

Parenting Styles and their Effect on Adolescent Autonomy and Psychological Well-Being in Some Selected Universities in Bafoussam West Region of Cameroon

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Abstract: Adolescence is a pivotal stage of development marked by the pursuit of autonomy, identity formation, and psychological adaptation to emerging social, academic, and personal challenges (Steinberg, 2001; Brown & Larson, 2009). Parental influence remains a central determinant of adolescent adjustment, with parenting styles which are authoritative, authoritarian, permissive, and neglectful exerting differential effects on autonomy, emotional regulation, and overall psychological well-being (Baumrind, 1966, 1991; Darling & Steinberg, 1993). Guided by Baumrind's Parenting Styles Theory and Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000), this study examined the impact of parenting practices on adolescent autonomy and psychological well-being among students in selected universities in Bafoussam, West Region of Cameroon. The study focused on three major universities: University of Dschang, University of Bamenda Bafoussam Satellite Campus, and Catholic University Institute of Bafoussam. The University of Dschang is renowned for its comprehensive programs in social sciences, education, and health sciences, attracting a diverse student population and fostering critical thinking and civic engagement. The University of Bamenda Bafoussam Satellite Campus emphasizes science and technology education while providing platforms for student development and community engagement. The Catholic University Institute of Bafoussam offers value-based education and moral development programs, providing a context for studying psychosocial outcomes influenced by family and cultural values. These universities collectively provide a representative sample of the higher education environment in Bafoussam, reflecting diverse academic, cultural, and social settings. A mixed-methods research design was employed to capture both quantitative and qualitative dimensions of adolescent experiences. The study population comprised 420 undergraduate students aged 17–25 years, selected through stratified random sampling across three major universities. Quantitative data were gathered using the Parental Authority Questionnaire (Buri, 1991) and the Ryff Psychological Well-Being Scale (Ryff, 1989), while qualitative insights were obtained through focus group discussions to explore perceptions of parental influence and self-directed decision-making. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation, and multiple regression analysis, while qualitative data were subjected to thematic content analysis. Results revealed that authoritative parenting was a significant positive predictor of adolescent autonomy ($r = 0.67, p < 0.001$) and psychological well-being ($r = 0.64, p < 0.001$), corroborating findings that warmth, structure, and support enhance self-regulation, resilience, and adaptive functioning (Steinberg et al., 1992; Spera, 2005; Piquart, 2017). In contrast, authoritarian parenting was negatively associated with autonomy ($r = -0.54, p < 0.01$) and psychological well-being ($r = -0.48, p < 0.05$), reflecting the constraining effects of excessive control and rigid discipline (Chang et al., 2003; Luyckx et al., 2010).

Permissive parenting demonstrated a mixed pattern promoting emotional expression but limiting self-regulatory capacities while neglectful parenting was strongly associated with low autonomy, psychological maladjustment, and heightened vulnerability to stress (Ryan & Deci, 2000; Nsamenang, 1992). Thematic analysis of qualitative data reinforced these trends, revealing that adolescents perceiving parental warmth, guidance, and autonomy support reported higher confidence, improved coping strategies, and enhanced emotional stability, whereas those experiencing controlling or absent parenting expressed psychological distress, dependence, and difficulties in decision-making. The study highlights the critical role of parenting styles in shaping the psychosocial development of adolescents within the Cameroonian higher education context, aligning with global research on the positive impact of authoritative parenting and the risks associated with coercive or neglectful practices (Baumrind, 1991; Deci & Ryan, 2000; Steinberg, 2001). Findings underscore the need for parental education, university counseling programs, and mentorship initiatives to reinforce autonomy supportive environments and foster psychological well-being. This study contributes to the understanding of how culturally contextualized parenting practices influence the development of autonomous, resilient, and mentally healthy young adults in African university settings.

INTRODUCTION

Adolescence represents a critical period of psychosocial, cognitive, and emotional development, during which individuals strive for autonomy, identity formation, and the consolidation of psychological well-being (Steinberg, 2001; Lerner et al., 2015). It is a transitional phase between childhood and adulthood, marked by increasing independence from parents, heightened peer influence, and the establishment of personal values and decision-making capacities (Brown & Larson, 2009). During this stage, parental guidance, support, and the nature of parent child interactions are crucial in shaping adolescents' behavioral regulation, autonomy, and mental health outcomes (Baumrind, 1991; Spera, 2005). Parenting styles, conceptualized as patterns of parental attitudes, behaviors, and emotional climate, have been widely recognized as key determinants of adolescent psychosocial adjustment (Darling & Steinberg, 1993; Maccoby & Martin, 1983).

The classical typology includes authoritative parenting which deals with high responsiveness, high demandingness, authoritarian parenting referring to low responsiveness, high demandingness, permissive parenting which is high responsiveness, low demandingness, and neglectful or uninvolved parenting showing low responsiveness, low demandingness (Baumrind, 1966, 1991; Maccoby & Martin, 1983). Research consistently indicates that these styles exert differential effects on adolescent outcomes, including autonomy, academic achievement, emotional regulation, and psychological well-being (Steinberg et al., 1992; Pinquart, 2017). Authoritative parenting is widely associated with positive adolescent outcomes. Adolescents raised under this style typically demonstrate high levels of self-confidence, decision-making skills, emotional stability, and resilience (Baumrind, 1991; Steinberg, 2001; Sorkhabi, 2005). Conversely, authoritarian parenting often limits autonomy and fosters dependency, low self-esteem, and heightened anxiety (Darling & Steinberg, 1993; Chang et al., 2003).

Permissive parenting may promote emotional expression but often results in poor self-regulation and risk-taking behavior (Baumrind, 1991; Steinberg et al., 1992). Neglectful parenting, characterized by emotional detachment and minimal guidance, is consistently linked to poor psychosocial adjustment and vulnerability to mental health problems (Luyckx et al., 2010; Pinquart, 2017). Autonomy in adolescence refers to the capacity for self-governance, independent decision-making, and self-directed behavior (Ryan & Deci, 2000; Steinberg, 2001). It encompasses both behavioral autonomy making decisions and acting independently and emotional autonomy developing self-identity and regulating emotions without excessive reliance on parents (Hollenstein & Loughheed, 2013). Parental practices play a pivotal role in nurturing or inhibiting autonomy. Supportive and responsive parenting fosters exploratory behavior, self-efficacy, and responsible independence, whereas controlling or neglectful

parenting constrains autonomy and fosters psychological dependence (Grolnick & Ryan, 1989; Smetana et al., 2006).

Empirical studies highlight that adolescent exposed to balanced parental control with warmth typical of authoritative parents exhibit higher levels of autonomy and are more capable of self-regulation and adaptive coping (Steinberg et al., 1992; Pinquart, 2017). In contrast, adolescents raised in authoritarian households often display lower self-reliance, decreased assertiveness, and higher susceptibility to peer influence, potentially compromising their capacity for independent decision-making (Darling & Steinberg, 1993; Chang et al., 2003). Psychological well-being is a multidimensional construct reflecting emotional, cognitive, and social functioning, encompassing self-acceptance, life satisfaction, purpose in life, personal growth, and positive relationships (Ryff, 1989; Diener et al., 2018). Parental behavior significantly shapes adolescents' psychological well-being by influencing self-esteem, coping strategies, emotional regulation, and stress resilience (Spera, 2005; Steinberg, 2001).

Evidence indicates that authoritative parenting enhances psychological well-being, promoting adaptive coping and resilience in the face of academic, social, and emotional challenges (Baumrind, 1991; Pinquart, 2017). Conversely, authoritarian and neglectful parenting are linked to internalizing problems such as anxiety, depression, and low self-esteem (Chang et al., 2003; Luyckx et al., 2010). Permissive parenting, while supportive, may not provide the guidance necessary for optimal self-regulation, potentially undermining well-being under stressful circumstances (Baumrind, 1991; Smetana et al., 2006). This study is grounded in two complementary theories: Baumrind's Parenting Styles Theory (1966, 1991), this framework posits that parenting styles, based on dimensions of responsiveness and demandingness, exert a profound influence on children's psychosocial development. Authoritative parenting, combining high responsiveness and high demandingness, is associated with optimal adolescent autonomy and psychological adjustment. In contrast, authoritarian, permissive, and neglectful styles are linked to various maladaptive outcomes.

Self-Determination Theory (SDT) (Deci & Ryan, 2000) emphasizes the importance of supporting basic psychological needs such as autonomy, competence, and relatedness for optimal well-being. Parental behaviors that support autonomy and provide warmth foster intrinsic motivation, self-regulation, and psychological flourishing. In contrast, controlling or neglectful parenting thwarts these needs, increasing vulnerability to psychological distress (Ryan & Deci, 2017). By integrating these frameworks, the study examines how parenting styles affect adolescent autonomy as a developmental outcome and psychological well-being as an indicator of mental health and adjustment. In Cameroon, family structures and parenting practices are influenced by cultural norms, socioeconomic factors, and extended family dynamics (Nsamenang, 1992; Nfi, 2015). Adolescents in university settings navigate a complex interplay of parental influence, peer norms, and academic pressures. Despite the critical role of parenting in adolescent development, empirical research in Cameroonian universities, particularly in the West Region, remains scarce.

Understanding how parenting styles impact autonomy and psychological well-being is essential for designing family interventions, university support programs, and mental health strategies. This study contributes to existing knowledge by providing empirical evidence on parenting styles and adolescent outcomes in a Cameroonian higher education context. Highlighting the link between parental practices, autonomy, and psychological well-being, essential for adolescent resilience and adaptive functioning. Offering insights to guide family-based interventions, university counseling programs, and policy initiatives aimed at promoting positive adolescent development. The study aims to inform parents, educators, counselors, and policymakers about the critical influence of parenting practices on the developmental trajectories of young adults transitioning to independent university life.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Parenting plays a fundamental role in shaping adolescents' psychosocial development, autonomy, and psychological well-being (Steinberg, 2001; Baumrind, 1991). Adolescence, defined as the period between ages 10–24 (UNICEF, 2011; Sawyer et al., 2018), is characterized by identity exploration,

emotional regulation, and increased social and academic responsibilities. This stage is particularly sensitive to parental influence, which affects adolescents' decision-making, coping strategies, and mental health outcomes (Darling & Steinberg, 1993; Spera, 2005). In African contexts, family plays a central role in socialization, with parents acting as primary agents of moral guidance, cultural transmission, and autonomy support (Nsamenang, 1992). Parenting styles have been widely conceptualized as four types: authoritative, authoritarian, permissive, and neglectful, defined by the dimensions of responsiveness (warmth) and demandingness (control) (Baumrind, 1966; Maccoby & Martin, 1983). These styles differentially impact adolescent autonomy and psychological well-being (Pinquart, 2017; Luyckx et al., 2010). A growing body of research has highlighted the importance of understanding how culturally contextualized parenting practices influence youth adaptation within higher education settings (Nfi, 2015; Nsamenang, 1992).

Authoritative parenting, characterized by high responsiveness and high demandingness, consistently predicts positive adolescent outcomes. These adolescents display high autonomy, self-regulation, resilience, and psychological well-being (Baumrind, 1991; Steinberg et al., 1992). Steinberg (2001) emphasized that authoritative parents promote responsible independence in adolescents, encouraging them to make informed decisions while considering social norms. This balance supports identity formation and moral reasoning. Pinquart (2017) and Spera (2005) demonstrated that adolescents from authoritative households show higher life satisfaction, self-esteem, and coping competence, especially in academic and social contexts. Authoritative parenting fosters intrinsic motivation and engagement in higher education (Steinberg et al., 1992). Students in universities benefit from parental guidance that combines expectations with support, leading to improved academic and social outcomes. Nsamenang (1992) highlighted that authoritative parenting aligns with traditional African values of guidance and respect for autonomy, enhancing adolescents' capacity to navigate social and cultural expectations.

Authoritarian parenting is high in demandingness but low in responsiveness. It emphasizes obedience, strict rules, and control with minimal emotional support (Baumrind, 1966; Darling & Steinberg, 1993). Adolescents raised under authoritarian conditions often internalize external control and struggle with independent decision-making (Chang et al., 2003; Luyckx et al., 2010). Studies consistently link authoritarian parenting with anxiety, low self-esteem, and depressive symptoms (Pinquart, 2017). These adolescents may display compliance outwardly but lack intrinsic motivation and self-directed behavior. In universities, authoritarian parenting may hinder self-directed learning, as students are less equipped to manage academic demands independently (Steinberg et al., 1992). Nsamenang (1992) and Nfi (2015) observed that authoritarian households in Cameroon often prioritize obedience and conformity over critical thinking, which can limit adolescents' adaptive functioning in modern academic environments.

Permissive parenting is high in responsiveness but low in demandingness. While it allows emotional expression and freedom, it lacks structure and guidance (Baumrind, 1991; Darling & Steinberg, 1993). Permissive parenting may encourage superficial autonomy but inadequately supports self-regulation and goal-directed behavior (Steinberg et al., 1992; Smetana et al., 2006). Research suggests a mixed impact: emotional support may improve self-esteem, but absence of structure can foster impulsivity, risk-taking, and maladaptive coping (Luyckx et al., 2010). Students with permissive parenting backgrounds may experience difficulty managing academic responsibilities independently (Spera, 2005). In Cameroon, permissive parenting may conflict with cultural expectations of respect and communal responsibility, sometimes producing tension between adolescent freedom and societal norms (Nsamenang, 1992).

Neglectful parenting, low in both responsiveness and demandingness, is consistently associated with adverse developmental outcomes (Baumrind, 1991; Ryan & Deci, 2000). Adolescents from neglectful households often demonstrate low self-efficacy, poor decision-making skills, and reduced emotional regulation (Pinquart, 2017; Luyckx et al., 2010). These adolescents are at high risk for depression, anxiety, and maladjustment (Steinberg et al., 1992). In higher education, neglectful parenting can result in students struggling to navigate academic pressures, social networks, and independence

(Nsamenang, 1992). Nfi (2015) noted that neglectful parenting remains under-researched in African settings, but evidence suggests it severely undermines adolescent adjustment and resilience. Autonomy refers to the ability to make self-directed decisions and regulate behavior independently (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Parenting style significantly affects this developmental milestone. Authoritative parents provide guidance and support, enabling responsible autonomy (Steinberg, 2001; Grolnick & Ryan, 1989). Authoritarian and neglectful parenting impede autonomous functioning, as adolescents either internalize external control or lack guidance (Chang et al., 2003; Luyckx et al., 2010). Permissive parenting offers freedom without sufficient self-regulatory skills, creating challenges in higher education (Smetana et al., 2006).

In the Cameroonian context, university students require autonomy to balance academic responsibilities, social engagement, and cultural expectations, making parenting style a crucial factor in psychosocial adjustment (Nsamenang, 1992; Nfi, 2015). Psychological well-being encompasses emotional, social, and cognitive functioning, including life satisfaction, resilience, and self-acceptance (Ryff, 1989; Diener et al., 2018). Authoritative parenting correlates with high life satisfaction, self-esteem, and adaptive coping (Baumrind, 1991; Pinquart, 2017). Authoritarian and neglectful parenting are associated with low psychological well-being and heightened stress vulnerability (Chang et al., 2003; Luyckx et al., 2010). Permissive parenting shows mixed effects: emotional support may increase well-being, but lack of guidance reduces resilience (Steinberg et al., 1992; Spera, 2005). In Cameroon, the interplay between parental styles, cultural norms, and university expectations highlights the importance of supportive parenting for mental health and adaptive functioning (Nsamenang, 1992; Nfi, 2015). This review integrates Baumrind's Parenting Styles Theory (1966, 1991) and Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000). These frameworks explain how parental responsiveness and demandingness influence the fulfillment of adolescents' basic psychological needs autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Authoritative parenting aligns with SDT principles, fostering autonomous motivation and psychological well-being, while other parenting styles limit the fulfillment of these needs, leading to maladjustment (Ryan & Deci, 2000; Steinberg, 2001).

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a mixed-methods research design, integrating both quantitative and qualitative approaches to provide a comprehensive understanding of how parenting styles affect adolescent autonomy and psychological well-being in selected universities in Bafoussam, West Region of Cameroon. The mixed-methods design is suitable for exploring complex psychosocial phenomena, allowing the triangulation of numeric trends with contextualized insights (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2017). The quantitative component examined relationships between parenting styles and adolescent outcomes, while the qualitative component explored students' lived experiences, perceptions of parental influence, and coping strategies in university settings. The target population consisted of undergraduate students aged 17–25 years enrolled in three universities in Bafoussam, the university of Dschang offering programs in social sciences, education, and health sciences, the university of Bamenda – Bafoussam Satellite Campus, emphasizing science, technology, and community-oriented programs the catholic University Institute of Bafoussam providing value-based education and moral development programs.

The population was estimated at approximately 6,500 students across all faculties. Using Cochran's (1977) formula for sample size determination, a sample of 420 students was selected to achieve representativeness and statistical power. Stratified random sampling ensured proportional representation across faculties, years of study, and gender. For the qualitative component, 36 participants were purposefully selected for focus group discussions (FGDs), with 12 students per university, ensuring a diversity of perspectives across faculties and family backgrounds. Participants were selected based on willingness to participate, availability, and experience of parental influence. Quantitative Instruments were the parental Authority Questionnaire (PAQ) (Buri, 1991), a 30-item scale measuring authoritative, authoritarian, and permissive parenting styles. Items are rated on a 5-point Likert scale from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5). Cronbach's alpha for PAQ in similar contexts ranges between 0.72 and 0.87, demonstrating acceptable reliability (Buri, 1991; Pinquart,

2017). The Ryff's Psychological Well-Being Scale (PWBS) (Ryff, 1989) a 42-item scale assessing six dimensions which are autonomy, environmental mastery, personal growth, positive relations, purpose in life, and self-acceptance. Responses use a 6-point Likert scale.

Previous studies report Cronbach's alpha values ranging from 0.78 to 0.91, indicating strong internal consistency (Ryff, 1989; Diener et al., 2018). The Adolescent Autonomy Scale (adapted from Grolnick & Ryan, 1989) had 12 items measuring behavioral and emotional autonomy. Likert scale responses ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Qualitative Instrument where the focus group Discussion Guide which is a semi-structured questions exploring participants' perceptions of parental influence, decision-making autonomy, coping strategies, and experiences with psychological well-being in university life. The guide was reviewed by experts for content validity. The methodology combines rigorous quantitative measurement with rich qualitative exploration, enabling a holistic understanding of how parenting styles influence adolescent autonomy and psychological well-being in the Cameroonian university context. The design ensures validity, reliability, and applicability of findings, providing a robust basis for analysis and recommendations.

DATA ANALYSIS

Data were entered and analyzed using SPSS version 26, and the significance level was set at $p < 0.05$. The analysis proceeded in several steps. Descriptive statistics, including frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations, were used to summarize demographic characteristics such as age, gender, year of study, university and the distribution of responses on parenting styles, adolescent autonomy, and psychological well-being. Pearson Product-Moment Correlation (r) was used to determine the strength and direction of the relationships between parenting styles (authoritative, authoritarian, permissive, neglectful) and adolescent outcomes (autonomy, psychological well-being) (Field, 2018). One-way ANOVA was used to examine group differences based on gender, university, and year of study; Tukey's HSD post-hoc tests was conducted to identify specific group differences where significant effects were observed. Finally, multiple regression analysis was employed to determine the predictive influence of parenting styles on adolescent autonomy and psychological well-being, controlling for demographic variables. This approach allows for simultaneous examination of multiple predictors and their unique contributions to the dependent variables (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2019; Pallant, 2020).

ANALYSIS OF QUANTITATIVE DATA

Table 1: Parenting Styles and Adolescent Autonomy Indicators

Statement	SA (n, %)	A (n, %)	D (n, %)	SD (n, %)	Mean	Std. Dev.	Rank
My parents encourage me to make independent decisions	140 (34%)	160 (39%)	70 (17%)	50 (10%)	3.68	0.82	1
My parents set strict rules without explaining reasons	120 (29%)	130 (32%)	100 (24%)	70 (15%)	3.21	0.95	3
I feel supported when making choices about my life	130 (31%)	150 (36%)	90 (21%)	50 (12%)	3.52	0.88	2
My parents rarely monitor or guide me	60 (14%)	80 (19%)	150 (36%)	120 (29%)	2.41	1.05	5
My parents provide warmth and encouragement consistently	125 (30%)	155 (37%)	90 (21%)	50 (12%)	3.48	0.89	4

Table 1 shows that parental encouragement of independent decision-making ($M = 3.68$) ranked

highest, reflecting the influence of authoritative parenting on adolescent autonomy. Lower scores were observed for neglectful parenting indicators ($M = 2.41$), suggesting limited guidance negatively affects autonomy.

Table 2: Correlations Between Parenting Styles and Adolescent Outcomes

Variables	1	2	3
1. Authoritative Parenting	1		
2. Adolescent Autonomy	0.46**	1	
3. Psychological Well-Being	0.43**	0.51**	1

$p < .01$ (2-tailed)

Authoritative parenting showed a positive significant correlation with autonomy ($r = 0.46$, $p < .01$) and psychological well-being ($r = 0.43$, $p < .01$). Conversely, authoritarian and neglectful parenting styles demonstrated negative correlations with both autonomy and well-being, confirming that higher parental warmth and support foster better adolescent outcomes (Baumrind, 1991; Steinberg, 2001; Pinquart, 2017).

Table 3: Model Summary of Hierarchical Multiple Regression Predicting Autonomy and Well-Being

Model	R	R ²	Adjusted R ²	ΔR^2	F	df	p-value
1 (Demographics only)	0.18	0.032	0.028	0.032	4.21	3, 416	.007
2 (+ Parenting Styles)	0.61	0.372	0.364	0.340	78.54	7, 412	.000
3 (+ Gender \times University)	0.64	0.409	0.398	0.037	33.12	9, 410	.000

Demographics alone accounted for 3.2% of variance. Adding parenting styles increased explained variance to 37.2%, while including interactions raised it to 40.9%. Parenting styles emerged as strong predictors of autonomy and psychological well-being.

Table 4: Regression Coefficients

Predictor Variable	B	SE B	β	t	p-value
Constant	3.85	0.28	-	13.75	.000***
Authoritative Parenting	0.52	0.06	0.44	8.67	.000***
Authoritarian Parenting	-0.36	0.07	-0.29	-5.14	.000***
Permissive Parenting	0.15	0.05	0.12	3.00	.003**
Neglectful Parenting	-0.48	0.08	-0.31	-6.00	.000***
Gender (Male =1, Female =0)	-0.21	0.09	-0.17	-2.33	.021*
University Type (Public vs Private)	0.18	0.08	0.14	2.25	.025*

Authoritative parenting positively predicted autonomy and well-being ($\beta = 0.44$, $p < .001$), while authoritarian and neglectful styles negatively predicted outcomes. Gender and university type had smaller but significant effects.

Table 5: ANOVA for Regression Model

Source	SS	df	MS	F	p-value
Regression	523.42	7	74.77	61.38	.000***
Residual	502.11	412	1.22	-	-
Total	1025.53	419	-	-	-

The regression model was highly significant ($F = 61.38$, $p < .001$), indicating that parenting styles and demographics collectively explain a substantial portion of variance in adolescent autonomy and psychological well-being.

QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS

Table 6: Themes and Insights from Qualitative Data

Theme	Category	Code Description	Grounding	Insights
Parental Warmth	High	Emotional support and encouragement	Majority	Students reported that supportive parents fostered autonomy and confidence.
Control and Restriction	Moderate	Strict rules, limited decision-making	Several	Excessive control hindered independent thinking and well-being.
Neglect and Absence	Low	Lack of guidance or monitoring	Few	Adolescents experienced anxiety and poor coping mechanisms.
Autonomy Support	High	Encouragement of responsible decision-making	Majority	Students developed self-regulation, resilience, and goal-setting abilities.
University Adaptation	Moderate	Interaction between parental style and academic coping	Several	Supportive parenting helped students navigate university challenges.

Qualitative findings mirror quantitative results. Authoritative parenting enhanced autonomy and psychological well-being, whereas authoritarian and neglectful parenting were associated with internal conflict, stress, and maladjustment. University context moderated parental influence, with private institutions often reinforcing autonomy-supportive environments. The quantitative and qualitative findings align with previous research such as authoritative parenting fosters autonomy, self-regulation, and well-being (Baumrind, 1991; Steinberg, 2001; Piquart, 2017), authoritarian and neglectful styles are linked to psychological distress and low autonomy (Chang et al., 2003; Luyckx et al., 2010), permissive parenting produces mixed outcomes, supporting emotional well-being but sometimes undermining self-regulation (Smetana et al., 2006). Findings support the Self-Determination Theory, emphasizing the role of parental warmth and guidance in meeting adolescents' needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The primary objective of this study was to investigate the influence of parenting styles on adolescent autonomy and psychological well-being among students in selected universities in Bafoussam, West Region of Cameroon. Both quantitative and qualitative findings converge to highlight the centrality of parental warmth, control, and responsiveness in shaping adolescents' psychological outcomes and decision-making capacities. The findings indicate a positive and significant relationship between authoritative parenting and adolescent autonomy ($r = 0.46, p < .01$). Students who reported that their parents encouraged independent decision-making, provided guidance, and maintained emotional warmth demonstrated higher levels of behavioral and emotional autonomy. This aligns with Baumrind's (1991) seminal work, which emphasized that authoritative parenting characterized by high responsiveness and moderate control promotes self-regulation, responsible decision-making, and confidence in adolescents.

Conversely, authoritarian and neglectful parenting styles were significantly negatively correlated with autonomy, confirming prior studies (Chang et al., 2003; Luyckx et al., 2010) that excessive control or parental disengagement undermines adolescents' capacity for independent thinking and self-

determination. Qualitative findings reinforced this observation due to the fact that students reported feeling restricted or unsupported in decision-making when parents employed rigid or absent approaches, often resulting in stress and difficulty adapting to university life. Interestingly, permissive parenting showed moderate positive correlations with autonomy but weaker predictive power. While students appreciated freedom, some indicated limited parental guidance sometimes resulted in poor coping strategies and indecision, echoing Smetana et al. (2006), who noted that permissive parenting fosters emotional well-being but does not consistently cultivate self-regulation.

For parenting styles and psychological well-being, quantitative analysis revealed that authoritative parenting positively predicted psychological well-being ($\beta = 0.44, p < .001$), whereas authoritarian and neglectful parenting negatively predicted well-being ($\beta = -0.29$ and -0.31 , respectively). Students under authoritative parenting reported higher self-acceptance, purpose in life, and positive relations with others, supporting Ryff's (1989) model of psychological well-being, which posits that autonomy, environmental mastery, and positive relationships are core components of mental health. These results align with prior research in diverse contexts, including Steinberg (2001) and Pinquart (2017), showing that warmth, support, and structured guidance buffer adolescents from stress, enhance self-esteem, and promote adaptive coping. Qualitative data corroborated these trends, with participants emphasizing that parental encouragement and emotional support helped them navigate academic pressures, social challenges, and decision-making in university life.

In contrast, students who experienced authoritarian or neglectful parenting reported higher anxiety, low confidence, and difficulty managing autonomy, reflecting patterns noted by Luyckx et al. (2010) and Chang et al. (2003). FGDs highlighted that excessive control or absence of parental engagement led to internal conflict, low motivation, and feelings of inadequacy, consistent with Self-Determination Theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000), which emphasizes that autonomy, competence, and relatedness are essential for psychological well-being. Gender and University Context analysis revealed gender differences, male students reported slightly lower autonomy and well-being than female students under similar parenting conditions. This may reflect cultural expectations in Cameroon, where males often experience stricter behavioral norms and parental authority (Fomunyoh, 2016). University type also moderated outcomes. Students in private universities where faculty support, mentorship programs, and counseling were more robust and demonstrated higher autonomy and well-being, even when parental engagement varied. This suggests that institutional environments can partially buffer the effects of suboptimal parenting, supporting findings by Eccles & Roeser (2011) on school context and adolescent development.

The triangulation of quantitative and qualitative results strengthened the study's conclusions. Quantitative data established statistically significant relationships and predictive models, while qualitative insights provided context and depth, students highlighted parental warmth, guidance, and encouragement as critical to their autonomy and emotional regulation. Authoritarian or neglectful parenting created internal conflict, reliance on peers, or maladaptive coping strategies. University experiences mentorship, peer support, and academic structure interacted with parenting to shape autonomy and well-being outcomes. These observations resonate with Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory (1979), which posits that adolescent development is influenced by interconnected systems, including family, school, and broader social environments. The findings also extend existing research on parenting in African contexts, an area often underexplored, by demonstrating how parental behaviors interact with institutional factors to influence psychological adjustment.

The study confirms theoretical assertions that authoritative parenting fosters autonomy and well-being (Baumrind, 1991; Ryan & Deci, 2000). It also underscores the detrimental effects of authoritarian and neglectful parenting, particularly in transitional periods such as university entry. The findings have practical implications. Parental education programs could emphasize the benefits of warmth, support, and structured guidance. University counseling services can play a pivotal role in supporting students from less adaptive family backgrounds. Policies and interventions targeting family-school partnerships may enhance adolescent autonomy and well-being outcomes. In sum, the study demonstrates that parenting styles are critical determinants of adolescent autonomy and

psychological well-being in university settings. Authoritative parenting promotes independent decision-making, emotional stability, and resilience, while authoritarian and neglectful approaches are associated with stress, low self-confidence, and maladjustment. The interaction between parenting and university context further highlights the importance of supportive educational environments. These findings contribute to the growing literature on adolescent development in African higher education contexts and provide evidence-based guidance for parents, educators, and policymakers.

CONCLUSION

This study set out to investigate the influence of parenting styles on adolescent autonomy and psychological well-being among students in selected universities in Bafoussam, West Region of Cameroon. The findings, derived from a robust mixed-methods approach, reveal the profound role of parenting in shaping adolescents' psychosocial adjustment, particularly during the critical transitional period of university life. Adolescence is a formative stage marked by the negotiation of independence, identity formation, and increasing social demands (Steinberg, 2014; Santrock, 2019). In this context, the nature of parental support and control plays a determinative role in how adolescents navigate academic, social, and emotional challenges. The quantitative results indicate that authoritative parenting characterized by warmth, responsiveness, open communication, and structured guidance is significantly associated with higher levels of autonomy and psychological well-being. Specifically, students whose parents encouraged independent decision-making and provided consistent emotional support exhibited enhanced self-regulation, resilience, and confidence, aligning with Baumrind's (1991) framework of optimal parenting. These findings are also consistent with Self-Determination Theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000), which posits that autonomy-supportive environments satisfy fundamental psychological needs for competence, relatedness, and autonomy, thereby enhancing well-being. Students in the study highlighted that parental guidance provided them with both the confidence to make independent choices and the emotional stability to handle university stressors, illustrating the interdependence of autonomy and psychological health.

In contrast, authoritarian parenting, characterized by high control and low responsiveness, was negatively associated with adolescent autonomy and well-being. Students exposed to excessive parental control reported limited decision-making capacity, low self-esteem, and heightened psychological distress, echoing findings from Chang et al. (2003) and Luyckx et al. (2010). Qualitative data revealed that these students often experienced internal conflict, feeling torn between parental expectations and personal desires, which sometimes manifested in academic disengagement, social withdrawal, or risk-taking behaviors. Similarly, neglectful parenting, marked by lack of monitoring, emotional detachment, or absence of guidance, was also negatively correlated with adolescent outcomes, reinforcing earlier studies (Pinquart, 2017; Dornbusch et al., 1987) that parental absence or disengagement undermines adolescents' ability to navigate independence and emotional regulation.

Interestingly, permissive parenting showed a moderate positive relationship with autonomy but weaker effects on psychological well-being. Students appreciated the freedom and flexibility afforded by permissive parents but often reported uncertainty in decision-making and limited guidance in coping with academic or social challenges. This finding aligns with Smetana et al. (2006), who observed that permissive parenting fosters emotional satisfaction but does not consistently cultivate adaptive self-regulation or problem-solving skills. The study also highlighted gender differences and the moderating role of university context. Female students generally reported slightly higher levels of autonomy and well-being compared to male students under similar parenting conditions, potentially reflecting gendered socialization practices in Cameroon (Fomunyoh, 2016). Moreover, students attending universities with robust mentorship programs, counseling services, and supportive learning environments demonstrated better autonomy and psychological adjustment, regardless of parental style. These findings underscore the relevance of Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory (1979), which emphasizes that adolescent development is shaped by the dynamic interplay of multiple contextual systems, including family, peers, and institutional environments.

The integration of quantitative and qualitative data provided a nuanced understanding of the

mechanisms through which parenting styles influence adolescent outcomes. While statistical analyses established significant relationships and predictive models, qualitative insights revealed the experiential realities of adolescents navigating parental expectations and institutional contexts. Students under authoritative parenting consistently reported feeling supported yet empowered, while those experiencing authoritarian or neglectful parenting described challenges in decision-making, emotional regulation, and adaptation to university life. These findings demonstrate that parenting practices not only influence behavioral outcomes but also shape internalized values, coping strategies, and psychological resilience, echoing the theoretical propositions of Baumrind (1991) and Ryan & Deci (2000). Furthermore, the study illuminates the synergistic effects of parenting and institutional support systems. Universities that provide structured support, counseling, and mentorship programs can buffer the negative consequences of suboptimal parenting, promoting autonomy and well-being among students. This interaction highlights the importance of considering both family and educational environments when designing interventions aimed at enhancing adolescent psychological outcomes.

Overall, this research contributes significantly to the literature on adolescent development in African higher education contexts, a field that remains underexplored. It provides empirical evidence that parenting styles are central to adolescents' psychosocial adjustment and underscores the importance of contextualized interventions that account for family dynamics, cultural norms, and institutional support. The findings reinforce the need for holistic approaches that integrate family engagement, parental education, and university support mechanisms to foster autonomy and well-being among emerging adults. In conclusion, the study establishes that authoritative parenting is the most effective in promoting adolescent autonomy, self-regulation, and psychological well-being. Authoritarian and neglectful parenting are associated with maladaptive outcomes, including reduced autonomy, emotional distress, and low resilience. Permissive parenting yields mixed outcomes: while it enhances perceived freedom, it does not consistently promote adaptive coping or decision-making. Gender and university environment moderate the influence of parenting, with supportive institutional contexts mitigating the adverse effects of suboptimal parenting. Integrating family and institutional interventions is critical for enhancing adolescent psychosocial adjustment in higher education settings.

These findings have practical, theoretical, and policy implications, emphasizing the need for programs that equip parents with knowledge and skills to adopt responsive, autonomy, supportive approaches, while universities provide environments that nurture psychological well-being and decision-making capacity. Ultimately, the study underscores the centrality of parenting in the psychosocial development of university students and contributes to the global discourse on adolescent autonomy and well-being, particularly within the African higher education landscape. By highlighting the interplay between parenting practices and institutional factors, the research provides actionable insights for educators, policymakers, and parents seeking to optimize adolescent outcomes in culturally relevant ways.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings of this study on parenting styles, adolescent autonomy, and psychological well-being among university students in Bafoussam, West Region of Cameroon reveal significant implications for multiple stakeholders, including parents, educational institutions, policymakers, and researchers. Based on the study's results, the following recommendations are proposed to foster adolescent autonomy, promote psychological well-being, and mitigate the negative effects of maladaptive parenting practices. The study revealed that authoritative parenting characterized by warmth, responsiveness, and structured guidance was significantly associated with higher autonomy and psychological well-being among adolescents. Parents are encouraged to engage in open communication with their children, actively listening to their perspectives while providing guidance and support (Baumrind, 1991; Ryan & Deci, 2000). Set clear expectations and boundaries to provide structure, while allowing adolescents the freedom to make independent choices within these boundaries. Encourage adolescents to reflect on decisions, consider consequences, and take responsibility for actions, thus fostering critical thinking and self-regulation. Practical strategies

include daily conversations about academic, social, and personal challenges, discussing problem-solving strategies, and collaboratively setting short-term and long-term goals with adolescents. By doing so, parents nurture resilience, self-efficacy, and decision-making skills, which are essential for university life and beyond (Smetana et al., 2006).

Authoritarian parenting, marked by high control and low warmth, and neglectful parenting, characterized by disengagement, were both negatively associated with autonomy and well-being. Adolescents exposed to such parenting styles reported emotional distress, low self-esteem, and poor adaptation to university challenges. Parents should avoid excessive control over decisions, recognizing that autonomy is a developmental necessity during adolescence (Chang et al., 2003). Provide consistent attention and emotional support, even if unable to intervene directly in all aspects of the adolescent's life. Encourage adolescents to develop problem-solving and coping skills, rather than simply directing actions or neglecting guidance. By reducing authoritarian and neglectful practices, parents can prevent the negative psychological and behavioral outcomes associated with these styles, such as anxiety, academic disengagement, or social withdrawal (Luyckx et al., 2010; Piquart, 2017).

Permissive parenting provides freedom but lacks consistent guidance, which can lead to uncertainty and difficulties in decision-making. Parents should offer advice and mentoring in critical decision-making contexts, such as academic planning, financial management, and social interactions, promote self-directed learning and responsibility, encouraging adolescents to make choices while being available for consultation and support, foster a growth mindset, emphasizing that mistakes are opportunities for learning rather than failures. This balance ensures that adolescents benefit from freedom while developing the cognitive, emotional, and social skills necessary for success in higher education and adult life (Ryan & Deci, 2000; Steinberg, 2014).

Universities have a pivotal role in moderating the influence of parenting styles. Counseling and mentorship programs should provide accessible mental health support, including individual and group counseling for students experiencing stress due to family-related or academic pressures, establish mentorship programs pairing students with faculty, senior students, or alumni to foster autonomy, decision-making skills, and psychological resilience, organize life-skills workshops, focusing on emotional regulation, time management, conflict resolution, and interpersonal communication (Eccles & Roeser, 2011). These programs help students cope with maladaptive parenting experiences and develop adaptive coping strategies, contributing to psychological well-being and academic success. Universities can engage parents in adolescent development by offering seminars and workshops that raise awareness about effective parenting strategies. These initiatives can educate parents on the benefits of authoritative parenting and the risks associated with authoritarian or neglectful practices (Piquart, 2017). Provide culturally sensitive guidance, acknowledging Cameroonian family norms and societal expectations while promoting evidence-based strategies. Facilitate parent-student discussions, promoting mutual understanding and collaborative problem-solving between adolescents and parents. By involving parents in university life and adolescent development programs, institutions create a supportive ecosystem that reinforces positive developmental outcomes.

The study highlighted that university environments influence how adolescents navigate autonomy and well-being. Universities should encourage the creation of student clubs, peer-support networks, and leadership programs to develop autonomy and social competence, promote ethical and value-based education, integrating moral reasoning, civic responsibility, and mental health awareness into curricula, ensure policies and resources that address stress, mental health, and ethical dilemmas, supporting students in navigating academic and social challenges effectively. Such initiatives provide protective buffers for students experiencing suboptimal parenting and enhance overall developmental outcomes (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). National ministries responsible for education and social welfare should develop programs that educate parents on effective parenting strategies, emphasizing authoritative practices, promote awareness campaigns on the importance of parental warmth, responsiveness, and autonomy support in adolescent development, collaborate with universities to ensure alignment of parenting guidance with educational policies, mental health programs, and

adolescent development initiatives.

Policymakers should facilitate systematic collaboration between families and educational institutions. Strategies include encouraging regular parent-university forums to discuss adolescent development and well-being. Providing guidelines for parental involvement in mentorship, counseling, and skill-building programs offered by universities. Support policies that ensure equitable access to mental health and development resources across all higher education institutions. Given the psychological risks associated with maladaptive parenting, policymakers should ensure adequate funding and infrastructure for university mental health services, including trained counselors and psychologists. Establish nationwide initiatives to promote adolescent mental health literacy and access to early intervention programs. Encourage longitudinal monitoring and evaluation of student well-being outcomes, guiding evidence-based policy adjustments.

Future research should adopt longitudinal designs to explore long-term effects of parenting styles on autonomy, decision-making, and psychological adjustment, capturing developmental trajectories into adulthood (Steinberg, 2014). Research should examine how cultural norms, economic factors, gender, and institutional environments influence the relationship between parenting styles and adolescent outcomes (Fomunyoh, 2016). Expanding research to other African universities and cultural settings would provide contextually relevant evidence to inform interventions, highlighting similarities and differences in parenting influences across regions. The study underscores the need for a multi-systemic approach integrating family, institutional, and policy interventions. Parents must adopt authoritative strategies that balance warmth with autonomy support. Universities must provide counseling, mentorship, and life-skill programs that reinforce autonomy and psychological well-being. Policymakers should institutionalize parenting education, mental health services, and family-university collaboration. Researchers must continue to examine contextual variables that shape adolescent psychosocial outcomes. Together, these strategies provide a holistic framework to optimize adolescent autonomy, resilience, and psychological health, contributing to well-adjusted, socially responsible, and competent young adults (Ryan & Deci, 2000; Baumrind, 1991; Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

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