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The Relationship Between Empowering Parenting and Health-Oriented Academic Lifestyle: The Mediating Role of Academic Parenting Behaviors

Nafiseh Sadat Yousefi¹, Hossein Pourshahriar^{2*}, Ahmadreza Kiani³, Omid Shokri⁴

¹ MA, Department of Counseling, Shahid Beheshti University, Tehran, Iran.

² Associate Professor, Department of Counseling, Shahid Beheshti University, Tehran, Iran.

³ Associate Professor, Department of Psychology, Shahid Beheshti University, Tehran, Iran.

⁴ Assistant Professor, Department of Psychology, Shahid Beheshti University, Tehran, Iran.

* Corresponding author email address: h_pourshahriar@sbu.ac.ir

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: The objective of this study was to test a hypothesized mediation model in which academic parenting mediates the relationship between empowering parenting and health-oriented academic lifestyle behaviors.

Methods and Materials: In this correlational study, 500 adolescents (250 girls and 250 boys) aged 16 to 18 years, selected through convenience sampling, completed the Empowering Parenting Scale, the Health-Oriented Academic Lifestyle Behavior Questionnaire, and the Academic Parenting Scale. To test the hypothesized causal model involving partial mediation, path analysis using a model-fitting approach was employed.

Findings: The results of the statistical analysis indicated that the hypothesized model demonstrated a good fit with the data. All path coefficients between the observed variables were statistically significant, except for the direct path coefficient from parental warmth and parental support variables to the inhibitory behaviors of health-oriented academic lifestyle, and the direct path coefficient from psychological control to the facilitative behaviors of such lifestyle. Empowering parenting and academic parenting together explained 53% and 34% of the variance in facilitative and inhibitory academic lifestyle behaviors, respectively.

Conclusion: The findings, emphasizing the mediating role of academic parenting in the relationship between empowering parenting and health-oriented academic lifestyle behaviors, suggest that one of the conceptual paths to understanding adolescents' productive/unproductive achievement-oriented behaviors in achievement contexts can be realized through empowering parenting as a non-contextual approach in the domain of parenting, when integrated with academic parenting as a contextual approach for analyzing parenting styles.

Keywords: Empowering parenting; Academic parenting; Academic lifestyle; Adolescents.

1. Introduction

Empowering parenting is an emerging dimension of positive parenting, developed by Waters (2015a) under the influence of the nascent positive psychology movement. Empowering parenting, by emphasizing the awareness of children's and adolescents' strengths and encouraging their development, consists of two components: the awareness component and the application component of empowering parenting (Waters et al., 2022; Waters et al., 2021; Waters & Johnstone, 2022; Waters, Loton, Grace, et al., 2019; Waters, Loton, & Jach, 2019). In Waters' conceptual framework (2015a, 2015b), the parental awareness component refers to the parent's knowledge of their child's strengths (Waters, 2015a, 2015b), while the application component pertains to motivating children and adolescents to utilize these strengths and offering opportunities to actualize them (Arslan, 2024; Arslan et al., 2022). Waters (2017) argues that while authoritative rational parenting—based on a deficit-focused framework—is defensible in terms of its behavioral features and merits, empowering parenting, with its departure from the deficit-based approach and its roots in the positive psychology movement, enjoys broader acceptance. Although both authoritative rational parenting and empowering parenting involve emotional support and warmth, the former emphasizes correcting children's deficiencies, whereas the latter focuses on nurturing their strengths (Gu et al., 2024; Waters et al., 2022; Waters & Johnstone, 2022).

A review of the literature reveals that with the emergence of the positive education approach—within the context of functional characteristics of positive constructs in education and learning—researchers have increasingly concentrated on the behavioral characteristics of empowering parenting (Guo et al., 2021). In this regard, scholars have drawn upon Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory (1999), emphasizing the distinctiveness of various contextual levels. At the microsystem level, they underscore the role of parenting context in explaining academic engagement among children and adolescents (Burgdorf et al., 2022). The results of multiple studies point to the overlapping scope of empowering parenting with domains such as perseverance, academic engagement, and enhanced academic performance (Amani et al., 2020; Arslan, 2024; Arslan et al., 2022), psychological resilience, mental fortitude, and happiness (Ardehsir Larijani et al., 2021), emotional-social well-being and school connectedness (Arslan et al., 2022), self-efficacy beliefs and psychological distress, post-traumatic growth,

and subjective well-being (Zavala et al., 2022). These findings further support the functional features of the parenting context in various aspects of adolescents' psychosocial lives. Accordingly, following the studies of Waters et al. (2021) and Waters et al. (2019), the central role of the parenting context in explaining motivational correlates of adolescents' academic functioning is emphasized (Waters et al., 2021; Waters, Loton, Grace, et al., 2019).

One emerging motivational construct identified in the literature is health-oriented academic lifestyle behaviors (Salehzadeh et al., 2017a, 2017b). Salehzadeh and colleagues (2017a, 2017b), inspired by leading perspectives on contemporary achievement motivation, were the first to distinguish between facilitative and inhibitory aspects of learners' achievement-oriented efforts. In their conceptual system, constructs such as academic resilience, academic optimism, academic vitality, mastery goal-setting, and self-efficacy beliefs are considered facilitative motivational factors, while learned helplessness, withdrawal from effort, self-handicapping, procrastination, maladaptive perfectionism, and academic dishonesty are viewed as inhibitory motivational factors (Salehzadeh et al., 2017a, 2017b). Existing evidence suggests that the building blocks of motivational facilitators are adjacent to domains such as academic well-being, positive achievement emotions, and self-empowering evaluations, thereby evoking adaptive aspects of academic life. Conversely, inhibitory motivational components are aligned with domains such as negative achievement emotions, emotional dysregulation, and self-disabling interpretations, contributing to the evocation of maladaptive academic functioning (Ataei et al., 2023; Laki et al., 2018; Rashidipour et al., 2023; Sufi et al., 2019).

The broad empirical support for the role of empowering parenting—as a non-contextual and setting-independent approach—in explaining variance in diverse correlates of adolescent academic functioning has sparked methodical interest in identifying the causal mechanisms that explain how and why empowering parenting is linked to motivational outcomes in achievement contexts (Gurland & Grolnick, 2024). Therefore, in alignment with the methodological logic of causal mediation analysis (Wu & Zumbo, 2008), it becomes necessary to ask: What interpretive mechanisms explain the causal link between empowering parenting and health-oriented academic lifestyle behaviors in adolescents?

While earlier research on empowering parenting often approached the phenomenon from a non-contextual lens, contemporary demands stemming from variation across parenting contexts and developmental outcomes have shifted the focus toward contextualized understanding. This shift is driven by both the need to distinguish parenting styles across contexts and the requirement to explore developmental consequences specific to those contexts (Wang et al., 2022). Accordingly, Wang and colleagues (2022), inspired by Self-Determination Theory (Deci, 2008), introduced the concept of academic parenting. Self-Determination Theory posits that autonomy-supportive parenting, as opposed to controlling parenting, enhances intrinsic motivation and autonomous forms of extrinsic motivation by fulfilling basic psychological needs for competence, relatedness, and autonomy in children and adolescents (Ryan & Deci, 2020).

In elaborating the conceptual scope of academic parenting, Wang et al. (2022) emphasize a parental engagement model, highlighting the significance of parent–child interactions and parenting behaviors within the context of children’s academic pursuits. Their proposed model identifies four distinct parenting profiles: autonomy-supportive parent, behavioral-controlling parent, psychologically controlling parent, and structured parent (Wang et al., 2022). Within this framework, psychological control involves manipulating the child’s emotional world through guilt induction, power assertion, and emotional withdrawal. In contrast, behavioral control entails establishing rules and providing guidance-appropriate opportunities for the child (Gu et al., 2024; Guo et al., 2021).

In a study by Khodaei and Shokri (2023), significant positive correlations were observed between facets of academic parenting—such as parental warmth, behavioral control, and parental support (excluding psychological control)—with empowering parenting and components of parental wisdom, including reflective thinking, perspective-taking, emotional regulation, and learning from life experiences. Additionally, they found that psychological control was negatively correlated with both empowering parenting and multiple aspects of parental wisdom (Khodaei & Shokri, 2023).

Further, Wang et al. (2022) empirically supported the explanatory power of academic parenting by reporting positive correlations between parental warmth, behavioral control, and autonomy support with parental academic engagement, children’s mastery-oriented academic behaviors, and academic performance. Conversely,

psychological control negatively correlated with academic engagement and performance (Wang et al., 2022).

Thus, current evidence suggests that while empowering parenting, as a non-contextual approach, holds potential in explaining adolescents’ differentiated academic behaviors, a contextual understanding of its interpretive mechanisms is necessary. This is especially pertinent when examining its causal relationship with facilitative and inhibitory academic lifestyle behaviors. Accordingly, the mediating role of academic parenting becomes central in clarifying how empowering parenting exerts influence within educational contexts. Therefore, this study aims to test the mediating role of academic parenting in the relationship between empowering parenting and adolescents’ productive and unproductive motivational behaviors.

2. Methods and Materials

2.1. Study Design and Participants

In this correlational study, a total of 500 adolescents (250 boys and 250 girls) from the second stage of secondary education in District 11 of the Tehran Department of Education participated. The male participants had a mean age of 16.87 years ($SD = 0.95$; range = 16–18), and the female participants had a mean age of 16.94 years ($SD = 1.06$; range = 16–18). Participants were selected using convenience sampling. Among them, 170 students (34%) were in 10th grade, 177 students (35%) in 11th grade, and 153 students (31%) in 12th grade. Regarding academic streams, 200 students (40%) were in the humanities track, 168 students (34%) in natural sciences, and 132 students (26%) in mathematics.

Following Kline’s (2015) recommendation for causal modeling approaches such as structural equation modeling and path analysis with model-fitting, sample size estimation was based on a ratio of 18 participants per parameter. The proposed model involved 14 parameters, and thus, 18 participants per parameter were selected within each gender group. The key inclusion criterion was current enrollment in secondary education (grades 10–12) in District 11 of Tehran. The main exclusion criterion was failure to respond to more than 5% of items on the measurement instruments. No participants were excluded during data screening.

2.2. Measures

Health-Promoting and Inhibiting Academic Lifestyle Behavior Questionnaire: This questionnaire, developed by

Salehzadeh et al. (2017), is based on contemporary achievement motivation theories and designed to assess facilitative and inhibitive behaviors related to a health-oriented academic lifestyle. The facilitative section consists of 48 items covering five subscales: academic optimism, academic engagement, mastery goal orientation, academic vitality, and academic resilience. The inhibitive section includes 76 items with subscales for learned helplessness, help-seeking avoidance, passive-aggressive behavior, academic procrastination, self-handicapping, effort avoidance, academic dishonesty, and maladaptive perfectionism. Items are rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Internal consistency coefficients reported by Salehzadeh et al. (2017) ranged from .85 to .93 for facilitative subscales and from .90 to .96 for inhibitive subscales (Salehzadeh et al., 2017a). In the present study, Cronbach's alpha was .93 for facilitative behaviors and .91 for inhibitive behaviors.

Empowering Parenting Scale: This 14-item scale, developed by Jack et al. (2018) based on Waters' (2015a, 2015b) conceptualization of empowering parenting, includes two 7-item subscales: awareness of strengths and use of strengths. Items are rated on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). Previous studies have confirmed the validity and reliability of this scale (Jack et al., 2018; Ardeshtir Larijani et al., 2021). In Jack et al.'s (2018) study, internal consistency for both subscales was .95. In Ardeshtir Larijani et al. (2021), the reliability coefficients for both subscales were .94. In the current study, the Cronbach's alpha for the entire scale was .95.

Academic Parenting Scale: Wang and colleagues (2022), drawing on Self-Determination Theory (Deci, 2008; Ryan & Deci, 2020), developed the academic parenting construct comprising four dimensions: autonomy-supportive parenting, behavioral control, psychological control, and structured parenting. Items are rated on a 4-point Likert

scale. Confirmatory factor analysis by Wang et al. (2022) supported the first-order four-factor structure. Reported internal consistency coefficients for subscales ranged from .84 to .93 (Wang et al., 2022). In a validation study by Khodaei and Shokri (2023), confirmatory factor analysis confirmed a structure with four dimensions: parental warmth, behavioral control, psychological control, and parental support. Moreover, convergent validity was supported by correlations between these dimensions and empowering parenting as well as components of parental wisdom. Cronbach's alphas for these subscales were .80, .77, .84, and .79, respectively (Khodaei & Shokri, 2023). In the present study, internal consistency coefficients using Cronbach's alpha were .83 (parental warmth), .80 (behavioral control), .86 (psychological control), and .78 (parental support), supporting the reliability of the Persian version.

2.3. Data Analysis

Data analysis in this study was conducted using path analysis with a model-fitting approach to examine the hypothesized mediation model. Prior to model testing, assumptions including univariate normality (via skewness and kurtosis), normality of residuals (via standardized normal probability plots), multicollinearity (using tolerance and variance inflation factor), and homoscedasticity (via scatterplots of standardized predicted values and errors) were assessed and met. Bootstrapping procedures were employed to test the statistical significance of indirect effects within the mediation model.

3. Findings and Results

Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics for the study variables, including empowering parenting, academic parenting, and productive/unproductive motivational behaviors.

Table 1

Descriptive statistics: Means, standard deviations, skewness, and kurtosis for study variables

Variable	Mean	Standard Deviation	Skewness	Kurtosis
Empowering Parenting	31.26	10.42	0.34	-0.42
Parental Warmth	22.58	4.52	-0.17	-0.33
Behavioral Control Parenting	15.05	2.87	0.08	-0.25
Psychological Control Parenting	22.95	5.90	0.21	-0.47
Parental Support	19.50	3.22	0.07	-0.30
Health-Oriented Facilitative Academic Lifestyle Behaviors	96.44	18.82	-0.25	-0.24
Health-Oriented Inhibitive Academic Lifestyle Behaviors	59.07	19.10	0.36	-0.15

Table 2 displays the correlation matrix among the study variables. The results indicate that empowering parenting is positively and significantly correlated with the subscales of parental warmth, behavioral control, parental support, and facilitative health-oriented academic lifestyle behaviors, and negatively and significantly correlated with psychological control and inhibitive academic lifestyle behaviors.

Table 2

Correlation matrix of study variables

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Empowering Parenting	1						
2. Parental Warmth	.67	1					
3. Behavioral Control Parenting	.47	.37	1				
4. Psychological Control Parenting	-.45	-.34	-.29	1			
5. Parental Support	.66	.60	.36	-.33	1		
6. Facilitative Academic Behaviors	.56	.38	.64	-.34	.47	1	
7. Inhibitive Academic Behaviors	-.54	-.39	-.36	.37	-.39	-.54	1

Before applying the path analysis using the model-fitting approach, data screening was conducted in accordance with the guidelines of Kline (2015) and Meyers, Gamst, and Guarino (2016). The assumptions tested and confirmed included univariate normality based on skewness and kurtosis statistics, normality of residuals through standardized normal probability plots for facilitative/inhibitive academic lifestyle behaviors, multicollinearity via tolerance and variance inflation factors (VIF), and homoscedasticity using standardized scatterplots of predicted values and errors for the dependent variables.

To evaluate the hypothesized mediation model in which academic parenting mediates the relationship between empowering parenting and health-oriented academic lifestyle behaviors in adolescents, path analysis with a model-fitting approach was employed. Figure 1 illustrates the tested mediation model linking empowering parenting to facilitative and inhibitive academic lifestyle behaviors through academic parenting dimensions.

Model fit indices for the proposed model in adolescents were as follows: $\chi^2 = 9.87$, $\chi^2/df = 1.98$, CFI = .997, GFI = .994, AGFI = .970, and RMSEA = .044, indicating a good fit between the model and the data based on criteria by Meyers et al. (2016).

As depicted in Figure 1, the model explained 45% of the variance in parental warmth, 22% in behavioral control, 49%

Additionally, parental warmth, behavioral control, and parental support were positively and significantly correlated with facilitative motivational behaviors and negatively with inhibitive ones. In contrast, psychological control was negatively correlated with facilitative motivational behaviors and positively with inhibitive ones.

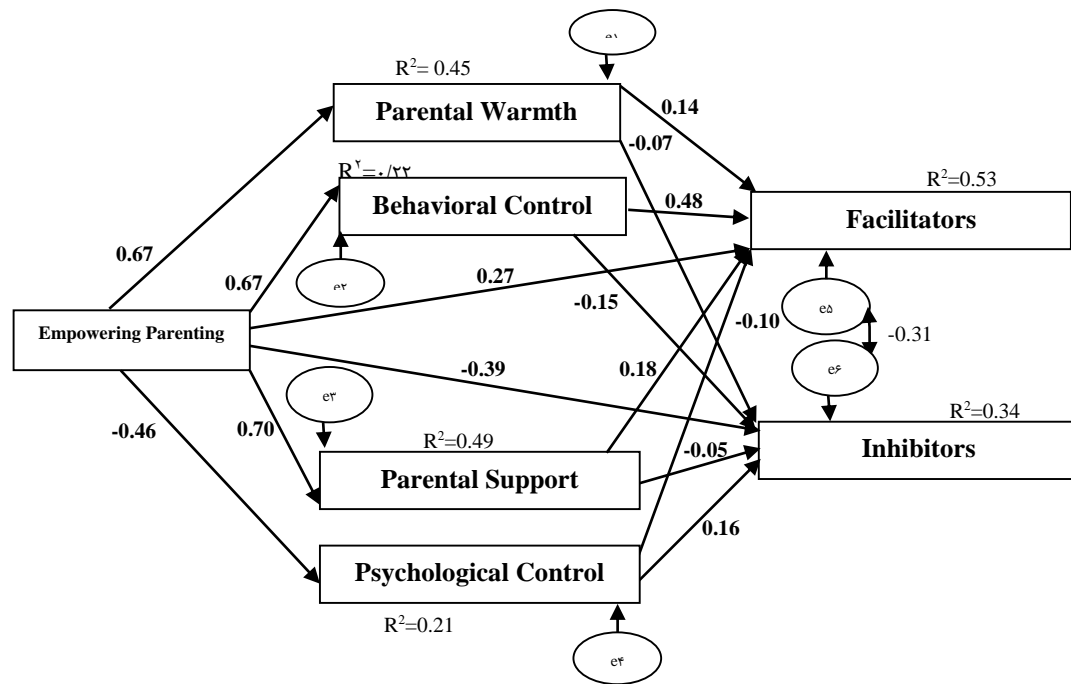
in parental support, and 21% in psychological control through empowering parenting. Furthermore, the model accounted for 17% of the variance in facilitative academic lifestyle behaviors and 22% of the variance in inhibitive academic lifestyle behaviors via empowering parenting and the subdimensions of academic parenting, including parental warmth, behavioral control, parental support, and psychological control.

In the hypothesized partial mediation model, all path coefficients were statistically significant ($p < .05$), except for the direct effect of parental warmth and parental support on inhibitive academic lifestyle behaviors and the direct effect of psychological control on facilitative academic lifestyle behaviors.

To test the statistical significance of the indirect effects of empowering parenting on facilitative/inhibitive academic lifestyle behaviors, the bootstrap method was used. The indirect effects of empowering parenting through parental warmth were .10 and -.07, respectively, both statistically significant ($p < .05$). The indirect effects through behavioral control were .23 and -.07, also significant ($p < .05$). The indirect effects through parental support were .13 and -.06, which were significant ($p < .05$). However, the indirect effects through psychological control were .06 and -.07, which were not statistically significant ($p > .05$).

Figure 1

Path diagram of the partial mediation model in adolescents



4. Discussion and Conclusion

This study, grounded in the ecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1999), aimed to investigate distinctions in health-oriented academic lifestyle behaviors (facilitative and inhibitive) among adolescents through empowering parenting as an emerging approach inspired by the positive psychology movement, with particular emphasis on the mediating role of perceptions of academic parenting. In essence, the researchers not only focused on the conceptual model of empowering parenting as one of the most current non-contextual approaches in the parenting domain but also prioritized a contextual orientation by incorporating academic parenting to explain adaptive and maladaptive motivational profiles of learners. This dual perspective sought to realistically uncover explanatory mechanisms linking empowering parenting to motivational outcomes in adolescence. Such an integrative approach potentially enhances the interpretive capacity of empowering parenting in adolescents' psychosocial domains by anchoring it within context-based mechanisms.

Educational scholars in recent years have increasingly prioritized the need to contextualize parenting by distinguishing demands across different settings and understanding the developmental outcomes of parenting styles in diverse environments. Accordingly, investigating the multifaceted outcomes of empowering parenting—both academic and non-academic—through contextual mechanisms enables deeper insights into similarities or

differences in its functional attributes within the broad geography of adolescent psychological life (Jabali & Ayyoub, 2024).

Consistent with prior studies (Ardeshir Larijani et al., 2021; Ataei et al., 2023; Sagkal, 2019; Sagkal & Özdemir, 2019), the present research favors empowering parenting—rooted in the positive psychology movement—as a progression beyond deficit-oriented approaches in the parenting domain. Additionally, aligned with the ecological systems theory, the analysis of behavioral characteristics as identifiers of the microsystem level, especially regarding the parenting context, was found crucial in predicting adolescents' motivational profiles. Results also affirmed, in line with Self-Determination Theory, that at the microsystem level, parents' tendencies to fulfill their children's basic psychological needs—while avoiding excessive control or over-involvement—play a pivotal role in fostering adolescents' responsible pursuit of academic achievement (Kerns et al., 2024).

Studies show that such parents refrain from authoritarian imposition, seek to see the world from their child's perspective, actively listen to their voice, avoid solving problems for the child during stressful situations, and refrain from judgmental or overly evaluative feedback in the face of failure (Lan & Ma, 2024; Rodríguez-Meirinhos et al., 2021). These behaviors cultivate a developmental orientation in parenting that prioritizes transformational demands over narrow, quantitative expectations (Lee et al., 2024; Ma et al., 2024). Furthermore, empowering parenting, in proximity to concepts such as hopeful parenting and parental wisdom,

and through mechanisms like parental self-care, assertive discipline, realistic expectations, and the creation of a secure environment, plays a broad role in fostering adolescents' psychological capital and, more specifically, in enhancing motivational functioning in both academic and non-academic contexts (Acet & Oliver, 2023).

The findings of this study also provide compelling evidence supporting the mediating role of academic parenting in the causal relationship between empowering parenting and health-oriented academic lifestyle behaviors. These findings align with previous studies (Sagkal, 2019; Sagkal & Özdemir, 2019; Waters, Loton, Grace, et al., 2019; Waters, Loton, & Jach, 2019), which emphasize the need to explore the causal mechanisms linking empowering parenting to its various outcomes. One such explanatory pathway points to *parental support*, where the concept of empowerment reflects the notion that supportive experiences—helping adolescents adaptively face life events and manage emotional and physiological arousal—serve as rich informational sources that foster self-belief and empowerment. Through evoking self-efficacy beliefs, supportive parenting experiences contribute directly to adolescent empowerment.

In the nurturance model, the foundational assumption is that supportive experiences, especially from significant others such as parents, play an essential role as situational coping resources that extend or cultivate adolescents' psychological capital (Moller et al., 2024). Other scholars, in analyzing the functional importance of positive parenting in the academic context, underscore related subcomponents under the broader framework of self-regulation, including self-efficacy, self-management, personal agency, problem-solving, and self-determination (Ryan et al., 2024; Wang et al., 2022).

The effort to understand academic parenting outcomes through the empowering parenting lens further highlights the interpretive value of compassionate parenting. This explanatory pathway focuses on parenting behaviors that help adolescents respond to challenging situations by promoting self-compassion, accepting inevitable setbacks, avoiding over-identification with failure, and resisting excessive self-criticism. Compassionate parenting—by fostering a secure environment, adopting a pluralistic mindset, and avoiding judgmental attitudes within the parent-child relationship—reduces adolescents' exposure to turbulent or self-/other-damaging experiences. Researchers suggest that compassionate parenting, by meeting adolescents' core psychological needs, promotes moral

foundations such as care, commitment, and empathetic responsiveness in interpersonal interactions.

Aligned with Self-Determination Theory (Deci, 2008; Ryan & Deci, 2020), the fulfillment of these psychological needs—and avoidance of disempowering, overly controlling practices—inevitably leads to improvements in motivational profiles, including academic resilience, vitality, mastery goal setting, and academic optimism (Hoang et al., 2024). Moreover, the concept of mindful parenting, especially when embedded in emotional regulation practices, not only improves parent-child relationships but also equips adolescents with essential 21st-century skills (Schaff et al., 2024; Tong et al., 2024; Wang et al., 2022).

Additionally, Waters et al. (2019), Sarkhabi & Midagh (2019), and Waters & Johnston (2022) demonstrate that when parents nurture their children's strengths, they activate internal resources and energy reserves, enabling adolescents to persist in pursuing their best personal goals. These goals—growth-oriented, personally significant, and challenge-driven—are prioritized by adolescents for achieving personal development, especially in academic endeavors. The establishment of such mastery-focused, personalized goals plays a decisive role in adolescents' motivational imagery. Researchers emphasize that setting attainable and challenging personal goals—particularly within the framework of empowering academic parenting—leads to more engaging, enjoyable learning, deeper processing, increased flow and academic engagement, stronger relationships with teachers, parents, and peers, and enhanced self-satisfaction (Ho & Chen, 2022; Shameli et al., 2024).

While the contextual analysis of parenting in adolescents' academic development was central in this study, a few limitations must be noted. First, although mediation analysis offers a theoretically grounded approach for testing causal models, the cross-sectional design limits the strength of causal inference. A longitudinal design would yield stronger causal conclusions. Second, participants were selected non-randomly from one educational district in Tehran, which restricts the generalizability of findings. Third, although data were collected from both boys and girls, gender invariance in the model was not tested. Future research should consider a moderated mediation model rather than a simple mediation model to enhance the interpretive power of the framework.

In conclusion, the findings—highlighting the mediating role of academic parenting in the relationship between empowering parenting and health-oriented academic lifestyle behaviors—suggest that one pathway to

understanding productive or unproductive achievement-oriented behaviors in adolescents involves situating empowering parenting as a non-contextual construct and integrating it with academic parenting as a contextual approach. In other words, this study demonstrates that the diverse outcomes of empowering parenting can be better understood by adopting a context-sensitive framework through the lens of academic parenting.

Authors' Contributions

All authors significantly contributed to this study.

Declaration

In order to correct and improve the academic writing of our paper, we have used the language model ChatGPT.

Transparency Statement

Data are available for research purposes upon reasonable request to the corresponding author.

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Declaration of Interest

The authors report no conflict of interest.

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Ethical Considerations

In this study, to observe ethical considerations, participants were informed about the goals and importance of the research before the start of the interview and participated in the research with informed consent.

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