

Emotional Intelligence in School Children

A Blended Analysis of Parenting Styles and Parental Perceptions

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Abstract

Emotional intelligence (EI) helps school children identify feelings, interpret social cues, regulate reactions, and maintain constructive relationships. Parenting is one of the principal contexts in which these capacities are modeled and practiced, yet its influence cannot be understood only through adult reports. This article examines EI in relation to authoritative, authoritarian, permissive, and uninvolved parenting while giving particular attention to parental perceptions and their correspondence with children's experiences. Parents can report goals, routines, discipline, and perceived responsiveness; children provide information about how these behaviors are received and interpreted. Agreement may indicate a stable relational climate, whereas disagreement may reveal differences in expectations, communication, context, or emotional meaning. A blended analytical approach combines standardized child and parent measures with qualitative interviews to examine both statistical patterns and lived explanations. Evidence generally associates authoritative parenting with stronger emotional competence because warmth, predictable limits, explanation, and age-appropriate autonomy support emotion coaching and self-regulation. Harsh control, inconsistent boundaries, or emotional disengagement are more often related to poorer adjustment, although associations vary across cultures and family circumstances. The findings support multi-informant, culturally responsive assessment and coordinated family-school interventions. Longitudinal research is needed to clarify reciprocal influence and distinguish broad parenting styles from specific practices that can be changed.

Keywords: emotional intelligence, school children, parenting styles, parental perceptions, child perceptions, emotion socialization, blended analysis

Introduction

Children use emotional information throughout the school day. They interpret a teacher's tone, manage frustration during difficult work, decide how to respond to teasing, and repair relationships after disagreement. Emotional intelligence (EI) provides a framework for understanding these capacities. In the ability model, EI includes perceiving emotions, using emotional information to guide thought, understanding emotional meanings and changes, and regulating emotion in oneself and others (Mayer et al., 2004). These abilities are relevant to learning and peer relationships, but they develop within broader cognitive, social, and cultural systems.

The family is a central setting for emotional development because children repeatedly observe how adults express feelings, handle conflict, set limits, and respond to distress. Parenting style refers to the general relational climate surrounding these interactions, while parenting practices refer to specific behaviors used in

particular situations (Darling & Steinberg, 1993). The distinction prevents researchers from treating one act of discipline as a complete description of family life. A limit delivered calmly with explanation may carry a different emotional meaning from the same limit delivered with ridicule or threat.

Parental perceptions add an important but incomplete account. Parents know their intentions, values, household demands, and efforts that children may not see. Children know how parental behavior feels and how consistently it occurs from their position in the relationship. A blended analysis treats these reports as related sources of evidence rather than assuming that either is automatically correct. This article explains the links between parenting and EI, examines the meaning of agreement and discrepancy between reports, and proposes a quantitative and qualitative framework for integrated assessment.

Emotional Intelligence During the School Years

Emotional competence becomes more differentiated from middle childhood through adolescence. Children acquire a larger emotional vocabulary, recognize that people can experience mixed feelings, and learn rules about when emotions should be displayed. They also become better able to consider another person's perspective and select strategies such as problem solving, seeking support, or cognitive reappraisal. These skills support school readiness and classroom engagement because emotional regulation helps children attend, cooperate, persist, and request help appropriately (Denham, 2006). Difficulties in regulation can interfere with learning even when a child has adequate academic ability.

EI is assessed through several methods. Ability measures ask participants to solve emotion-related problems; the Mayer Salovey Caruso Emotional Intelligence Test (MSCEIT) represents this approach. Self-report measures such as the Trait Emotional Intelligence Questionnaire (TEIQue) assess perceived emotional tendencies. Performance and self-report scores should not be treated as interchangeable. A child may understand an effective response in a structured task but fail to use it during conflict. Another child may underestimate genuine competence. A sound study therefore selects a measure appropriate to age and research purpose and explains whether it assesses ability, self-perception, or both.

Parenting Styles as Emotional Learning Environments

Baumrind (1967) described authoritative, authoritarian, and permissive parenting. Maccoby and Martin (1983) later organized the framework around responsiveness and demandingness and added an uninvolved pattern. Authoritative parenting combines warmth with clear, developmentally appropriate expectations. Authoritarian parenting emphasizes obedience and control while offering less responsiveness. Permissive parenting is responsive but provides limited structure, and uninvolved parenting is low in both responsiveness and demandingness. These categories summarize tendencies rather than fixed family identities, and parents may behave differently across children, situations, and stages of development.

Each style creates different opportunities for emotional learning. Responsive parents notice distress and help children connect bodily cues, labels, causes, and possible responses. Clear limits allow children to practice tolerating disappointment without losing a sense of security. Emotion socialization also occurs through parental reactions, family discussion, and adults' own emotional expression (Eisenberg et al., 1998). Morris et al. (2007) describe three related pathways: observation of parents, direct parenting practices, and the broader emotional climate of the family. These pathways help explain why style can affect EI even when parents do not deliberately teach emotional skills.

How Parenting Styles Relate to Emotional Intelligence

Authoritative Parenting

Authoritative parenting is generally associated with stronger emotional and social adjustment. Warmth encourages children to disclose concerns, while predictable expectations provide a stable setting for learning self-control. Explanations help children understand the effects of behavior, and choices within boundaries allow them to practice judgment. Meta-analytic evidence links authoritative dimensions with better academic achievement, although effect sizes differ according to culture, age, and measurement method (Pinquart, 2016). Research among adolescents in rural Karnataka also identified associations between perceived parenting styles and EI, showing the relevance of the child's interpretation in an Indian context (George et al., 2017). These results describe probabilities rather than outcomes guaranteed by a particular label.

Authoritarian Permissive and Uninvolved Parenting

Authoritarian parenting may produce immediate compliance, but harsh or psychologically controlling methods can restrict emotional disclosure. Children who expect criticism may hide fear or sadness instead of seeking help and learning how to regulate it. This does not mean that all firm parenting is harmful. Expectations may express protection, duty, or care in some cultural contexts. The likely effect depends on the combination of control with warmth, explanation, consistency, and perceived legitimacy. Researchers must therefore measure parenting dimensions as well as broad categories.

Permissive homes may offer affection and acceptance, yet inconsistent boundaries can reduce practice in frustration tolerance and delayed gratification. In uninvolved environments, limited monitoring and emotional availability may restrict modeling, conversation, and co-regulation. A meta-analysis linked harshness, low warmth, and inconsistent control with more externalizing problems, while warmth and appropriate behavioral control were generally protective (Pinquart, 2017). However, family adversity may contribute to both parenting behavior and child outcomes. Supportive teachers, relatives, peers, and community programs can also compensate for difficulties within the home.

The Meaning of Parental Perceptions

Parents interpret their behavior through personal values, stressors, and intentions. A parent may report high responsiveness because food, transport, schooling, and safety needs are reliably provided. The child may define responsiveness more narrowly through listening, emotional availability, or freedom to speak. Parents may also judge strictness against the practices common in their community, while children compare rules with those of peers. Instruments such as the Parental Authority Questionnaire (PAQ) or Parental Bonding Instrument (PBI) can organize these perceptions, but scores remain reports from a position within the relationship rather than objective recordings of every interaction.

Parental perceptions still offer information that a child report cannot provide. Adults can describe the reasons for rules, changes in behavior over time, caregiver coordination, and pressures that shape family routines. Their accounts can identify deliberate emotion coaching that a child does not recognize as instruction. At the same time, social desirability and self-protective interpretation may influence reporting. A parent may remember the usual approach, while a child remembers intense episodes. The most defensible analysis preserves both accounts and asks what each reveals about the parent child relationship (PCR).

Agreement and Discrepancy Between Informants

Agreement between parent and child ratings may indicate that warmth, structure, or conflict is stable and visible across situations. It can also suggest shared language and expectations. Disagreement is equally informative. A parent may view frequent checking as support, while the child experiences it as mistrust. Low agreement may reflect different observation periods, settings, emotional salience, or developmental standards. De Los Reyes and Kazdin (2005) argue that informant discrepancies can arise from meaningful differences in perspective and context rather than measurement error alone.

Multi-informant assessment improves understanding when researchers examine how reports converge and diverge. A broad review concluded that different informants provide incrementally useful information about child and adolescent mental health (De Los Reyes et al., 2015). For EI research, parental ratings may reflect behavior at home, while children describe internal experiences and teachers observe peer and classroom behavior. Combining reports into one average can erase this structure. Separate scores, agreement indices, and discrepancy profiles allow the analysis to identify when parental intentions and children's experiences do not align.

A Blended Framework for Research

A sequential explanatory design can integrate quantitative and qualitative evidence. In the first phase, children complete an age-appropriate EI assessment and perceived-parenting measure. Parents independently report parenting dimensions, emotional communication, and family practices. The analysis should include relevant variables such as age, gender, family structure, socioeconomic status (SES), caregiver stress, and school context. Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) can test whether measures represent the intended constructs in the study population. Regression or structural equation modeling (SEM) may examine associations, indirect pathways through emotion coaching, and moderation by age or cultural setting.

The qualitative phase can select families who represent distinct quantitative patterns: high agreement on authoritative parenting, shared reports of low responsiveness, or marked parent-child discrepancy. Separate semi-structured interviews reduce pressure to endorse the other person's account. Questions can explore a recent conflict, the meaning of rules, how emotions are discussed, what support looks like, and how repair occurs after disagreement. The analysis should compare themes across agreement groups and then integrate them with the statistical findings. Qualitative evidence may confirm a pattern, explain why it occurs, or show that a survey item carries a different cultural meaning.

Ethical procedures require parental consent, child assent, privacy, and a clear safeguarding pathway. Children should know that participation is voluntary and that ordinary responses will not be reported to parents individually. Researchers must nevertheless explain the limits of confidentiality when a child discloses abuse, self-harm, or serious danger. Translation and cognitive interviewing are important when instruments are adapted for another language. Reliability, validity, and measurement equivalence should be examined rather than assumed from use in a different population.

Cultural and Contextual Interpretation

Parenting occurs within cultural beliefs about respect, autonomy, family obligation, and safety. The same level of demandingness may carry different meanings when children perceive it as legitimate care rather than rejection. Economic pressure, crowded housing, caregiver illness, and unsafe neighborhoods may also constrain choices that questionnaires classify as low involvement or high control. A culturally responsive study avoids ranking families against one universal behavioral script. It examines warmth and structure alongside the reasons, resources, and meanings that surround them.

Bidirectional influence also requires attention. A child's temperament, disability, school difficulties, or emotional reactivity can alter parental behavior. Repeated conflict may increase control, while a child's openness may invite more discussion. Cross-sectional correlations cannot determine which process came first. Longitudinal designs can examine change over time, and observational data can show how emotions are managed during actual interactions. Even then, causal conclusions require caution because unmeasured family and community conditions may affect both parenting and EI.

Implications for Families and Schools

Intervention should focus on modifiable practices rather than assigning parents a fixed type. Useful practices include acknowledging feelings, distinguishing emotion from harmful behavior, explaining limits briefly, offering developmentally appropriate choices, and repairing communication after conflict. Parents can model regulation by naming a feeling and demonstrating a pause before responding. Guidance should recognize workload, financial strain, mental health, and cultural expectations so that recommendations remain realistic. When parent and child perceptions differ, facilitated discussion can clarify intention and impact without presuming that one report invalidates the other.

Schools can extend emotional learning through social and emotional learning (SEL), supportive classroom management, and shared language for identifying feelings and choosing responses. Studies of the RULER approach report improvements in classroom emotional climate and aspects of competence and academic performance (Brackett et al., 2012; Rivers et al., 2013). School counselors and nurses can invite both child and parent perspectives when concerns arise, while avoiding diagnostic conclusions from a single questionnaire. Coordinated support is most useful when families and schools agree on a small number of observable emotional and behavioral goals.

Limitations and Future Research

Current evidence is limited by cross-sectional designs, convenience samples, self-report bias, and inconsistent definitions of EI. When the same child rates both parenting and emotional competence, common-method variance may inflate associations. Studies may also overrepresent mothers and underrepresent fathers, grandparents, and other caregivers. Future research should combine ability tests, self-reports, behavioral observation, and teacher reports; include diverse caregivers; test measurement equivalence; and follow families across developmental transitions. Intervention trials should identify whether changes in specific practices, such as emotion coaching or conflict repair, produce measurable improvement in children's emotional abilities.

Conclusion

EI develops through repeated emotional experiences in families, schools, and peer groups. Parenting style contributes to this development by shaping the warmth, structure, communication, and autonomy surrounding daily interactions. Authoritative patterns are generally associated with stronger emotional competence, while harsh, inconsistent, or disengaged patterns more often accompany difficulty. These associations remain culturally situated, reciprocal, and influenced by family resources. Parental perceptions explain intentions and constraints; children's reports explain how parenting is experienced. A blended analysis preserves both forms of evidence and uses their agreement or discrepancy to understand the relationship more accurately. This approach supports research and practice that strengthen specific family interactions rather than reducing parents and children to fixed categories.

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