The Influence of Parental Autonomy Support on Adolescent Academic Achievement: A Moderated Mediation Model

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Abstract. Based on the theories of ecosystem and self-determination, a questionnaire survey was conducted among 1,372 students from four grades (7th to 10th) in three middle schools in Chengdu, Xi'an, and Hangzhou. The study aimed to investigate the relationship between parental autonomy support and adolescents' academic performance, as well as the mediating role of metacognition and the moderating effect of grade level. The results revealed the following: 1. Parental autonomy support significantly and positively predicted adolescents' academic performance; 2. Metacognition played a significant mediating role in the relationship between parental autonomy support and adolescents' academic performance; 3. Grade level moderated the first half of the mediation model, specifically the impact of parental autonomy support on adolescents' metacognition. This study constructed a theoretical model that explores the combined influence of environmental factors (parental autonomy support) and individual factors (metacognition) on academic performance. It provides a theoretical basis and empirical support for gaining a deeper understanding of the underlying mechanisms by which parental autonomy support affects academic performance and offers insights for enhancing adolescents' academic achievement.

Keywords: Parental autonomy support; Metacognition; Academic performance; Adolescents; Grade; Moderated mediation effect.

1. Introduction

Academic performance is one of the most extensively studied variables in the field of education[1] and a matter of shared concern among students, parents, and teachers. It holds a significant position in the development of adolescents, reflecting not only their learning performance during school years but also exerting a substantial influence on their future educational attainment, career achievements, and income levels[2-4]. In recent years, researchers have examined the relationship between academic performance and various factors from both environmental perspectives, such as economic conditions, social status, and parental involvement[5], as well as individual factors, including learning motivation[6], intelligence[7], self-regulation[8], and self-control[9]. These studies have provided empirical evidence demonstrating the impact of these factors on academic performance. The research on academic performance and its related influencing factors has garnered widespread attention from various sectors of society[10]. Therefore, this study aims to explore the significant factors influencing academic performance in adolescents from both environmental and individual perspectives and provide empirical support for relevant theories.

Based on the Ecological Systems Theory, an individual's development is influenced by their environment and is the result of interactions with the environment[11]. In light of this theory, parental autonomy support is an important environmental factor that significantly impacts academic performance[12-14]. Parental autonomy support refers to parenting behaviors perceived by children (adolescents) as promoting their autonomous development and respecting and acknowledging their perspectives and feelings[15]. However, previous research on adolescence has focused more on the relationship between teacher support, peer support, and academic performance. It suggests that as

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Based on the Self-Determination Theory, when individuals are provided with opportunities for autonomy in their environment, they gradually develop self-evaluation and self-management abilities. At the core of these abilities is metacognition, which is closely related to academic performance. Metacognition refers to one's awareness and understanding of cognitive processes and outcomes and the active monitoring and regulation of these processes [22,23]. Metacognition is integral to learning strategies, and its impact on adolescent academic performance has received considerable attention. Students with higher levels of metacognition are more likely to achieve better academic performance. The Programmer for International Student Assessment (PISA), the largest international academic achievement test, has conducted surveys on students' metacognitive strategies. After analyzing the reading, mathematics, and science achievements of students from 34 OECD countries, the research found that metacognitive strategies had the greatest impact on students' academic performance[24,25]. The process of using metacognitive strategies by adolescents involves self-evaluation and self-management of cognition[26]. Therefore, from the perspective of self-determination theory, the active use of metacognitive strategies by adolescents is a form of self-determined behavior, and higher levels of metacognition are closely associated with an environment of autonomy support[27]. Previous research supports the influence of parental involvement on adolescent metacognitive strategies, and metacognitive strategies have been found to play an important mediating role between parental involvement and academic performance[1]. Based on the aforementioned research evidence, metacognition may also mediate the relationship between parental autonomy support and academic performance in adolescents. Therefore, this study hypothesizes that parental autonomy support can indirectly influence adolescent academic performance through the mediating role of metacognition (H2).

Ecological Systems Theory emphasizes that both individual and environmental factors undergo changes over time, with individuals developing as they age and their environments changing accordingly[28]. Research has shown that there is a significant cognitive development process in the brain from early to late adolescence[29], and as grade level increases, adolescents' cognitive and metacognitive abilities also tend to increase. However, as adolescents enter puberty, their self-awareness strengthens, and conflicts with parents increase[30], leading to a decrease in perceived parental autonomy support. But as adolescents grow and mature, parents tend to provide more autonomy support, and adolescents are more likely to perceive parental autonomy support. Therefore, the perceived parental autonomy support by adolescents exhibits a trend of initial decline and subsequent increase[31]. It is evident that at different stages of age development, the autonomy support provided by parents to adolescents, as well as the perceived parental autonomy support and their level of metacognition, vary. In this context, the question arises: What impact does grade level, as a time factor, have on the process of parental autonomy support influencing adolescent metacognition? Therefore, this study hypothesizes that grade level acts as a moderator in the first half of the pathway of this mediating model (H3).

In summary, based on the Ecological Systems Theory and Self-Determination Theory, this study aims to further explore the underlying mechanisms of parental autonomy support, metacognition, and adolescent academic performance. Building upon existing research, it seeks to propose a

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moderated mediation model to examine the relationship between parental autonomy support and adolescent academic performance, the mediating role of metacognition in this relationship, and the moderating effect of grade level on the relationship between parental autonomy support and metacognition. The findings of this study will contribute to the theoretical foundation and empirical support for understanding how families can promote the academic development of adolescents.

2. Objects and Methods

2.1 Research Object

The research adopted a cluster sampling method to conduct a questionnaire survey on a total of 1,605 students from four different grades (7th to 10th) in one middle school each from Chengdu, Sichuan Province, Xi'an, Shaanxi Province, and Hangzhou, Zhejiang Province. Questionnaires that exhibited strong regularity in responses, missing items, or lacked academic performance data were excluded. The analysis was conducted using 1,372 valid questionnaires, resulting in an effective response rate of 85.5%. Among the participants, there were 644 males (46.9%) and 728 females (53.1%). The distribution across grades was as follows: 484 students in 7th grade (35.3%), 364 students in 8th grade (26.5%), 267 students in 9th grade (19.5%), and 257 students in 10th grade (18.7%). The average age was 13.88±1.17 years. Regarding the educational level of the participants' fathers and mothers, 30.8% had completed college or above, 25.7% had completed high school or vocational school, and 35.4% and 42.2% had completed middle school or below, respectively.

2.2 Research Tools

2.2.1 Parental Autonomy Support Scale

The Parental Autonomy Support Scale, revised by Wang et al. (2007), was used as the measurement tool[32]. It consists of 12 items. A Likert-type 5-point scoring system was employed (1 = "strongly disagree" to 5 = "strongly agree"). The scale score is calculated as the average score of all items, with higher scores indicating a higher perceived level of parental autonomy support among adolescents. Confirmatory factor analysis was conducted to validate the Parental Autonomy Support Scale, and the fit indices were within an acceptable range: x2/df=7.101, RMSEA=0.067, GFI=0.954, AGFI =0.933. In this study, Cronbach's α coefficient for the Parental Autonomy Support Scale was 0.919.

2.2.2 Metacognitive Awareness Inventory (Jr. MAI)

The Metacognitive Awareness Inventory (Jr. MAI) for adolescents was translated into Chinese. This inventory consists of 18 items and is divided into two dimensions: cognitive knowledge and cognitive regulation. It was developed based on the adult Metacognitive Awareness Inventory (MAI) by Sperling (2002), which was originally created by Schraw and Dennison (1994)[23,33,34]. The Jr. MAI is suitable for general metacognitive assessment of students in grades 3 to 9. A Likert-type 5-point scoring system was used (1 = "completely disagree" to 5 = "completely agree"). Confirmatory factor analysis was conducted to validate the Metacognitive Awareness Inventory for adolescents, and the fit indices were within an acceptable range: x2/df = 6.630, RMSEA=0.064, GFI=0.927, AGFI =0.907. In this study, Cronbach's α coefficient for the metacognitive inventory was 0.854. The cognitive knowledge dimension and the cognitive regulation dimension had Cronbach's α coefficients of 0.745 and 0.807, respectively.

2.2.3 Academic Performance

Academic performance was primarily based on the students' scores in the Chinese, Mathematics, and English exams during the 2022 autumn mid-term or final assessments. Since this study involved three different schools and the content of mid-term and final exams varied across grades, the academic performance scores were standardized and then averaged at the school and grade levels.

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2.3 Statistical Methods

The data collection was conducted at the class level, using a combination of on-site testing and the use of the Ding Talk questionnaire platform. Statistical analysis was performed using SPSS 22.0, including descriptive statistics, correlation analysis, and the common method bias test. The mediation effects were examined using Model 4 (simple mediation model) from the PROCESS 4.1 component in SPSS. The moderated mediation effects were tested using Model 7 (hypothesized moderated mediation model) consistent with the theoretical model in this study. Bootstrap resampling with 5,000 samples was used to estimate the confidence intervals of the mediation effects and test the significance of regression coefficients. If the 95% bootstrap confidence interval does not include zero, it indicates a significant effect. A significance level of P<0.05 was considered statistically significant for detecting differences.

3. Results

3.1 Common Method Bias Test

The Harman single-factor test method[35] was used to examine common method bias. Exploratory factor analysis without rotation was conducted on all measurement items. The results showed that there were four common factors with eigenvalues greater than 1. The first common factor accounted for 26.06% of the total variance, which is below the critical threshold of 40%. Therefore, this study does not exhibit significant common method bias.

3.2 Descriptive Statistics

Through one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA), significant differences were found in parental autonomy support levels among different grades. The ANOVA results revealed a significant effect of grade on parental autonomy support, F (3, 1368) =11.295, P<0.001, η 2=0.024, Post-hoc tests indicated that the parental autonomy support in the 10th grade (high school) was significantly higher than that in the 7th, 8th, and 9th grades (see Table 1).

3.3 Correlation Analysis

The results of the correlation analysis showed significant positive correlations between parental autonomy support and metacognition, as well as between parental autonomy support and academic performance. There was also a significant positive correlation between metacognition and academic performance (see Table 2). In other words, a higher level of parental autonomy support was associated with higher levels of metacognition and better academic performance.

3.4 Moderated Mediation Analysis

First, controlling for gender and parental education level, a test was conducted to examine the mediating effect of metacognition in the relationship between parental autonomy support and academic performance. The results indicated that parental autonomy support positively predicted academic performance (B=0.12, t=3.68, P <0.001). After including the mediating variable, parental autonomy support positively predicted metacognition (B=0.22, t=11.73, P <0.001), and metacognition positively predicted academic performance (B=0.30, t=6.74, P <0.001). However, the direct predictive effect of parental autonomy support on academic performance was not significant (B=0.05, t=1.53, P =0.13) (see Table 3).

The analysis of the mediating effect of metacognition in the relationship between parental autonomy support and academic performance in adolescents indicates that the indirect effect of metacognition on academic performance through parental autonomy support is 0.07. The Bootstrap 95% confidence interval does not include 0, indicating that the mediating effect of metacognition in the relationship between parental autonomy support and academic performance is significant (see Table 4).

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		Table 1	: ANOVA	Tests of	f Grade	e on Ea	ich Facto	or			× ×		
Test Variable	Grouping	g n	М	SD		F	Р	η2	2	Post-hoc Comparisons			
Parental Autonom y Support	$ \begin{array}{r} 7(1) \\ 8(2) \\ 9(3) \\ 10(4) \end{array} $	484 364 267 257	3.527 3.440 3.491 3.769	0.740 0.736 0.758 0.644	11.	295 0.000		0.0		4>1***,2***,3 ***		4>1***,2***,3	
		Ν	Note: *p<0.	05, **p<	0.01, **	**p<0.0	001.						
		Table 2:	Correlatio	n Statistie	es of Va	ariables	(N=1372	2)					
Test Va	ariable	N	1	SD)		1		2	3			
1 Parental A Supp	•	3.5	542	0.734		1							
2 metaco	gnition	3.5	504	0.54	.9	0.	320**		1				
3 acad perforr		0.0	000	0.87	7	0.	.117**		0.237**		1		
Da			Mediation	Model T					c	oeffic	ient		
Ke	gression eq	uations (N=13/2		goodness-of-fit indices significance						ance		
Outcome		Predictor variable			R	R2	F (df	()	В		t		
Academic performance				0.24	0.06	20.01*	***						
		Gender							0.19		4.13***		
		Father's Education							0.08		2.84**		
		Mother's Education							0.06		1.87		
		Parental autonomy support							0.12	2	3.68***		
Metacognition			<u> </u>		0.37	0.14	55.25*	***	0.04	-	2.02*		
			Gender						0.06		2.02*		
Father's Education Mother's Education							0.05		2.64** 2.78**				
		wioth	er s Educal	1011				-+	0.05		2.78***		
		Parental	autonomy s	support					0.22	2	*		
Acade perform					0.29	0.09	25.61*	***					
			Gender						0.17		3.82***		
			er's Educat						0.07		2.4*		
			er's Educat						0.04		1.39		
			autonomy s	<u> </u>					0.05		1.53		
Metacognition									0.30)	6.74***		

Next, using grade 7 as the reference group, we encoded the grade variable into three dummy variables[36]. Controlling for gender and parental education level, we established a moderated mediation model with the moderator variable being a multicategory variable ($k \ge 3$). We examined whether the moderating effect of grade influenced the mediated relationship between parental autonomy support and metacognition. The results indicated that after including grade in the model, the interaction between parental autonomy support and grade significantly predicted metacognition with respective values of (B=0.15, t=-3.04, P <0.01; B=0.11, t=-2.15, P <0.05; B=0.19, t=-3.2, P <0.01). This suggests that the mediating effect of metacognition on the relationship between

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parental autonomy support and academic performance is moderated by grade, and it is the first stage of the mediation process that is moderated (see Table 5).

Tab	le 4: Decompos	ition of Total	Effects, I	Direc	t Effe	cts, and M	ediation 1	Effects	
	`		BootS	BootSE		BootLLCI		Effect ratio	
Total		0.12	0.03	;		0.05	0.17		
Dii	rect	0.05	0.03	-0.02		-0.02	0.12	42.89%	
Indi	irect	0.07	0.01	0.04			0.09	57.11%	
	Table 5	: Regression	Analysis o	of Gi	ade a	s a Modera	ator		
Regre	ession equations	(N=1372)		Fit index			Fit index		
Outcome variable	Predi	ctor variable		R R2		R2	F(df)	В	t
Metacognitio n				0.3	92 2	0.153 8	24.74 ***		
		Gender						0.06	2.27*
		r's Education						0.04	2.56*
	Mothe	r's Educatior	ı					0.04	2.18*
	Parental autonomy support Grade W1							0.32	10.19** *
								-0.06	-1.83
	G	rade W2						-0.06	-1.47
	G	rade W3						-0.10	-2.39*
	Parental autonomy support * Grade W1							-0.15	-3.04**
	Parental autonomy support * Grade W2							-0.11	-2.15*
	Parental auton	omy support W3	* Grade					-0.19	-3.2**
Academic performance				0.2	92 7	0.085 7	25.61 ***		
		Gender						0.17	3.82***
	Father	r's Education						0.07	2.4*
	Mothe	r's Educatior	1					0.04	1.39
	Parental a	utonomy sup	port					0.05	1.53
	Metacognition							0.30	6.74***

Specifically, the size of the mediated effect at grade 7 was 0.32, 95% CI [0.26, 0.38]. At grade 8, the size of the mediated effect was 0.18, 95% CI [0.10, 0.25]. At grade 9, the size of the mediated effect was 0.21, 95% CI [0.13, 0.29]. Finally, at grade 10, the size of the mediated effect was 0.13, 95% CI [0.04, 0.23] (see Table 6).

Table 6: Mediation Effects of Metacognition across Different Grades									
	Grade	Effect	BootSE	BootLLCI	BootU LCI				
Mediation Effects	Grade7 (W1=0, W2=0, W3=0)	0.32	0.03	0.26	0.38				
	Grade8 (W1=1, W2=0, W3=0)	0.18	0.04	0.10	0.25				
	Grade9(W1=0, W2=1, W3=0)	0.21	0.04	0.13	0.29				
	Grade10(W1=0, W2=0, W3=1)	0.13	0.05	0.04	0.23				

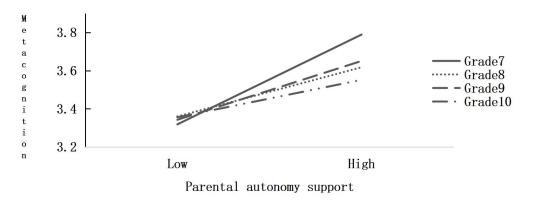


Figure 1: Moderating Role of Grade in the Relationship between Parental Autonomy Support and Metacognition

To further analyze the moderating effect trend of the multicategory moderator variable (grade), we plotted a simple effects analysis graph (Figure 1) by taking metacognition values at one standard deviation above and below the mean of parental autonomy support. The results of the simple slope test indicate that as grade increases, the promoting effect of parental autonomy support on metacognition tends to weaken[37].

4. Summary

Based on previous research, ecological systems theory, and self-determination theory, this study constructed a moderated mediation model with metacognition as the mediating variable and grade (a multicategory variable) as the moderating variable. This model not only clarifies how parental autonomy support affects adolescents' academic performance through metacognition but also responds to the question of under what conditions (moderating effect of grade) parental autonomy support has a more significant impact on adolescents' academic performance[38]. The findings of this study have theoretical and practical implications for deepening the understanding of the relationship between parental autonomy support, adolescents' metacognition, and academic performance, as well as guiding parents to actively provide a positive external environment and enhance adolescents' ability to master and apply learning strategies.

4.1 The Mediating Role of Metacognition in the Relationship between Parental Autonomy Support and Academic Performance

Metacognition is an essential component of learning strategies. Exploring the mediating role of metacognition in the relationship between parental autonomy support and adolescents' academic performance not only helps to elucidate the factors through which parental autonomy support influences adolescents' academic performance from a self-determination theory perspective but also sheds light on the factors influencing academic performance. Firstly, the study found that the impact of parental autonomy support on academic performance was smaller compared to its impact on metacognition, which aligns with the viewpoint of self-determination theory[39]. This indicates that parental autonomy support is a distal influencing factor for academic performance, and the relationship between the two is mediated by proximal factors such as metacognition. Secondly, the study found that parental autonomy support predicted adolescents' academic performance through the mediating role of metacognition. This result supports previous research, suggesting that metacognition is a major component of learning strategies, influencing adolescents' levels of strategy use, and serving as a proximal factor through which other factors influence academic performance [20,40-42]. There is a strong positive correlation between metacognitive strategies and adolescents' academic performance[43]. When parental autonomy support enhances adolescents' metacognitive abilities, it further increases the likelihood of achieving good academic performance.

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Finally, compared to the direct impact of parental autonomy support on adolescents' academic performance, the path through metacognition is a more favorable pathway, aligning with the positive psychological assertion of self-determination theory[44]. This is because metacognition's two key features, self-evaluation, and self-regulation of cognition, are autonomous behaviors of adolescents and represent their inherent academic potential. They do not require parental supervision, and there is no concern for negative effects such as academic burnout or procrastination.

In conclusion, higher perceived parental autonomy support is beneficial for meeting students' competence development and the application of learning strategies, thereby enhancing their academic performance[45].

4.2 The Moderating Role of Grade in the Relationship between Parental Autonomy Support and Metacognition

Based on ecological systems theory and self-determination theory, a moderated mediation model was constructed to explore the moderating role of grade in the relationship between parental autonomy support, metacognition, and adolescents' academic performance[38]. The results revealed that grade played a moderating role in the first half of the mediation chain from parental autonomy support to metacognition. The study analysis found that firstly, one-way ANOVA revealed a significant difference in parental autonomy support across grades. Secondly, post-hoc tests indicated that parental autonomy support in grade 10 was significantly higher than in middle school grades. Finally, the study found that the promoting effect of parental autonomy support on metacognition weakened as grade increased. This result is consistent with previous research, indicating that as students mature, the influence of parental autonomy support gradually diminishes, and the decisive role of metacognitive abilities in academic success becomes more prominent[37]. In summary, during lower grades (grade 7), although parental autonomy support may be lower, it has a greater impact on metacognition. This suggests that it is an opportune time to cultivate adolescents' metacognitive abilities through parental autonomy support. In higher grades (grade 10), although parents provide more autonomy support, its promoting effect on metacognition weakens. This indicates that as adolescents develop and mature, the influence of environmental factors gradually diminishes, and individual factors take on a more dominant role.

Overall, this study highlights the importance of seizing key periods and utilizing parental autonomy support to help adolescents develop autonomy, thereby mastering learning strategies and enhancing their learning abilities.

4.3 Significance and Limitations

The moderated mediation model employed in this study not only elucidates the internal mechanism (mediating role of metacognition) through which parental autonomy support influences academic performance but also reveals the developmental differences of this mechanism (moderating role of grade). This moderated mediation model addresses both how parental autonomy support affects adolescent academic performance and under what conditions its effects are more significant. It contributes to a deeper understanding of the factors influencing academic performance. The results of this study indicate that parental autonomy support is an external (environmental) factor influencing academic performance. The influencing academic performance of external factors on internal factors is moderated by grade, which is in line with ecological systems theory and self-determination theory.

Furthermore, the findings of this moderated mediation model provide insights for guiding parents to provide appropriate autonomy support and fostering students' learning abilities. Firstly, the "double reduction" policy reduces external pressures, providing an opportunity to create a supportive environment for adolescents and cultivate their autonomy. Secondly, although the "double reduction" policy reduces external pressures, it may not necessarily alleviate internal

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pressures. Therefore, it is important to seize critical periods of adolescent development and promote a collaborative effort between families and schools. Leveraging the positive influence of parental autonomy support as an external factor, adolescents' internal capabilities can be nurtured, such as the ability to master and apply effective learning strategies, laying a solid foundation for future development. In summary, school and family education should be integrated, with a focus on providing support for learning and stimulating students' potential to the fullest extent in a supportive environment.

However, this study has a few limitations: (1) The use of cross-sectional design in this study precludes establishing causal relationships. Future research should employ longitudinal designs or experimental studies to explore the causal relationships among parental autonomy support, metacognition, and academic performance using methods such as cross-lagged designs or manipulation of independent and mediating variables[38]. (2) The measurement of parental autonomy support in this study relied on self-reports from adolescents. It is worth exploring whether there are discrepancies between adolescents' perceptions and the actual support provided by parents in future research[31].

Conclusion: (1) Parental autonomy support significantly predicts adolescents' academic performance in a positive direction. (2) Metacognition plays a significant mediating role in the relationship between parental autonomy support and adolescents' academic performance. (3) Grade level moderates the first half of the mediation model, specifically the impact of parental autonomy support on adolescents' metacognition.

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