-management, social-awareness and relationship management—was used to measure the emotional intelligence of the sample of the study. The items were responded to on a 4-point scale ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (4). The instrument had an internal consistency of 0.87 using Cronbach Alpha.

Demographic information regarding gender of the respondents was collected from responses on the first sections of each of the instruments. The consent of the school authority in each of the randomly selected schools and subsequently that of the potential participants was sought. The purpose of the study was explained and confidentiality of information given in the questionnaires was assured. The questionnaires were administered and collected on the spot to ensure high response rate. Participants voluntarily participated in the study.

Data collected were analysed using descriptive analysis of means and standard deviation, t-test of independent samples and Pearson product moment correlation statistics. The hypotheses were tested at .05 level of significance.

RESULTS

Research Question: What is the adolescents' perception of maternal parenting style?

Table 1: Adolescents' perceived maternal parenting styles

Perceived parenting styles	Response scores	Decision
Authoritative	2.75	Moderate
Authoritarian	2.50	Moderate
Permissive	2.10	Low

N = 325

The data on Table 1 indicates that the adolescents perceived their mothers to be moderately authoritative (2.75) and authoritarian (2.50) and low on permissiveness (2.10). The adolescents therefore perceived their mothers to be predominantly authoritative.

Hypothesis 1

Table 2: Summary of t-test analysis of gender difference in adolescents' perceived maternal authoritative parenting style

Perceived maternal style	Gender	N	Mean	Mean diff	df	t	Sig (2-tailed)	Decision
Authoritative	Male	119	21.28	1.08	323	2.36	.02*	Significant
	Female	206	22.37					

**significant at p < .05*

The data on Table 2 indicates a significant gender difference in favor of female adolescents.

Hypothesis 2

Table 3: Summary of t-test analysis of gender difference in adolescents' perceived maternal authoritarian parenting style

Perceived maternal style	Gender	N	Mean	Mean diff	df	t	Sig (2-tailed)	Decision
Authoritarian	Male	119	20.27	0.37	323	0.89	0.37	Not significant
	Female	206	19.90					

**significant at p < .05*

Results displayed on Table 3 show no significant differences across gender categories.

Hypothesis 3

Table 4: Summary of t-test analysis of gender difference in adolescents' perceived maternal permissive parenting style

Perceived maternal style	Gender	N	Mean	Mean diff	df	t	Sig (2-tailed)	Decision
Permissive	Male	119	17.48	1.06	323	2.29	0.02*	Significant
	Female	206	16.42					

**significant at p < .05*

With regards to the perception of maternal permissiveness, Table 4 shows a higher score among male adolescents.

Hypothesis 4

Table 5: Summary of Pearson Product Moment Correlation analysis between perceived maternal authoritativeness and emotional intelligence of the adolescents

Perceived maternal authoritativeness	Emotional intelligence	Decision
Pearson correlation r	0.155	Significant
Sig (2-tailed) p	0.005*	

N = 325 *Sig at *p* < 0.05

Table 5 data shows a positive correlation between maternal authoritativeness and adolescents' emotional intelligence levels.

Hypothesis 5

Table 6: Pearson Product Moment Correlation between perceived maternal authoritarianism and emotional intelligence of the adolescents

Perceived maternal authoritarianism	Emotional intelligence	Decision
Pearson correlation r	0.164	Significant
Sig (2-tailed) p	0.003*	

N = 325 *Sig at *p* < 0.05

Results displayed on Table 6 reveal a positive, statistically significant relationship.

Hypothesis 6

Table 7: Pearson Product Moment Correlation between perceived maternal permissiveness and emotional intelligence of the adolescents

Perceived maternal permissiveness	Emotional intelligence	Decision
Pearson correlation r	-0.233	Significant
Sig (2-tailed) p	0.000*	

N = 325 *Sig at *p* < 0.05

The data displayed on Table 7 indicates a distinct negative correlation with emotional intelligence.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study indicate that the adolescents generally perceive their mothers as employing the three parenting styles but more of the authoritative parenting style than authoritarian and least, the permissive parenting style. This could be because mothers spend a lot of time interacting with the children. This finding is in consonance with Akinsola (2011) who asserted that in Nigeria, parents embrace all three parenting styles with emphasis on obedience and compliance with parental instructions. She also asserted that for many Nigerian parents the demand for obedience and compliance with parental instruction is often

accompanied with responsiveness, love, care and sensitivity, reciprocal dialogue and explanations for their actions. The combination of demand for obedience and responsiveness by parents makes Nigerian children perceive their parents as both authoritative and authoritarian which is displayed in the results of the present study. This dual perception is supported by modern literature on Nigerian family dynamics, where contemporary socio-cultural shifts continue to blend traditional collectivism with democratic child-rearing practices (Adeyemi & Obiakor, 2018). Furthermore, recent empirical studies across urban and semi-urban environments in Nigeria confirm that authoritative parenting remains predominant, balancing firm cultural discipline with emotional responsiveness to build adolescent self-esteem (Ojo, 2020; Owadara, 2025). The findings also indicate a significant gender difference in the perceived authoritativeness of mothers in favour of girls. The justification for this could be found in the fact that adolescent girls are socialized into taking responsibilities of maintenance and functioning of the household. This results in more verbal give and take between mothers and daughters regarding care of the home, cooking and taking care of other people in the home. Adolescent girls sometimes assume motherly roles in the home even when the mothers are present. The results indicate a significant difference in the perceived maternal permissiveness in favour of the adolescent boys. Boys at this developmental stage are given much more freedom from such responsibilities at home especially when they have sisters in the home to do the household chores. They are allowed more freedom to go outside the home than the girls who 'must' not be seen as 'loose' by outsiders. This corroborates Comrade and Ho (2021), who made findings indicating that boys perceived their mothers as more permissive while girls perceived mothers as more likely to be authoritative. No significant gender difference was found in perceived authoritarianism of mothers. These findings corroborate the findings of Laxmi & Kadapatti (2022) who found no significant gender differences in male and female adolescents' perception of parenting styles.

Regarding the relationship between emotional intelligence and parenting styles, authoritative and authoritarian parenting styles were found to be positively correlated with emotional intelligence while perceived maternal permissiveness correlated negatively with emotional intelligence. The Nigerian society is predominantly hierarchical—much value is placed on respect for elders and authority figures and research findings have shown that perceived authoritarian and authoritative parenting styles and their hybrids are significantly practiced in Nigeria (Akinsola, 2010a, 2011). The cultural values of a society shape the people's values and consequently their child rearing or parenting styles. It has also been suggested that if parental behaviour is consistent with cultural values the children in that culture will accept it (Baumrind, 1972) and it will impact positively on them. It is therefore not surprising that perceived maternal authoritative and authoritarian parenting styles correlated positively with the emotional intelligence of the adolescents in the present study. This unique positive correlation with both structured styles has been validated by contemporary regional studies; for instance, cross-sectional research on Nigerian children establishes that both authoritative and authoritarian styles significantly predict and shape a child's baseline emotional intelligence, whereas permissive parenting yields weak or statistically non-significant predictive value (Adekeye, Adeniyi, & Olatoye, 2025; *Ife Social Sciences Review*, 2023).

The findings are in consonance with Alegre et al., (2024) who opined that parental responsiveness, parental emotion-laden coaching and parental positive demandingness are related to children's higher emotional intelligence. They also corroborate Doinita, and Maria, (2025) who found that understanding emotion (an aspect of emotional intelligence) was positively associated with maternal democratic (authoritative) attitudes. These findings are however at variance with research reports that indicate negative outcomes in children and adolescents of perceived authoritarian parenting style (Demo & Cox, 2010; Baumrind, 1971, 1991). More recent global and Nigerian literature confirms this divergence, demonstrating that while western contexts consistently link authoritarian practices to adverse outcomes, the structured and highly disciplined nature of authoritarian parenting within collectivist societies like Nigeria often operates in tandem with clear moral rules, thus providing an alternative pathway for developing emotional and academic coping mechanisms (Rakhshani, et. al, 2024; Olofe, 2025).

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings of this study, it can be concluded that adolescents generally perceive their mothers as employing the three parenting styles with more emphasis on authoritative parenting style. It can also be concluded that authoritarian and authoritative maternal parenting styles correlate positively with emotional intelligence while permissiveness does not.

Implications and Recommendations

This study has implications for future parenting and counselling. Counsellors should get acquainted with the concept of emotional intelligence and strategies for developing the skills. Family members, particularly parents can nurture emotionally stable and emotionally intelligent children by being aware of the impact of their child-rearing practices/parenting styles on their children and choosing to model effective parental behaviour. Effort should therefore be made by school counsellors to organise forums in which parents, particularly mothers could be educated on the influence of parenting styles on the social and emotional development of their children bearing in mind that these also have implications for academic achievement and social competence.

Parenting styles and emotional intelligence have been found to predict violent behaviour among students (Akanbi & Aderemi, 2013), therefore in counselling students involved in violence, the factors of parenting and emotional intelligence must be addressed alongside peer influence which is the common focus in such situations. Students involved in violence should not just be punished or expelled by the school authorities. Rather, the antecedents of the behaviour should be determined and appropriate counselling techniques employed in assisting the students become well-adjusted socially and emotionally. Emotional intelligence has been found to be basically environmentally determined. School counsellors should therefore organise individual and group counselling sessions for the development of emotional intelligence in the adolescents.

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