



Research Paper

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Adolescents and Academic Pressure

Nowadays, humans experience evolution in many aspects of their lives. As the world evolves, expectations become greater and so do standards of success. In fact, people are becoming more concerned and are competing against each other to achieve success in order to live a healthy and why not a wealthy life. Success has become a stressor that shapes the minds and acts of many generations. Adolescents represent a portion of these generations and do care about being successful especially in their studies because most of them believe that good studies open the doors of an ambitious life full of joy and excitement. Academic success has become the center of interest for the majority of students especially adolescents as they become more aware about the environment and the expectations surrounding them. In fact, the entourage of adolescents represents a major pressure on their academic performance. As parents relate to this entourage, they are certainly contributing to their children's academic performance. Some parents do influence their children to do well in their studies while others do not. Others do not even show interest in their children studies and just let them orient themselves by their own. The last category concerns parents who indirectly influence their children's academic performance as they symbolize their role models. As a matter of fact, parenting style can positively or negatively sways adolescents' academic performance. Adolescents perform better within authoritative parents, so parents should democratically and tenderly act with their children while talking with them about their studies and trying to orient them toward their best. Parents should also encourage their children to choose their fields or majors of study. Still, some people claim that there are some adolescents who perform better within a specific parenting style depending on their cultures and personalities; in fact, some adolescents within collectivist societies achieve success in their studies. However, exceptions should not be taken as a model because parental styles and image do have an impact on adolescents' academic performance simply because adolescents can not be detached from the

environment they live in and if they are not directly influenced, they might be indirectly influenced by the way their parents treat them. So, adolescents do perform better in their studies if their parents help them in this process.

Adolescence is a crucial age that children go through. At this stage, adolescents experience relevant changes in their lives. Indeed, they experience physical change and intimate relationships, and start questioning many issues related to sexuality and identity. While going through adolescence, females and males build their own identities, so they should be encircled by good role models in order to help them in this process. These role models can be parents, peers, and other people who appeal to adolescents and they should provide help instead of constituting a pressure that will certainly harm the continuity of adolescents. Role models should assist adolescents in order to assure for them a smooth transition to adulthood. Parents, for example, should encourage adolescents to make good choices concerning their lives and especially their studies. They should also provide them with valuable advice as they have more experience in life. Overall, while going through adolescence, females and males face crises in the process of building their identities and parents should listen to them and understand them in order to achieve success especially in their studies.

Adolescents perform better at schools when they are assisted and well treated by their parents. Indeed, when parents show comprehension, warmth, and affection toward their children, they indirectly encourage them to be creative in their lives especially in their studies. This proves what has been found in the research article “Parents’ Education and Feature of Parent-Adolescent Relationships as Predictors of Adolescents’ Academic Performance;” indeed, the authors reached the conclusion that “affective features of parent-adolescent relationships have been identified as significant correlates of adolescents’ academic performance” (Nuijens, Mrozak, Zhe, Chadha, Tillman, Repinski, Zook , p.3, 2000).

Adolescence is a critical stage that everyone goes through; therefore, children should be encircled by good entourage so that they can achieve success. Actually, this is hard for adolescents to concentrate and perform well in their studies as the adolescence stage is characterized by major crises that they may face. However, if parents act democratically with their children and try to understand their ways of thinking, they can undoubtedly push them to achieve academic success. According to Repinski, and Zook (2000), “subjective closeness and positive motions in parent-adolescent relationships are correlated with academic performance” (p.5). Indeed, adolescents should be indirectly encouraged to earn good grades; parents can reward their children every time they do well in their studies. They can also give them permissions to go out with their peers from time to time to show them that they are confident and happy about their performance in schools. When adolescents feel that their parents trust them and are proud of them, they will try to do their best in order to keep this trust and pride. As stated in the conventional level of Kohlberg’s theory, especially stage three, adolescents try to behave in a good way in order to fit the image of “good boy/ nice girl”. Indeed, they try to act properly because they become more concerned about the way the others perceive them especially their parents. They start acting not only for their own benefit but for the benefit of the others as they value more maintaining good relationships with their environment. When talking about adolescents, Muss (p.183) claims, “children will try to behave, not because it is the right thing to do, but in order to win the approval of others.” As a matter of fact, when adolescents feel that their efforts are valued, they try to increase these efforts in order to make their parents feel delighted and win their approvals.

Authoritative parenting style undoubtedly leads to adolescents’ academic success. In a review article written by three professors from different American universities, it is argued that the authoritative parenting style can lead adolescents to achieve success. In fact, while analyzing the findings of a study named Dornbusch et al., and in an article named

“Authoritative Parenting, Psychosocial Maturity, and Academic Success among Adolescents,” Steinberg, Elmen, & Mounts (1982), the authors, claim that “students whose parents were less permissive, less authoritarian, and more authoritative performed better in school than their peers” (p.1425). In effect, while surveying several families from different cultural backgrounds; the conductors of the study found out that the authoritative parenting style is the best way to educate adolescents to enhance the concept of good grades in their minds. When parents let the floor for their children to act the way they think it is best for them in their studies, they feel that they are trusted and that they are mature enough to take their own decisions without having to rely on adults. According to Steinberg, Elmen, and Mounts (1982), “One reason that autonomy may play an especially important role in influencing school performance during adolescence is that young people, as they move through the school years, are expected to take increasing responsibility for self-management” (p.1425). Giving the autonomy to children can help them make the right decisions and know what is best for them as they start to feel that they are adults enough and therefore can act to their own benefits. They also start bearing the responsibility of their own success as they start believing that each action should be given thought and should be well managed toward their own benefits. However, autonomy should be controlled by parents with the aim to give some advice about some decisions that adolescents may take which will have impacts on their studies. Also, parents should sway the thinking of their children in a smart way to act in a manner that will lead their children to achieve success. They can explain to them the importance of earning good grades as they will help them join famous universities to get high Master’s and PhD’s degrees; this will offer to them the opportunities to find good jobs and therefore live a wealthy and luxurious life. In the same study, it is stated that, “authoritative parenting contributes to the psychosocial development of the adolescent, which in turn facilitates school success.” Indeed, when parents show interest and value their children’s work, they provide a

psychological assistance to them as they enhance their self confidence and assist them to build their own identities. Also, when an intimate social relationship between parents and children is build upon a strong basis of trust and confidence, adolescents feel safe and protected for they feel that they are well encircled to make the right choices toward success.

While passing through adolescence, adolescents build their own identities, so in this period; the concept of academic success should be enhanced in their minds. Muss (p. 46) says “a redefinition of one’s ego- identity emerges quite commonly when major role changes occur.” Indeed, when students join universities, they face a major role change in their lives and start building their own identities. Adolescents, in this period, start feeling the beginning of adulthood as they face more challenging studies that they have to succeed in. As they attain universities, the expectations of their parents become greater for they believe that their children can bear their own responsibilities in their academic performance. Also, the expectations of teachers grow and adolescents need to prove that they are able to meet these expectations and to do what is required from them. Adolescents need to build the image they want in the minds of the others because they start valuing the others’ points of view; therefore, they try to be successful in their studies. During the university period, adolescents try to prove themselves as they become more involved in their studies; they may take decisions about their own majors and minors and start thinking about their career orientation. Successful studies can lead adolescents to take high positions and therefore participate in the well being of their societies.

Successful and competent parents indirectly influence their children’s academic performance; indeed adolescents whose parents are successful and competent perform better in their studies. Generally, adolescents take their parents as their role models, so parents should represent a good example for their children to follow. In a research article that appeared in the journal of marriage and the family, Bogenschneider, Small, and Tsay (1997),

three professors from Wisconsin university, argue that “sons and daughters of competent parents reported higher levels of most measures of academic and psychosocial competence”(p.345). As a matter of fact, adolescents are unconsciously influenced by their parents for the reason that they take them as examples to follow. If parents are competent, they positively sway their children’s way of thinking about success; adolescents try to imitate their parents and prove to them that they are as competent as them. Bogenschneider, Small and Tsay (1997) claim that, “competent parenting promotes attachment security, cooperation, compliance, and achievement in children” (p.345). In fact, competent parents provide a sort of security to adolescents as they feel protected from responsible parents who want their best and can provide precious advice to them which can help them achieve academic success. Moreover, children whose parents are competent show cooperation and agreement not only with parents but also with their peers as they are encouraged by their parents to be self confident and cooperate with others to reduce stress and therefore to achieve academic success. Finally, competent parents promote the concept of achievement in the minds of their children because they promote good examples of a successful achievement.

Unsuccessful and incompetent parents badly influence adolescents’ performance in their studies. In their research article, Bogenschneider, Small and Tsay (1997) claim that, “incompetent parenting fosters uncooperative and problematic behaviour” (p.345). In fact, when parents are unskilled, they indirectly push their children to not cooperate with them as they think that their parents do not present good models for them. In the adolescence stage, females and males start making comparisons between many aspects that are related to their lives, so they often make comparisons between their parents and their peers’ parents and try to analyze the differences that they found between them. When making this comparison, adolescents may figure out that their parents do not really endorse the image of “good parents” to them; this can create a sort of confusion to adolescents and cause their behaviours

to change toward their environment. These adolescents may feel ashamed and guilty about being the children of incompetent and unsuccessful parents and this can badly influence their academic performance.

Some studies have shown that collectivistic and individualistic societies can both promote adolescents' academic performance. This can be true on the surface; however, exceptions always exist and do not really represent a good model to follow. If humans support the idea that even if parents badly treat their children, they can perform well, then some parents will continue to do so and adolescents will never know how to build their own personalities and characters. Collectivistic parenting style is mainly characterized by conformity to authority in general and conformity to parents in a more specific way. Moreover, this parenting style focuses on the concept of interdependence rather than independence; people within collectivism societies act for the benefit of the public rather for their own benefits. Indeed, while describing the collectivism society, Shen and Peterson (1999), professors at the Arizona University, claim that "the emphasis is on attending to others, fitting in, and harmonious interdependence with them" (p.5). Within these societies, parents tend to be more involved in their children's lives because they believe that their children can not live without them and therefore should obey, respect, and cooperate with them to achieve success. Adolescents, as members of these societies, are more prone to achieve academic success to conform to their parents' expectations and to act for the benefit of their societies. Moreover, collectivist parents tend to be more demanding as they have higher expectations regarding their adolescents' academic performance. These parents tend to charge their children difficult responsibilities as they connect their children academic success with that of society. This badly influence adolescents' academic performance because they may find themselves obliged to conform to society rather than to do what they think is the best for them. Adolescents within these societies have difficulties valuing their own

achievements because what they do can not be judged by themselves but by society. So, adolescents within collectivistic societies tend to have a lack of self fulfilment and freedom to decide about their own lives; they always feel the need to conform to their societies rather than taking charge their own lives and making individual decisions that can enhance their sense of responsibility and help them overcome the problems that they face during this crucial stage. Adolescents within collectivistic societies may perform well in their schools not because they understand that this can help them achieve success in their lives but because they feel that they are obliged to participate in the well being of their societies, this can cause adolescents to stress and can cause them to manifest in their own ways. Stress can lead adolescents to smoke and drink alcohol. It may also cause adolescents to become violent with their friends and refuse cooperating with them. More than this, stress may lead to suicide. Indeed, according to the article “Choosing Life: Adolescent Suicide in Literature,” the author remarks that many suicides take place at schools and argues about the reasons behind suicide; the professor claims that “experts cite the following as contributing factors to adolescent suicide: chemical abuse, an unrealistic view of death, societal changes and worries, family changes, a plethora of life choices, academic pressures, and a stress causing success code” (p.78, 1990). Talking only about the last two reasons of suicide, one may notice the danger of the exercise of pressure and power especially when it comes to deal with studies. Academic and success pressures may cause adolescents to commit suicide. Adolescents generally face other appealing problems because they start feeling the world in which they operate and can have difficulties to adapt with it; therefore parents should aid their children overcome these problems and may help them in many aspects of their lives; one example relates to academic performance.

One may give the Chinese model to prove that some adolescents do perform well within a collectivistic society; however, in general, adolescents perform better within

individualistic societies. According to Shen and Peterson (1999), “ because of the importance placed on education by Chinese parents and society, conforming to parents’ wishes probably insinuates that youngsters will identify with their parents, recognize the importance of education, and eventually work hard to achieve academic goals” (p.5). This shows the exception of some authoritarian societies in enhancing the academic performance of adolescents. Compliance may be a positive forecaster of school performance within the Chinese society; however, authoritarian parenting style negatively affects adolescents’ academic performance. If parents constitute a pressure on their children’s studies, than they contribute to their failure not only in their academic performance but also in their future lives. Parents should be involved in the education process of their children in order to aid them to earn good grades and therefore occupy good positions. However, this involvement should not limit the freedom of adolescents to take their own studies in charge. Authoritarian parents can cease the creativity and the identity building process of their children because adolescents need to take initiatives in order to achieve success. Limiting adolescents’ freedom to take decisions about their own studies will sustain them from taking responsibilities and will cause them to fail to build their own self confidence and personalities. Some parents force their children to choose some majors or fields of studies thinking that they are the best for them; this can sustain adolescents from achieving success in their studies. Adolescents should be given the freedom to decide about their studies and career orientations; otherwise, they will badly perform in their studies and this can harm their continuities in these fields of studies and therefore can waste time switching from a major to another. Generally, when one does not like what he or she does, he or she is unmotivated and becomes confused about what he or she really wants to achieve in the future. Adolescents should have a clear image of what they want to do in the future in order to work toward achieving their objectives of lives and build their own identities. In the adolescence period, children may face a sort of confusion when they are

not well oriented and find difficulties to make pertinent choices involving their studies. This fact underlines the crucial role that parents should play in order to lead to their children's academic success.

Individualistic societies emphasize on the importance of independence, self reliance and autonomy; this can help adolescents better perform in their studies and therefore achieve success because parents within this style show less involvement in their children lives, especially in their studies. The following statement better describes individualistic societies, "individuals seek to maintain their independence from others by attending to the self and by discovering and expressing their unique inner attributes" (Shen & Peterson, p.5, 1999). Adolescents whose parents conform to the individualistic principles develop a sort of self efficiency and self esteem which will obviously lead to a better academic performance. Parents within individualistic societies tend to be more encouraging their children to experience everything and to not fear failure. This encouragement will certainly lead adolescents to be creative, ambitious and persistent in their studies. These adolescents show a high level of motivation as they are given freedom and are less directed by their parents to deal with their own studies. The American model best describes individualistic societies; indeed, American adolescents tend to decide about their own lives and studies. They choose their own majors and fields of studies and take the responsibility of their own academic performance. Adolescents within individualistic societies are somehow considered as adults and are responsible for their own acts. They like to achieve academic success not to win the approval of their parents and the others but because they think that it is beneficial for them and that success in their studies lead to success in their personal lives. Parenting style, in general, represents a part that can not be detached from culture. Some cultures conform better to individualistic societies while others do not. In this regard, Shen and Peterson (1999) claim that, "if Chinese culture is collectivistic in nature, the forces of individualism might have

diminished influence in Chinese socialization process (p.6). This underlines the fact that some people need to be guided and controlled while others prefer to decide about their own lives. The way adolescents are involved in their own studies depends on their own personalities and on the cultures within which they live. However, adolescents do not make major decisions, they only make decisions that involve routines, so parents should encourage them to decide about their own success and help them in this process by showing affection and involvement, and giving them some advice from time to time. Parents should not forget that they influence their children; thus, if they want their children to be successful, they should themselves represent good and successful models to follow.

To sum up, the issue of education, especially academic performance has been given much importance by researchers as it differs from parents to others and because it is positively and negatively linked to adolescents. The adolescence stage has been devoted much attention because of its significance in building children's identities and because of its direct relation with adulthood. With the help of their parents, adolescents may easily overcome the crises that they may face and therefore can transit to adulthood in a smooth way; Erik (p.262) claims about these crises, "If diagnosed and treated correctly, these incidents do not have the same fatal significance which they have at other ages." Parents' involvement in their children's studies can positively or negatively influence their academic success and therefore their future lives. Some parents indirectly influence their children's academic performance as they represent their role models. Moreover, Parents who are authoritative positively influence their children's academic performance. However, authoritarian parents badly influence adolescents' academic success. Authoritative and authoritarian parents lead different parenting styles within different societies, individualistic and collectivistic societies respectively. Some adolescents tend to perform well in their studies even within some collectivistic societies. However, the pressure that parents exercise on their children may lead

adolescents to face many crises that will in their turn badly affect their academic performance. Generally, parents should help their children overcome the problems that they encounter and should not constitute a pressure on them especially when it comes to deal with their studies for the reason that academic performance is related to many other aspects of adolescents' lives. Assistance at the educational level is not sufficient; parents should aid adolescents in many other aspects of their lives. There should be a continuous dialogue between parents and adolescents to talk about the crises that they are encountering and aid them to solve them.

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