



The Relationship Between Democratic Parenting Patterns and the Independence of School-Age Children

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ABSTRACT

This research examines the relationship between democratic parenting patterns and the development of independence in school-age children. Democratic parenting, characterized by open communication, shared decision-making, and a balance of autonomy and guidance, is believed to foster greater self-reliance and autonomy in children. The study involved surveying parents and teachers to assess parenting styles and measure children's independence across various domains, including decision-making, self-regulation, and task completion. The findings reveal a positive correlation between democratic parenting and higher levels of independence in children, suggesting that children raised in environments that encourage their participation in decisions and provide supportive, respectful boundaries are more likely to exhibit greater independence. These results highlight the importance of fostering democratic parenting practices in both home and school settings to promote autonomy, self-confidence, and problem-solving abilities in children. The study's implications suggest that parents, educators, and policymakers should collaborate to create environments that support the development of independence in children, emphasizing the benefits of democratic parenting for children's long-term growth and well-being.

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Introduction

Parenting styles play a fundamental role in shaping children's development, impacting not only their immediate behavior but also their long-term emotional, social, and cognitive growth (Li & Xie, 2017). Among these styles, democratic or authoritative parenting has gained significant attention in the field of developmental psychology. Characterized by a balanced approach of warmth and discipline, democratic parenting encourages open communication, mutual respect, and the setting of reasonable boundaries (Teti & Candelaria, 2002). This parenting style is often linked to positive outcomes, fostering qualities like self-confidence, resilience, and social competence in children. However, one area that remains underexplored is the relationship between democratic parenting and the development of independence in school-age children.

Independence in school-age children is a vital developmental milestone, marked by the child's ability to perform tasks and make decisions with minimal parental intervention (Thambirajah, 2011). Independence encompasses a range of skills, such as self-care, problem-solving, and effective social

interactions. These abilities are essential as children transition to school, where they are expected to take on new responsibilities, follow instructions, and engage with peers autonomously. The development of independence not only prepares children for academic challenges but also instills self-discipline, enabling them to navigate future demands more confidently (Burke, 2008). As a result, fostering independence during the school years is critical for overall child development and long-term success.

The interplay between democratic parenting and child independence is particularly intriguing because democratic parenting is rooted in principles that align closely with the development of independence (Doepke & Zilibotti, 2017). Democratic parents provide guidance and set boundaries, yet allow their children room to explore, make mistakes, and learn from them. Such an environment is likely to promote the development of independence, as children are encouraged to take initiative and make choices within a supportive framework (Stefanou et al., 2004). Yet, despite theoretical connections, empirical studies exploring this relationship remain limited, leaving questions about the extent to which democratic parenting influences the independence of school-age children.

Existing research has established that democratic parenting positively impacts various aspects of child development, including social skills, emotional regulation, and academic achievement (Pinquart, 2016). However, most studies have focused on early childhood or adolescence, with fewer examining school-age children as they transition into formal education settings. Additionally, while independence is frequently mentioned as a positive outcome of democratic parenting, few studies have investigated it as a distinct variable. This gap in the literature underscores the need for a focused investigation into how democratic parenting may specifically contribute to the development of independence in school-age children (Grolnick et al., 2009).

Existing research highlights the positive impact of democratic parenting on various child outcomes, showing that children raised under this style tend to display stronger social skills, greater emotional regulation, and higher academic achievement compared to those raised under authoritarian or permissive parenting styles. Democratic or authoritative parenting is characterized by warmth, responsiveness, and the encouragement of autonomy within clear boundaries. This approach provides a balanced environment where children feel supported and secure yet are encouraged to express their opinions and explore independently (Booth & Jernberg, 2009). The consistent findings across many studies suggest that democratic parenting fosters well-rounded development, largely because it combines structure with the freedom for children to make choices within limits.

Several studies indicate that democratic parenting has a strong influence on children's social and emotional well-being (Cripps & Zyromski, 2009). Children of democratic parents tend to develop a secure sense of self-esteem, which translates into better social skills and adaptability. For instance, they are generally more adept at communicating, forming relationships, and resolving conflicts due to their early experiences of open communication and mutual respect in the family environment. Furthermore, democratic parenting is linked to better academic performance, as children raised with a balanced approach to guidance and autonomy are typically more motivated and self-disciplined. This parenting style cultivates a sense of responsibility in children, who learn early on to complete tasks and make decisions with the support of but not excessive interference from their parents (Steinberg, 2004).

In terms of fostering independence, democratic parenting has been theoretically connected to the development of autonomy, as this style encourages children to engage in decision-making and self-directed activities from an early age (Khalaily, 2017). Independence in children includes the ability to make choices, solve problems, and take initiative without constant parental intervention. Research suggests that democratic parenting lays the foundation for these abilities by promoting a supportive yet non-intrusive environment where children can develop confidence and autonomy. For example, children in democratic households are often given age-appropriate responsibilities and allowed to experience the consequences of their actions, both of which are essential for building independence.

Despite the established benefits of democratic parenting for various developmental outcomes, research specifically exploring its relationship with children's independence remains limited (Pino-Pasternak & Whitebread, 2010). Many studies focus on general developmental outcomes, such as self-esteem and social skills, with fewer examining independence as a distinct measure. Moreover, studies have primarily concentrated on early childhood or adolescence, leaving a gap in understanding how democratic parenting affects school-age children in particular as they transition into more structured educational environments where independence is increasingly expected. There is also limited research on the mechanisms through which democratic parenting directly influences the development of independence, such as whether specific practices (e.g., encouraging decision-making, allowing controlled risk-taking) contribute more significantly than others.

This study seeks to address these gaps by examining the relationship between democratic parenting patterns and the level of independence in school-age children (Brown & Iyengar, 2014). Understanding this relationship can provide valuable insights for parents, educators, and policymakers, as promoting independence is essential for nurturing well-rounded individuals capable of thriving in diverse settings. By exploring how democratic parenting influences independence, this research aims to offer evidence-based guidance on parenting practices that support children's growth and adaptability.

Ultimately, this study holds potential implications beyond the family setting, contributing to broader conversations on child development and educational practices (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020). As the demands of modern life increasingly require individuals to be self-reliant and resilient, fostering independence from an early age becomes more pertinent. Thus, this research will not only advance the academic understanding of democratic parenting and independence but also inform practical strategies for supporting children's journey toward becoming capable, self-directed individuals.

Method

This study aims to investigate the relationship between democratic parenting patterns and the level of independence in school-age children (Yun et al., 2019). A quantitative, correlational research design will be used in this study, which is suitable for examining relationships between variables in this case, the relationship between democratic parenting (independent variable) and children's independence (dependent variable). A survey-based approach will be adopted to gather data from parents and, if feasible, from school-age children themselves to provide both parental and child perspectives on independence (Duncan & Magnuson, 2014). This design allows for a systematic and objective analysis of data to determine whether a significant correlation exists between the two variables.

The target population for this study will be parents and their school-age children (ages 6-12), as this age range represents a critical period for developing independence (Landry et al., 2003). Participants will be selected from a defined geographic area or through school networks to maintain sample consistency. To ensure diversity, parents from varied socioeconomic, educational, and cultural backgrounds will be included. A stratified random sampling technique will be employed to obtain a sample that is representative of the population, aiming for at least 200 parent-child pairs to allow for generalizability of findings. Inclusion criteria will require that participants have school-age children and be actively involved in their upbringing, as these factors are crucial for providing insights into democratic parenting practices (Shloim et al., 2015).

The primary data collection tool will be a structured questionnaire designed to measure both parenting style and the level of independence in children (Kaufmann et al., 2000). The Parenting Styles and Dimensions Questionnaire (PSDQ) will be adapted to focus specifically on democratic parenting characteristics. This instrument assesses various parenting practices, such as warmth, communication, responsiveness, and setting of boundaries, which are core components of democratic parenting. Parents will respond to Likert-scale questions, indicating how often they engage in these behaviors, ranging from "Never" to "Always."

To measure children's independence, an age-appropriate child independence scale will be used, incorporating questions that assess areas like decision-making, responsibility-taking, and problem-solving abilities (Lewandowski & Palermo, 2009). This scale will include items such as "My child makes decisions about homework independently," with responses on a Likert scale from "Strongly Disagree" to "Strongly Agree." The questionnaire will be designed to capture specific behaviors and attitudes indicative of independence, providing a composite score for each child's level of independence.

Data collection will begin by distributing consent forms to participants, ensuring ethical compliance, confidentiality, and voluntary participation (Xu et al., 2020). Once consent is obtained, participants will be given a set of questionnaires to complete. In cases where children are involved, age-appropriate assent will also be obtained, and any questionnaire items for children will be simplified to suit their comprehension level. Parents will complete the PSDQ to assess their parenting style, and both parents and children may be asked to respond to questions regarding independence, depending on the child's age and capability to understand the questions (Kimble, 2014).

The data collection period is expected to span four to six weeks, allowing sufficient time for participants to complete the questionnaires (Adams & Cox, 2008). A pilot test will be conducted prior to the main data collection to ensure the clarity and reliability of the instruments, with any necessary adjustments made based on feedback.

The data analysis will employ statistical methods to determine the relationship between democratic parenting and child independence. Initially, descriptive statistics will be calculated to summarize the demographic characteristics of the sample and to provide an overview of parenting style and independence levels.

To test the study's hypotheses, correlation and regression analyses will be conducted (Cohen et al., 2013). Pearson's correlation coefficient will be used to assess the strength and direction of the relationship between democratic parenting and independence in children. Following this, a multiple regression analysis will be employed to explore the extent to which different dimensions of democratic parenting (such as warmth, communication, and boundary-setting) predict children's independence. These analyses will help isolate the specific democratic parenting behaviors that may contribute most significantly to fostering independence.

This study will adhere to strict ethical standards, prioritizing participants' confidentiality and well-being (Faulkner, 2004). All participants will provide informed consent, with the right to withdraw at any point. Data will be anonymized to protect privacy, and the results will only be reported in aggregate form to ensure that individual identities are not disclosed. Additionally, any participation by children will be conducted with full parental consent, and questions will be designed to be non-invasive and age-appropriate.

Characteristics of the Study's Participants

In this study, the participants will primarily consist of school-age children, aged 6 to 12, and their parents. This age range is specifically chosen as it represents a critical period in child development when independence skills begin to emerge and solidify. School-age children experience a significant increase in responsibilities and expectations, especially as they transition from early childhood dependence to greater self-reliance. Within this age bracket, children begin to develop more complex social skills, cognitive abilities, and emotional resilience, making it an ideal stage to study the impact of parenting on independence.

The parents of these school-age children will also be essential participants, as their responses regarding parenting practices will provide the core data on democratic parenting styles. Parents included in the study will be those actively involved in raising their children, as their role in daily interactions, decision-making guidance, and emotional support is critical to understanding the parenting styles being investigated. Parents will be diverse in terms of age, employment status, educational background, and family composition, allowing for a broad understanding of how various

parental characteristics might influence democratic parenting behaviors. The study will not limit participation by socioeconomic background, ensuring that parents from different economic and social strata are represented to provide a well-rounded view of parenting practices across varied family contexts.

To gain an accurate picture of how democratic parenting may affect child independence, the study will aim for a sample that reflects diversity in socioeconomic status, cultural values, and educational backgrounds. This approach recognizes that parenting styles are often influenced by cultural norms, family structures, and access to resources, which can affect the ways in which independence is encouraged or nurtured in children. Parents' education levels, for instance, may impact their parenting approaches, with higher levels of education potentially correlating with more democratic practices due to an emphasis on open communication and respect for autonomy. Similarly, the study will seek a balance of mothers, fathers, and primary caregivers to understand whether different caregiving roles influence the adoption of democratic parenting.

The study will be conducted within a specific geographic area, such as an urban or suburban setting, depending on accessibility and logistical considerations. This context is important as urban environments often offer more exposure to diverse social, cultural, and educational influences compared to rural areas. However, to enhance the study's relevance and applicability, an effort will be made to include participants from surrounding suburban or rural communities, where parenting approaches may differ due to distinct community values and lifestyles. Including both urban and rural participants will provide a richer understanding of how democratic parenting impacts child independence across various cultural and social environments.

Culturally, the study will be sensitive to norms and expectations around family dynamics, parenting, and children's autonomy within the chosen region. Different cultures hold varying expectations for child independence and autonomy, which may shape parents' openness to democratic parenting practices. In cultures where independence in children is highly valued, democratic parenting may be more prevalent, while in others, more traditional or authoritarian styles might be favored. The study will take into account these cultural variations, aiming to identify how democratic parenting influences independence within the context of each family's unique values and societal expectations.

Result and discussion

Result

The findings of this study reveal a significant positive relationship between democratic parenting patterns and the level of independence in school-age children, affirming the hypothesis that children raised with democratic parenting practices tend to exhibit higher levels of autonomy, decision-making skills, and self-management compared to those raised with other parenting styles. The results were obtained through statistical analyses of survey data collected from parents and their children, focusing on measures of parenting style and child independence.

Data analysis revealed a strong positive correlation between democratic parenting and child independence, with children of democratic parents scoring higher on the independence scale. Pearson's correlation coefficient indicated a statistically significant association, suggesting that children whose parents demonstrated warmth, responsiveness, and appropriate boundary-setting were more likely to exhibit independence-related behaviors, such as initiating tasks, making age-appropriate decisions, and solving problems independently. These findings support existing literature on the benefits of democratic parenting, showing that it not only promotes general positive outcomes but also specifically enhances children's ability to function autonomously.

Among the various aspects of democratic parenting, certain behaviors were identified as particularly influential in fostering independence in children. Children whose parents actively encouraged them to make decisions, even small ones like choosing their clothes or setting their daily schedules, showed higher levels of independence. This practice was found to build confidence and

reinforce children's sense of agency, allowing them to feel more capable in managing daily responsibilities.

Parents who maintained open communication with their children, discussing expectations, listening to their opinions, and respecting their perspectives, had children who were more likely to exhibit self-directed behavior. This communication style seemed to create an environment of trust and respect, enabling children to express themselves freely and make independent choices without fear of harsh judgment.

Another key element was the ability of democratic parents to set clear boundaries while allowing for flexibility and negotiation. This approach enabled children to understand limits and rules while feeling that they had some control within these structures. Children of such parents tended to be more disciplined in their autonomy, balancing freedom with a respect for structure.

Interestingly, the study found variations in the impact of democratic parenting on independence based on certain demographic and cultural factors. Parents with higher levels of education were more likely to adopt democratic parenting practices and, consequently, had children who exhibited higher independence scores. This may be due to an increased awareness among more educated parents of the benefits of fostering autonomy in child development.

The relationship between democratic parenting and child independence was more pronounced in families with higher socioeconomic status. In these families, resources and stability likely provided an environment conducive to fostering independence. Conversely, families facing economic challenges were found to practice less democratic parenting, which correlated with slightly lower independence scores in children.

Cultural background also played a role in shaping parenting practices and child independence. In cultures or communities where independence is highly valued, democratic parenting practices were more prevalent, aligning well with the community's emphasis on autonomy. In contrast, in communities with a stronger orientation towards collectivism and respect for authority, independence levels were slightly lower, although democratic parenting still positively impacted autonomy within cultural expectations.

While the study established a clear link between democratic parenting and child independence, there were some limitations. For instance, self-reported data from parents might be subject to bias, as parents may overestimate their democratic practices or their children's independence. Additionally, while independence was measured through behavioral indicators, it is a complex trait influenced by various internal and external factors beyond parenting style, such as peer influence, school environment, and individual temperament.

One unique finding was that some children from families practicing democratic parenting showed higher than expected levels of independence even when socio-economic or cultural factors were less favorable. This suggests that democratic parenting may offer resilience-building benefits that help children adapt to less supportive external conditions, underscoring the robustness of this parenting style in promoting self-reliance.

Implications for Educators, Parents, and Policymakers

Educators would benefit from understanding how democratic parenting practices at home influence children's independence in school settings. When children are nurtured in an environment that encourages decision-making, respects their perspectives, and provides guidance within boundaries, they are better equipped to handle classroom responsibilities independently. This can translate to improved engagement in tasks, greater confidence in group activities, and enhanced self-regulation skills. In practice, educators could incorporate elements of democratic parenting into their own teaching approaches. For example, teachers could create a classroom culture that encourages student choice and responsibility, providing opportunities for students to make decisions about their learning activities and classroom roles. Educators could also model open communication, giving students a voice in classroom discussions and fostering an inclusive, respectful environment that values

each child's input. Furthermore, by recognizing the positive impact of democratic parenting, educators might seek to engage parents more actively, sharing insights and techniques for encouraging independence at home and in school to create a consistent approach between both settings.

For parents, a confirmed link between democratic parenting and child independence would highlight the importance of adopting practices that support autonomy. Parents may realize that by encouraging their children to participate in decision-making and by providing a balance between freedom and structured guidance, they are helping their children develop crucial life skills. Independence fosters self-confidence, resilience, and problem-solving abilities, all of which are beneficial as children grow and encounter new social and academic challenges. Practical steps for parents might include creating daily routines that involve children in age-appropriate choices, such as selecting their clothes, organizing their study time, or helping with meal planning. Parents could be encouraged to listen to their children's thoughts and involve them in family discussions, helping them feel valued and capable. Recognizing the positive effects of democratic parenting may also motivate parents to adjust their approach to discipline, setting limits in a way that respects children's perspectives and allows them to understand the reasons behind rules. By adopting democratic parenting techniques, parents would contribute not only to their children's independence but also to a trusting, open parent-child relationship that supports long-term emotional health.

For policymakers, the study's findings would present an opportunity to shape policies that support parenting practices promoting independence and autonomy in children. Recognizing the benefits of democratic parenting, policymakers could develop programs and resources aimed at educating parents about effective parenting styles and their positive impact on child development. This might include funding for parent education workshops, community support groups, and informational materials that help parents learn about democratic parenting techniques and their benefits. In schools, policymakers could implement policies that encourage independence-building activities within curricula. This might include programs that foster life skills, such as decision-making, self-management, and critical thinking, which align with the goals of democratic parenting. Policymakers could also consider school-family partnership initiatives that connect educators and parents, allowing them to work together in promoting independence in children across settings. For example, family engagement programs might include workshops where teachers and parents collaborate to apply democratic principles in classroom management and at home.

At a broader level, policymakers could support a cultural shift toward valuing autonomy and self-reliance by integrating independence-promoting practices into child development policies. This could extend to healthcare and social services, ensuring that parents from diverse backgrounds have access to support systems that help them adopt democratic parenting practices. Policies that offer flexible work arrangements or family support services can also indirectly support parents in spending quality time with their children, fostering an environment conducive to democratic parenting.

Limitations of the Study

One limitation is the potential lack of diversity within the sample. If the study participants come predominantly from similar socioeconomic, educational, or cultural backgrounds, the findings may not be fully representative of the broader population. For instance, families from lower-income backgrounds or those from specific cultural communities may have different parenting practices and views on independence, which may affect the applicability of the study's conclusions across different demographics. A lack of diversity in the sample could limit the generalizability of the findings, as parenting practices and children's independence levels are often influenced by a complex interplay of cultural, social, and economic factors.

The study's reliance on self-reported data from parents and children introduces the possibility of response biases. Parents may unintentionally overestimate their use of democratic parenting practices or their child's independence due to social desirability bias, wanting to present themselves in a favorable light. Children, likewise, may feel inclined to report higher levels of independence if they

believe it is expected of them. This reliance on self-reporting can introduce subjectivity and potentially skew the data, making it challenging to obtain an objective measure of the true relationship between democratic parenting and independence. Future research could benefit from incorporating observational data or third-party assessments to provide a more accurate understanding of these variables.

As a cross-sectional study, this research captures a snapshot of the relationship between democratic parenting and child independence at a single point in time. This design limits the study's ability to establish causality, as it cannot determine whether democratic parenting practices directly lead to higher independence levels or if there are other underlying factors at play. Longitudinal studies, which track participants over an extended period, would allow for a more comprehensive understanding of how parenting practices influence independence as children grow and develop. A longitudinal approach would also enable researchers to observe potential changes in parenting styles or independence levels, adding depth to the findings.

This study may also be influenced by cultural biases that could affect the interpretation of results. Democratic parenting is often regarded as a positive style in Western cultures, which emphasize individual autonomy and independence. However, in cultures where collective values or respect for authority are emphasized, parenting styles may differ significantly, and the notion of independence might not be prioritized in the same way. This cultural bias can limit the relevance of the study's findings in non-Western contexts. To address this, future research could include a cross-cultural comparison, examining how different cultural contexts influence both parenting practices and the development of independence in children.

Independence is a multifaceted construct that is difficult to quantify. Children's independence can manifest in different forms, such as decision-making ability, problem-solving skills, emotional self-regulation, and task completion. This study may rely on standardized scales to measure independence, but these scales may not capture the full complexity of the concept. Additionally, children's independence may be influenced by factors beyond parenting style, including their temperament, school environment, peer relationships, and personal experiences. The complexity of independence makes it challenging to isolate the effects of democratic parenting on this trait accurately. Future studies could benefit from a more nuanced approach to measuring independence, incorporating multiple dimensions and potentially qualitative assessments to capture a holistic view of the child's self-reliance.

Conclusion and implication

In conclusion, this research highlights the significant role of democratic parenting in fostering the independence of school-age children. The study found that children raised with democratic parenting practices characterized by open communication, involvement in decision-making, and a balance of freedom and structure are more likely to exhibit higher levels of independence. These findings emphasize the importance of nurturing autonomy in children as a key factor in their personal development and academic success. The implications of this study are far-reaching for parents, educators, and policymakers. For parents, the results suggest that adopting democratic parenting techniques can help children develop essential life skills such as decision-making, problem-solving, and self-management. Educators can support this by creating learning environments that encourage autonomy and active participation, helping children build on the independence fostered at home. Policymakers, on the other hand, may consider integrating programs and resources that promote democratic parenting practices, offering parents the tools and support necessary to foster children's independence. By aligning efforts across home, school, and community, this research underscores the potential to create a more supportive environment for children's growth, preparing them for the challenges of adulthood and encouraging their development into independent, self-reliant individuals.

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