

Shuya Xiao\*

## Development of Emotional Autonomy of Adolescents in the Context of Family Relations and Academic Performance in Middle School

**Abstract:** The relevance of the study is explained by the fact that adolescence is a critical period of development when essential changes in the personality occur. Achieving personal autonomy is an urgent problem because it indicates the development of the independence of an adolescent and their ability to choose their life goals based on an independent and free choice. In this regard, the purpose of the study is to analyse and diagnose the development of emotional and spiritual independence in adolescents based on the connection with school performance and family environment. The leading techniques for investigating this problem were analysis, classification, observation, experiment, generalisation, and comparison of results. The study identified the role of parents in the development of independence of an adolescent and the connection of this process with success at school; demonstrated aspects and features of the psychological and pedagogical process; etc. A detailed analysis of the literature was conducted and the content, characteristics, and features of this phenomenon were clarified; various forms of parental influence on an adolescent and their psychological autonomy were discovered; the process of indirect influence on children's academic success was considered and other.

**Keywords:** *psychosocial development, adolescence, psychological maturation, emotional maturity, psychological characteristics, academic success*

### INTRODUCTION

The problem of the psychosocial development of autonomy of adolescents is quite important for the evolution of society. This question is being investigated by representatives of various fields of psychological science: general, age, counselling, social, pedagogical, clinical psychology, etc. J. V. Ray et al. (2017) assert that independence is a part of personal maturation, and the development of a person based on self-regulation is a fundamental task of adolescent development. During this period, people experience various cognitive changes at the formal operational stage (Piaget's theory). In addition, through individual thought processes, they can consider various things, think, and act, increasing their ability of autonomy and independence. However, it is necessary to consider not only the positive aspects because reality points to the low level of cognitive abilities, which are necessary for adolescents at this stage of development. N. Permatasari et al. (2021) point out that children tend to fall into depression, and doubt themselves and their abilities, which is associated with excessive pressure from parents and peers. The most substantial problem is the lack of support from parents and friends,

which hinders the development of thinking and independence in adolescents.

Adolescent autonomy is the period of a child's struggle to assert themselves as a free person in the eyes of others. Emotional independence is expressed in confidence in their actions and the ability to think independently. C. P. Tyler et al. (2020) describe this process as long and challenging for adolescent and their parents. The relationship with the father and mother can become decisive in separating a child from their parents so they can leave home and build a life independently. Many researchers indicate that adolescent autonomy is the ability to separate from loved ones and overcome a close connection. For S. Costa et al. (2018), independence is the ability to make personal decisions and be responsible for them. Adolescent autonomy is characterised by changes in the level of dependence on parents. Modern studies of emotional autonomy in adolescence are quite contradictory. The main issue is the debate about its naturalness or whether it is a necessity related to negative emotions. Parents' role in children's growing up and desire for greater autonomy and individualisation is notable. K. Kagıtcıbası (2005) states that parents play an important role as attachment figures. G. Evans (2004) states that

\* Lingnan University, Hong Kong, People's Republic of China

Corresponding author: Shuya Xiao, sh.xiao@newgeneration.in.net

adolescents do not receive enough support and lack initiative, cannot control their feelings, and develop mature psychological traits. Such children are unable to show their abilities, study better at school, and enjoy activities.

The relevance of the study is explained by the fact that researchers have not sufficiently considered the problem of child's maturing and the development of their emotional state. Thus, the development of emotional autonomy through parental support requires further investigation. It is also worth analysing the impact of high emotional independence of adolescents on their academic success. Therefore, the purpose of the study is to examine the phenomenon of emotional autonomy in adolescents and its connection to their relationship with their parents. The issues for discussion are: adolescent's development and their maturing (psychological, social, and emotional); aspects of the influence of independence on academic performance; group features of adolescents' relationships with parents.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

The following methods were used in the course of the study: theoretical (examination and analysis of pedagogical, psychological, methodological literature on the subject of the study; analysis of the features of the development of emotional autonomy in adolescence and problems of relationships with parents; generalisation of theoretical material on the issue under study; deduction when comparing approaches and highlighting the basic principles and ways of developing components of autonomy; classification different types and types of autonomy of schoolchildren with a detailed presentation of concepts; diagnostic (analysis of emotional autonomy and its connection to relationships with parents, conversation with schoolchildren and passing a survey); empirical (study of the results of the level of development of autonomy in a middle school in China; pedagogical experiment in natural conditions for the learning process and academic success of children); methods of graphic images of the results (diagram). The informed consent was obtained from all the participants.

The experimental base of the study was two middle schools in Wuhan and Beijing (about 250 adolescents). The study was conducted in three stages:

1. In the first stage, the theoretical collection and analysis of existing approaches in psychology and pedagogy concerning the issue of emotional autonomy, its specific features and problems were conducted; the studies of researchers devoted to this problem, its features, approaches to explanation were investigated; information data of books, monographs, conferences were considered, in which the features, aspects were deeply and comprehensively disclosed on autonomy and the influence of relationships with parents on the psychological maturation of a child; the principles of adolescent autonomy and independence were shown; cognitive changes in the psyche of adolescents and components of autonomy were demonstrated; special

features of adolescence were identified; the relevance of the study was substantiated; the problem, purpose, forms, and techniques (ways) of investigating this problem were highlighted; a plan for conducting an experimental study was drawn up.

2. In the second stage, an experiment was conducted to monitor adolescents in schools in natural learning conditions; the importance of relationships with parents and the impact of this process on academic success were considered; the problems faced by children during adulthood were analysed; the specific features of relationships with parents and peers were described; the level of development of emotional autonomy of schoolchildren was diagnosed; the results were uncovered based on a conversation and an experiment, which helped to identify the main levels of autonomy development and its features; the results of the conducted psychological research were substantiated; the conclusions obtained during the experiment were systematised.
3. In the third stage, the systematisation and classification of the material obtained during the analysis of the problem were conducted; theoretical, practical conclusions and study results were substantiated; a comparative analysis of studies and approaches to the investigation of this problem, experiments of researchers who have been considering the issue of children's autonomy and its impact on academic success were outlined; the results of experiments of other psychologists and teachers were summarised and logically presented; cultural factors of the development of adolescent autonomy in China, the specific features of the family atmosphere, and the influence of father and mother were classified and clarified. In addition, aspects of adolescent psychology were presented, and the importance of support and assistance from relatives for social adaptation was proved.

## RESULTS

### Development of emotional autonomy and family relations

With adolescence (10-15 years), there is an additional struggle for independence when children become less emotionally dependent on their parents. This stage does not always go perfectly but may result from family conflicts and in-depth experiences of negative emotions. Adolescents tend to experience extreme emotions of different types in response to the same event. Personality development is essential to a child's maturation when they become adults. Adolescents often explore themselves and search for their identity based on many failures, anxieties, and disappointments. Children who choose a specific type of identity promoted by their family early have a relatively low level of anxiety and do not experience great conflicts in building family relationships. Otherwise, adolescents tend to be passive, inactive, and quite dull. They would not be able to build good relationships with peers and have a risk of mental problems in adulthood.

O. V. Togachynska and V. I. Nemesh (2021) conclude that the achievement of a stable sense of personality is vital for the young people. It makes them more empathetic and successful in managing their emotions. Autonomy is a subject's ability to function independently and create their own internal criteria, considering their internal desires and living conditions. This process should be distinguished from blind imitation of a motive, the results of which are not always positive. Personal autonomy is an internal form of external regulation, where a person can communicate independently and deliberately with others and act adequately in different life situations without fear of losing their own Self. In such conditions, self-awareness and self-regulation are preserved. M. O. Golubeva et al. (2022) identify different types of autonomy inherent in personal: 1) behavioural autonomy (the ability to control one's actions); 2) emotional autonomy (the ability to be interested in the world and things regardless of someone else's opinion); 3) moral and value autonomy (the need for values and worldview).

Autonomy is a universal human need, especially for adolescents. It can be described as the task and basis of growing up. For decades, this theory has reached the concept where the development of autonomy is the ability of an adolescent to make their own decisions and think independently, having a properly built relationship with their family. Thus, children become more independent and freer without moving away from their parents. M. J. Noom et al. (2001) believe that emotional autonomy has to do with emotions, personal experiences, and relationships with surrounding people. Its affective and relational meaning is also important. This phenomenon is an adaptive development process when adolescents move into adulthood and abandon dependence on their parents. Notably, the development of emotional independence is a long-lasting adaptive process. In addition, this process is mandatory for adolescents to feel their internal resources. Children with higher emotional autonomy experience less family cohesion and separate their lives from their parents easier.

The connection with parents is of great importance. Adolescents with warm and supportive parents are more likely to learn life principles from them, share their problems and talk about their daily affairs, feelings, and thoughts. Such people often turn to their parents for advice, not friends. S. Lau et al. (1990) point out that in the Chinese context, it was also indicated that the mother's warmth is closely related to the emotional adaptation of children. It is the primary resource for emotional autonomy in the future. These feelings are also associated with family harmony in Hong Kong families. The warmth of the parental home helps adolescents create an emotionally safe climate that makes the child feel like part of the family. Parental control through various means (behavioural and psychological) is a negative aspect of parenting.

S. M. Chan and K-W. Chan (2013), determines that behavioural control is closely related to parental requirements when they establish the child's norms and rules of behaviour. Here, the main parental goal is to instil certain moral and social standards that will contribute to the behavioural competence of the adolescent.

### Results of a study on determining the autonomy of schoolchildren in a Chinese middle school

The main results of the study establish the relationship between the development of autonomy and its components (emotional, cognitive, behavioural, value) with specific interaction features with parents. The study was conducted in Wuhan and Beijing. The participants were 11 to 15 years old adolescents who studied at middle schools in these two cities. The sample consisted of about 250 schoolchildren. The results were determined based on the "Autonomy Questionnaire", which helped to determine adolescents' general level of personal autonomy and its components (emotional, behavioural, cognitive, and value). The methodology of O. A. Karabanova and N. N. Poskrebysheva (2013) consists of 12 statements, which the students had to answer by evaluating the phenomena on a 5-point scale.

Adolescents describe their relationship with their parents quite positively. Alienation and manifestations of depreciation in the family were quite rare. There was a friendly atmosphere in the family circle, which indicated a keen interest in children, their affairs, hobbies, and interests. Approximately 45% positively assess the degree of emotional closeness with their parents, as they are ready to share problems and essential moments of life with their relatives. In addition, some schoolchildren spoke of their parents as empathetic and accepting because they could always count on their support and acceptance. Most children expressed the absence of strict control as a parental requirement. Average indicators allow for diagnosing the relative satisfaction of adolescents with the level of control and exactingness in the family. It is worth highlighting such groups of adolescents, conventionally designated as: 1) "Highly autonomous" (10%); 2) "Autonomous" (33%); 3) "Moderately autonomous" (35%); 4) "Driven" (17%); 5) "Dependent" (5%) (Figure 1).

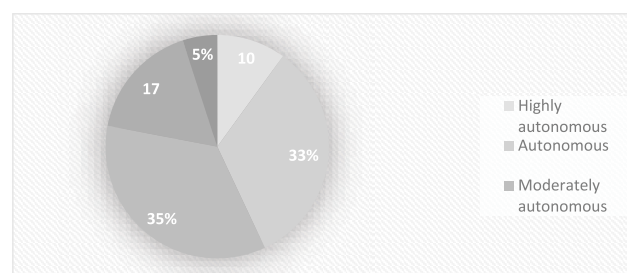


Figure 1. Levels of autonomy development in adolescents

The first group has low indicators of parental control, strictness, and directivity. Parents of such children are not prone to overprotection and have a more differentiated approach to solving the problems of adolescents. These children have enough freedom, and parents can entrust them with various tasks, support, help, openly show their love, etc. It is these students who will achieve the greatest success in school and will be able to uncover their academic abilities.

"Autonomous" also have high results in all components of autonomy. These children are pretty free and perceive their relationship with their parents as prosperous. They have a high level of emotional autonomy based on low

demands and a lack of rigour on the part of the father and mother. The "Autonomous" and "Highly autonomous" groups are quite similar. Still, the members of the first one experience problems while establishing friendly contacts and feel more anxious, although they can provide emotional support and mutual assistance in friendship. The third group ("Moderately autonomous") has average results in developing emotional autonomy. These adolescents see authority in their parents and speak of them as close and interested people. These children are very close to their parents, respect their mother and are satisfied with their relationship with their parents, although there is quite strict control in the family. In relationships with friends, such children are less anxious and more easily establish contact.

The "Driven" has low indicators of personal autonomy. They cannot solve issues independently and often consult with their mother or father. Such adolescents recognise the authority of their parents and imitate them. Often, "inconsistency" is present in upbringing. Parents do not give enough freedom and independence to children. Children with low results in all components of autonomy were included in the fifth group ("Dependent"). They fear parental control and cannot know themselves, make decisions, and explore the world. Parents' attitude is perceived as hostile, with no emotional closeness and cooperation, which often affects closeness and passivity. Such children are not sociable and cannot uncover their knowledge in the classroom. It is often difficult to concentrate on tasks and show their capabilities for them. The family combines strictness, control, hostility and emotional coldness, so the adolescents distance themselves from their parents and experience rejection. In relationships with peers, the "Driven" and "Dependent" groups are quite anxious, neglect mutual assistance in friendship and have a low level of emotional support. Such children believe that social contacts are not for them, so they do not want to communicate with anyone.

The study results show that adolescents with high emotional autonomy are not mainly controlled by their parents. The more pronounced the regulatory function of the father and mother, the less autonomous the child is. The results prove the age-psychological approach's productivity in describing adolescents' autonomy. During communication with parents, children get the opportunity to feel independent, contributing to the development of an indicator of maturity. Parental control, the level of freedom and cooperation in the family are quite substantial for the development of components of autonomy. Growing up, the relationship with parents becomes mutually directed, characterised by equal cooperation.

## DISCUSSION

Adolescence is a critical period for developing higher-order cognitive processes when children, based on methods of cognitive self-regulation, can skillfully switch between different cognitive strategies. Managing emotions and controlling them is quite an important process for their optimal development. During this period, it is necessary

to have a positive emotional self-perception and good skills in understanding one's feelings and self-regulation, which will help to cope with problems effectively. Every person needs to control their emotions despite various external factors and stimuli. In addition, adolescents should be able to control their emotions to be socially competent and overcome life difficulties. Such children will become more confident and will take the initiative.

In particular, emotional autonomy implies the ability to think independently based on cognitive abilities and emotional factors. Attention should be paid not only to the mind but also to the feelings. It is important for adolescents to learn how to reach logical decisions through cognitive abilities and use their emotions. N. Permatasari et al. (2021) proved that autonomy consists of the fact that people can make decisions themselves and think independently. Consequently, emotional intelligence is crucial for adolescents because it takes part in the ability to make decisions, which ultimately increases independence (Permatasari, et al., 2021). The study demonstrated the results of investigating adolescents' autonomy and its connection with the family atmosphere. The importance of the relationship between emotional autonomy and academic achievement was noted. The facts confirm that emotional autonomy strongly influences school performance in adolescents. The children who had much support from their families studied much better. In addition, the environment is not the only factor that affects adolescents' emotional autonomy development. Memories from childhood are also important: children with negative childhood memories had much higher indicators of emotional autonomy. The classification of children by types of autonomy is new and will help solve psychological problems.

Researchers have proved the author's words that adolescence is a dynamic period for developing emotion regulation and expressive skills that can be used to regulate emotional reactions following their goals. Here, the key tasks of development are to achieve greater independence from parents and develop self-regulation based on the management of substantial social, cognitive, and biological changes. Many problems arise for adolescents at this time because they strengthen their emotional autonomy and cope with difficulties. Influential theoretical models claim that parents significantly influence emotions and other self-regulation mechanisms. Even the mere presence of parents can regulate children's emotions, physiology, and neurobiology. In addition, the father and mother can influence the "behaviour of emotional socialisation", which helps to teach adolescents emotional behaviour. This proves once again that the parents' skills, their emotions, the family atmosphere and the child's behaviour are closely interrelated.

The paper of J. A. Silvers (2022), analysing the relative impact of parental emotional state on the child was important in this study. It was diagnosed that improving parents' emotional state and self-regulation can be an indirect but powerful mechanism for developing emotional autonomy, even in young people at risk of difficulties. One

of the ways to improve a child's emotional autonomy is to use "positive" feelings (i.e. warmth and emotional sensitivity), leading to better psychosocial adaptation in adolescence. Moreover, early age is correspondingly crucial. For example, a positive and emotionally stable relationship with parents at the age of 5 can improve social and emotional adaptation at the age of 11-15. Common forms of parental emotional support (demonstration of warmth and acceptance) affect older and younger adolescents, and emotional coaching from parents can be helpful for younger children. These results show that more active forms of parental support are important in the early stages of psychological development. In older adolescence, children want to get more and more emotional autonomy. Notably, communication with friends or peers plays a vital role in the development of an adolescent. During adolescence, the ways of self-regulation also change greatly. J. A. Silvers (2022) analyses the strategy of cognitive reassessment, which is associated with mental health. The ability to reassess the regulation of emotions in everyday life is also crucial for adolescents. It was determined that age does not indicate intrapersonal changes in the tendency to reassessment. On the contrary, sharp age-related improvements in the period up to mid-adolescence stabilise in late adolescence are notable. During this period, reassessment begins to weaken the amygdala response, which is consistent with behavioural data on the facts of protection from adverse consequences for mental health. These results uncover the importance of reassessment in the emotional autonomy of adolescents, which is a key component of the development of the nervous system.

A similar study by S. Liu et al. (2021) also investigated the influence of parental relationships on emotional autonomy and success at school. The results demonstrated that support from the mother or father was positive, and control and the presence of requirements negatively affected adolescents' well-being and emotional stability. Control and rude attitude negatively affected adolescents' academic achievements, which reduced their subjective well-being. The support and assistance of parents influenced the child's self-perception and helped them to form academic competence and learning strategies. This study once more confirmed the importance of parents' involvement in the student's education and emphasised that these interventions should stimulate and motivate the adolescent. Moreover, parents and educators should help adolescents to promote their self-perception of academic competence and learning strategies. For the development of emotional autonomy, it is important to prevent problems when children with high academic achievements experience family problems or discomfort. In this study, the importance of family relationships for academic achievement was emphasised in more detail.

Relatively new is the study of the gender difference in emotional autonomy. Researchers have concluded that boys often show the highest independence and build their lives based on their own guidelines. On the other hand, girls rely on their parents' and peers' ideas and views, not

trying to defend their own opinion. Emotional closeness with relatives and tranquillity in the family are important for them. This distribution is conventional and outdated. G. W. Chaika (2022) believes that this situation should be based on the fact that everyone has the opportunity to choose their path and take on exactly the role that suits them best. The analysis of the age aspect demonstrated that the period from adolescence to younger adulthood is filled with autonomous feelings of a person when they begin to feel independent and determine their future life path. Positive relationships are also aggravated; at this time, there is a search for oneself and a place in life. At subsequent age stages, the existing status is supported. This study pointed to the importance of autonomy in adolescence and youth.

In addition, the differences between the family structure and the parenting style in divorced families are notable. Here, differences were found in the adolescent's perception of demands from the mother or father. Attachment figures often speak negatively about each other, destroying the child's emotional stability. B. Ortega et al. (2021) found a substantial link between living in a single-parent family and depression during adolescence. It has been proven that a full family reduces the likelihood of developing mental disorders (anxiety disorder, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder). As a result, family function and parenting styles play a key role in the emotional well-being of children. The development of an adolescent's mental state is based on personal and social conditions, which makes it essential to consider both factors of influence. E. Aguirre-Dávila et al. (2021) considered the role of adolescent autonomy in the relationship between parenting and academic performance. The experiment involved interviewing 229 mothers and their children in Colombian and South American middle schools. The following techniques of upbringing were highlighted: the development of attachment, close communication, and the establishment of rules. Autonomy included cognitive, motivational, and social aspects in an academic context, and school success resulted from grades in social sciences, mathematics, language, and natural sciences. The data show that parenting indirectly influences academic performance and adolescent independence, and communication and parental support contribute to parenting. The cognitive, motivational, and social aspects of autonomy also influence academic achievements.

X. Bi and S. Wang (2021) have demonstrated that the quality of family communication is an important factor that can influence adolescents' life satisfaction. Considering this in the Chinese cultural context, the aspects of family communication are associated with the life satisfaction of Chinese adolescents. Many studies have investigated mediating factors in the development of emotional autonomy in relationships, including emotional intelligence, self-esteem, classroom environment and a sense of loneliness. This study also focused on researching the intermediary roles of autonomy and orientation for the future. The study of the Chinese conventional aspect of this problem is new. In Western

studies, theories and empirical data have confirmed the close relationship between the quality of family communication and autonomy and success in life. The traditional Chinese culture has specific features and characteristics that can affect the quality of family communication and autonomy. For example, non-confrontational and implicit communication is important in China, where authority exists and autonomy is devalued. The study also displayed differences in family relationships between Chinese and Western cultures, where the influence of individualism is noticeable.

The study of emotional autonomy in Asian culture is relevant, which was analysed by the author. Most of the studies on this issue have been conducted in Hong Kong, one of the largest modern cities. Notably, Chinese adolescents develop emotional autonomy much later than adolescents in Western countries. A similar study of emotional autonomy and academic achievement was conducted in Hong Kong. Results of the research by C. McBride-Chang and L. Chang (1999) demonstrated that self-reliance and independence substantially impacted adolescent school performance. Similar results were obtained in this study. Children need to develop their own Self based on the de-idealisation of father and mother. Emotional autonomy is also directly correlated with the social adaptation of children when their parents show support.

As a result, this study coincides with the author's thoughts. Family relationships are vital in Chinese culture, where authoritarian parents and parental control are frequent phenomena symbolising care and love. In addition, children's affection is considered a fundamental feeling for building human relationships. N. Hill and D. F. Tyson (2009) point out that communication between parents and children at an intellectual and mature level is one of the most important factors influencing the achievements of adolescents. The logical process is crucial when parents can help students analyse their emotions and state at school. This increases trust and parents can have open conversations about their expectations and prospects with their children. Based on expectations, they could help adolescents think through possible ways to achieve goals. In addition, parents need to cultivate the desire for self-improvement in children. That is why family communication should positively influence the emotional sphere of an adolescent and prepare them for the educational process and future planning. It is important to properly encourage children to examine, overcome difficulties and make efforts to complete their education successfully.

## CONCLUSIONS

Thus, it can be concluded that personal autonomy consists of different types of autonomy, which are aimed at the development and maintenance of the identity of the individual. This independence helps to resist external pressure and adjust behaviour following the life plan. Adolescents' experience helps them develop personal autonomy, which implies that they can independently

determine their position in a specific life situation. The autonomy of an adolescent is their ability to make a conscious choice based on the reflection of their values, interests, and needs. The study examined the emotional autonomy of adolescents as one of the most critical factors in building life plans. It refers to emotions, personal feelings, and social connections.

This study indicated that the author's research substantially improved the understanding of the development of adolescents' emotional autonomy. A connection between the type of relationship with parents, the child's independence, and their self-determination was proven. Furthermore, a high level of autonomy and a favourable emotional environment in the family positively affect academic success in middle school and help to develop social adaptation skills. It was confirmed that the development of emotional autonomy in middle school students is closely related to family and parental support. The materials of the study are relevant for the scientific community, students of psychological faculties, cultural researchers, psychologists, teachers, educators, university teachers, and social workers who need to be aware of the aspects and stages of psychological maturation of an adolescent in the context of educational and cultural environment. In addition, the results of the study will be informative for parents who need to understand their child better and influence the creation of a harmonious personality with their own Self.

It is worth continuing the research and deepening it, prolonging the study of autonomy and its types based on psychological and pedagogical methods and approaches. The conducted study does not exhaust all aspects of this psychological problem and requires further consideration of such issues as types of families and their impact on the child's psyche; the importance of emotional intelligence in academic achievements; the creation of a favourable family atmosphere.

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