

The Influence of Parental Parenting Style on Test Anxiety among High School Students: The Chain Mediation Model of Self-Esteem and Psychological Resilience

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Abstract: *This study examines the influence of parental parenting styles, self-esteem, and psychological resilience on test anxiety among high school students using a chain mediation model. A total of 602 Vietnamese high school students were surveyed using the Parenting Style Scale, the Self-Esteem Scale, the Psychological Resilience Scale, and the Test Anxiety Scale. The results indicated that: 1) negative parental parenting styles directly increased students' test anxiety, while positive parenting styles did not significantly predict test anxiety; 2) both self-esteem and psychological resilience independently mediated the relationship between parental parenting style and test anxiety; and 3) self-esteem and psychological resilience jointly functioned as a chain mediator between parental parenting style and test anxiety. The findings demonstrate that negative parenting styles not only directly affect students' test anxiety but also exert an indirect influence through the chain mediating roles of self-esteem and psychological resilience. Conversely, positive parenting styles influence test anxiety only indirectly through the mediating effects of self-esteem and psychological resilience.*

Keywords: *parental parenting style, test anxiety, self-esteem, psychological resilience, high school students.*

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1. Introduction

Test anxiety refers to the internal experiences of worry, tension, and apprehension that arise in response to testing situations. It is a complex emotional state that often leads students to undervalue their abilities and develop negative self-perceptions (Jinhua Dong, 2020). Although some researchers have suggested that a moderate level of test anxiety can enhance motivation and improve performance (YiFu Xie, 2019), the majority have found that high levels of test anxiety impair students' physical and mental health (Meiying Guo et al.,

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2015; Jingxuan He, 2023), lower academic achievement (Wei He & Xianpeng Meng, 2006; Sung et al., 2016), and interfere with attention (Yongmou Shi et al., 2017). Despite being a prevalent psychological concern among students, relatively few studies have explored test anxiety among Vietnamese high school students, and the mechanisms underlying its development remain unclear. Therefore, this study aims to investigate the factors influencing test anxiety, with practical implications for improving students' mental health and reducing exam-related stress.

Previous research has suggested that test anxiety is influenced by both external and internal factors. External factors include family functioning, parenting style, parent-child communication, and peer relationships (Yanrong Hu & Xiling Geng, 2020). Internal factors include learning ability, self-esteem, and psychological resilience (Lujun Shen, Lei Yang, & Yanyan Luo, 2016; Yanrong Hu & Xiling Geng, 2020). However, most prior studies have examined these influences independently, focusing on either external or internal factors, rather than exploring their combined effects on test anxiety among high school students. Consequently, the interaction between these factors remains poorly understood.

According to Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory (1986), the family represents the most immediate environment influencing an individual's development, and parenting style plays a crucial role in shaping a child's psychological growth (Yanqiang Tao & Xiangyi Chu, 2016). As Vu Khanh Linh (2012) noted, parenting style refers to a consistent system of attitudes and behaviors adopted by parents in child-rearing, forming a distinctive pattern that is perceived and internalized by the child. Numerous studies have established strong associations between parenting style and test anxiety. For instance, Thergaonkar and Wadkar (2007) reported a significant negative correlation between democratic parenting and students' test anxiety. Similarly, other research found that test anxiety is negatively related to parental warmth and emotional understanding but positively associated with rejection, overprotection, and excessive control. In other words, positive parenting styles can help reduce students' test-related anxiety (Miaomiao Wang et al., 2016). However, due to cultural and social differences across countries, test anxiety may manifest differently between cultures. In Vietnam, research examining the influence of parenting style on test anxiety remains limited. Thus, the first objective of this study is to explore the relationship between parental parenting style and test anxiety among Vietnamese high school students.

Self-esteem refers to an individual's overall evaluation of self-worth, encompassing both self-competence and self-value (Lumei Tian, 2005). Existing research indicates that self-esteem negatively predicts test anxiety, meaning that students with higher self-esteem tend to experience lower levels of test anxiety (Bayani, 2016). Parenting style and self-esteem are closely interrelated-positive parenting fosters higher self-esteem, whereas negative parenting undermines it (Fang Zhou, 2019). Furthermore, parental parenting style has been shown to influence test anxiety through the mediating role of self-worth among middle school students (Wenyu Li, 2022). Given the conceptual similarity between self-worth and self-esteem, the second objective of this study is to examine whether self-esteem mediates the relationship between parenting style and test anxiety.

Psychological resilience refers to an individual's capacity to adapt positively to adversity and recover from challenges using a constructive mindset (Roeser & Eccles, 1998). Prior studies have demonstrated strong associations between parenting style and resilience across

age groups (Xihui Shen, 2022; Lingyan Xiao, 2023). For example, Qing Liu et al. (2016) found that emotionally warm parenting enhances adolescents' psychological resilience, whereas rejecting or punitive parenting diminishes it. Moreover, Rustamov et al. (2023) reported that lower psychological resilience is associated with higher test anxiety among adolescents, while higher resilience predicts lower anxiety. Enhancing resilience may therefore help reduce students' exam-related anxiety (Shengyu & Wanran, 2023). Accordingly, the third objective of this study is to determine whether psychological resilience mediates the relationship between parenting style and test anxiety among Vietnamese students.

Finally, previous research has shown that both self-esteem and psychological resilience are key internal factors influencing test anxiety (Lujun Shen et al., 2016; Yanrong Hu & Xiling Geng, 2020). Moreover, self-esteem serves as a crucial protective factor for resilience, and the two constructs are strongly interrelated. For instance, Kidd and Shahar (2008) demonstrated that self-esteem plays an essential role in the development of resilience among adolescents. Higher self-esteem predicts greater resilience (An'an Hu & Xueping Gao, 2020). Collectively, these findings suggest interrelated pathways among parenting style, self-esteem, psychological resilience, and test anxiety. Specifically, positive or negative parenting styles may respectively enhance or diminish self-esteem; higher self-esteem predicts stronger resilience, which in turn reduces test anxiety. Therefore, the fourth objective of this study is to examine whether self-esteem and psychological resilience jointly mediate the relationship between parenting style and test anxiety among high school students.

In summary, this study employs a questionnaire-based survey involving four standardized scales to systematically explore the mechanisms by which parental parenting styles influence test anxiety among Vietnamese high school students. Based on prior empirical evidence, the following hypotheses are proposed:

Parenting style significantly affects students' test anxiety.

Self-esteem mediates the relationship between parenting style and test anxiety.

Psychological resilience mediates the relationship between parenting style and test anxiety.

Self-esteem and psychological resilience jointly serve as chain mediators between parenting style and test anxiety among Vietnamese high school students.

2. Method

2.1. Participants and research sites

This study employed a questionnaire survey method, randomly distributing the questionnaire to high school students in Vietnam. A total of 700 questionnaires were distributed, and each respondent took approximately 15 minutes to complete the questionnaire. After eliminating invalid responses, 602 valid questionnaires were retained, yielding an effective response rate of 86.0%. Among the participants, there were 187 males and 415 females; 195 students were in Grade 10, 176 in Grade 11, and 231 in Grade 12.

The data collection took place between November and December 2023 at several high schools located in Hanoi and Thanh Hoa Province, Vietnam.

2.2. Measures

Four standardized psychological scales were employed in this study:

1. Short-Form Egna Minnen Beträffande Uppfostran - Children's Version (s-EMBU-C)

The s-EMBU-C, initially developed by Jiang et al. (2010), is a Chinese revision of the short version of the Egna Minnen Beträffande Uppfostran questionnaire, designed to measure parenting styles. It is a 4-point Likert scale consisting of 21 items across three subscales:

Emotional warmth (7 items)

Overprotection (8 items)

Rejection (6 items)

The scale has demonstrated high reliability and validity across different cultures. Given the cultural and educational similarities between China and Vietnam, this instrument was adopted for the current study. The Cronbach's alpha coefficient for the entire scale was 0.78, and the alphas for the three subscales were 0.87 (emotional warmth), 0.83 (overprotection), and 0.88 (rejection), respectively.

2. Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES)

Developed by Rosenberg (1965), the RSES is one of the most widely used measures of global self-esteem. It comprises 10 items rated on a 4-point Likert scale, with higher scores indicating higher self-esteem. The Cronbach's alpha in the present study was 0.77, indicating satisfactory internal consistency.

3. Resilience Scale for Chinese Adolescents (RSCA)

The RSCA, compiled by Yueqin Hu and Yiqun Gan (2008), assesses adolescents' psychological resilience. It includes 27 items rated on a 5-point Likert scale, where higher scores indicate greater resilience and psychological flexibility. Given the cultural and educational similarities between China and Vietnam, this instrument was translated and utilized in this study. The Cronbach's alpha coefficient was 0.80.

4. Test Anxiety Scale (TAS)

The Vietnamese version of the Test Anxiety Scale (TAS), revised and validated by Quach Thi Phuong Thao et al. (2019), was used to assess students' test anxiety levels. It contains 37 items requiring respondents to answer "True" or "False" based on their personal experiences. The Cronbach's alpha for this study was 0.79, indicating good reliability.

Data were analyzed using SPSS version 26.0. Several statistical techniques were applied:

Harman's single-factor test was conducted to assess common method bias, ensuring that variations due to measurement methods did not distort the findings.

Pearson correlation analysis was employed to examine bivariate relationships among parenting style, self-esteem, psychological resilience, and test anxiety.

To test the chain mediation effects, the PROCESS macro version 4.2 (Model 6) was used to estimate indirect effects.

3. Results

3.1. Test of common method bias

To control for potential standard method bias arising from measurement format, instrument design, or item wording, Harman's single-factor test was performed. The unroasted exploratory factor analysis extracted 35 factors with eigenvalues greater than 1, and the most significant factor accounted for only 14.3% of the total variance, which is well below the 40% threshold. Thus, standard method variance was not a serious concern in this study.

3.2. Correlations among parenting style, self-esteem, psychological resilience, and test anxiety

To examine the relationships among the four key variables - parenting style, self-esteem, psychological resilience, and test anxiety - Pearson correlation coefficients were computed. The results are presented in Table 1.

From Table 1, emotional warmth (a positive parenting style) was negatively correlated with test anxiety ($p < .001$), self-esteem ($p < .001$), and psychological resilience ($p < .001$).

Table 1. *Correlations among parenting style, self-esteem, psychological resilience, and test anxiety*

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Emotional warmth	0.33***	1					
2. Rejection	0.53***	-0.49***	1				
3. Overprotection	0.79***	-0.19***	0.57***	1			
4. Self-esteem	-0.91*	0.25***	-0.26***	-0.21***	1		
5. Psychological resilience	-0.12**	0.44***	-0.43***	-0.32***	0.52***	1	
6. Test anxiety	0.23***	-0.15***	0.31***	0.28***	-0.44***	-0.44***	1

Note. $p < .05$; $p < .01$; $p < .001$.

In contrast, rejection and overprotection (negative parenting styles) were positively correlated with test anxiety ($p < .001$) and negatively correlated with both self-esteem and resilience ($p < .001$). Self-esteem and psychological resilience were negatively correlated with test anxiety ($p < .001$), and positively correlated with each other ($p < .001$). Overall, all correlations were statistically significant, indicating meaningful associations among the four variables.

3.3. Chain mediation model of self-esteem and psychological resilience

The PROCESS Macro (Model 6) developed by Hayes (2013) was used to examine the chain mediation effects of self-esteem and psychological resilience in the relationship between parenting style and test anxiety. Bootstrapping with 5,000 samples and 95% confidence intervals (CIs) was applied to assess the significance of indirect effects. In this study, emotional warmth was classified as a positive parenting style, whereas rejection and overprotection were treated as negative parenting styles.

Figure 1. Chain mediation model of self-esteem and psychological resilience in the relationship between positive parenting style and test anxiety

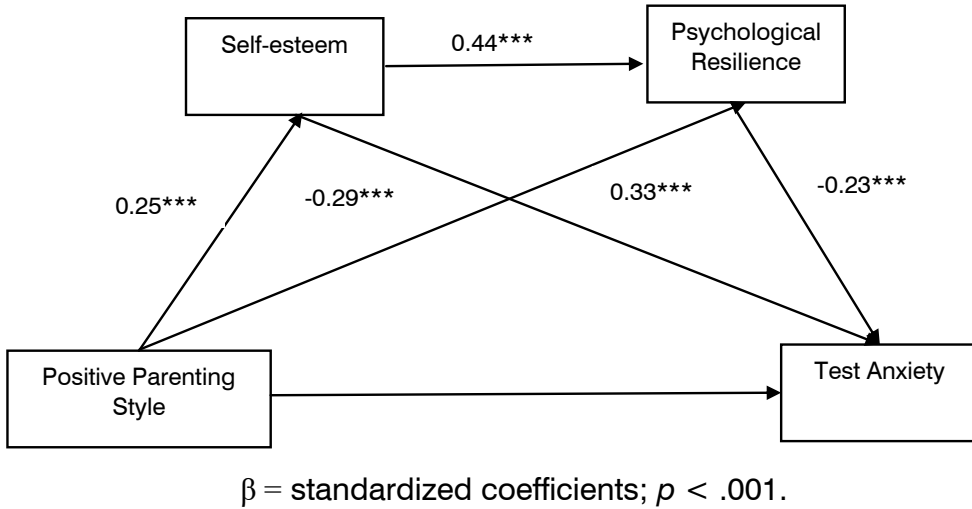
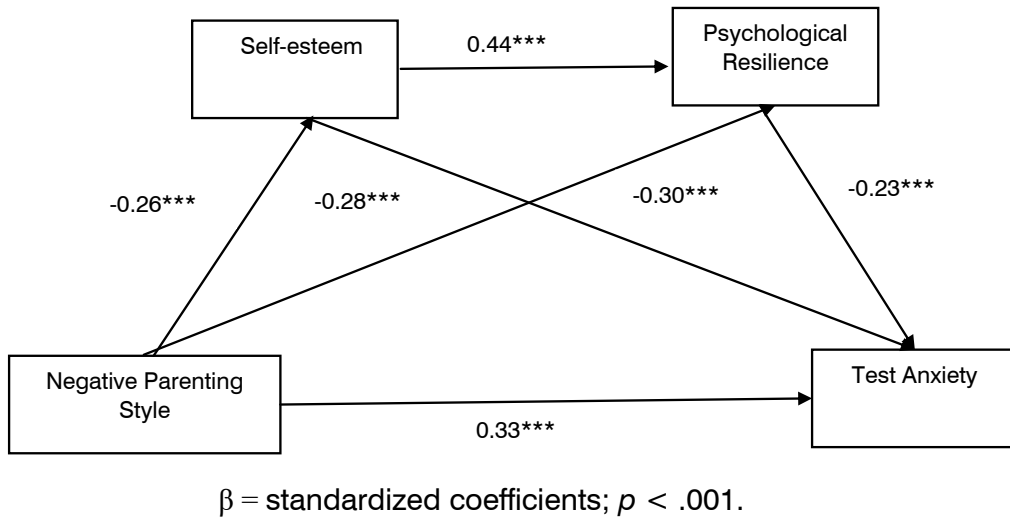


Figure 2. Chain mediation model of self-esteem and psychological resilience in the relationship between negative parenting style and test anxiety



As indicated in Figure 2, negative parenting style directly increased test anxiety ($\beta = 0.33$, $p < .001$), while reducing both self-esteem ($\beta = -0.26$, $p < .001$) and psychological resilience ($\beta = -0.30$, $p < .001$). Self-esteem ($\beta = -0.28$, $p < .001$) and resilience ($\beta = -0.23$, $p < .001$) again directly reduced test anxiety, and self-esteem positively predicted resilience ($\beta = 0.44$, $p < .001$).

Table 2. *Bootstrap test of chain mediation effects*

Pathways	Effect Size	Boot SE	95% CI
Positive parenting → Self-esteem → Test anxiety	-0.051	0.012	[-0.075, -0.030]
Positive parenting → Resilience → Test anxiety	-0.072	0.013	[-0.099, -0.049]
Positive parenting → Self-esteem → Resilience → Test anxiety	-0.024	0.005	[-0.035, -0.014]
Total indirect effect	-0.147	0.019	[-0.185, -0.112]
Direct effect (Positive parenting → Test anxiety)	0.043	0.027	[-0.011, 0.097]
Negative parenting → Self-esteem → Test anxiety	0.035	0.008	[0.021, 0.053]
Negative parenting → Resilience → Test anxiety	0.033	0.007	[0.020, 0.049]
Negative parenting → Self-esteem → Resilience → Test anxiety	0.013	0.003	[0.007, 0.019]
Total indirect effect	0.081	0.012	[0.059, 0.106]
Direct effect (Negative parenting → Test anxiety)	0.078	0.019	[0.042, 0.115]

Note. *Bootstrap sample = 5,000; 95% bias-corrected confidence interval (CI); effects are significant when the CI does not include zero.*

Results from Table 2 confirmed that for positive parenting style, all three indirect paths were significant (95% CI excluded zero), while the direct effect on test anxiety was non-significant (CI = [-0.011, 0.097]). Thus, self-esteem and resilience fully mediated the relationship between positive parenting and test anxiety. In contrast, for the negative parenting style, all indirect paths were also significant (CIs excluded zero), and the direct path from negative parenting to test anxiety remained significant (CI = [0.042, 0.115]). This indicates that self-esteem and resilience partially mediated the relationship between negative parenting style and test anxiety.

4. Discussion

4.1. The influence of parental parenting style on test anxiety

The findings revealed that negative parenting styles (rejection and overprotection) among Vietnamese parents had a direct positive effect on students' test anxiety, partially supporting Hypothesis 1. This result is consistent with previous studies (Jinhua Dong, 2020; Zhenpeng Deng, 2023) and aligns with Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory (1986), which emphasizes that the family, as part of the microsystem, exerts the most direct influence on an individual's psychological development. As Luo et al. (2018) pointed out, the family is a child's primary social environment, significantly shaping their psychological and behavioral development. Parents who frequently display rejection, excessive control, or overprotection may undermine children's confidence (Xiao Cheng & Zhaoxia Xue, 2020) and adaptive functioning (Yan Dong, Fangyuan, & Jing Guo, 2019), thereby increasing their vulnerability to test-related anxiety.

Conversely, the study found that positive parenting styles (emotional warmth) did not directly influence high school students' test anxiety. This finding aligns with the results of Fang Zhou (2019); it suggests that the effects of positive parenting are primarily indirect, operating through internal protective factors such as self-esteem and resilience. Previous research has shown that positive parenting tends to predict favorable emotional outcomes and adaptive development among adolescents (Yan Li, Wei He, & Xian Zhang, 2014; Abdi, Yasavoli, & Yasavoli, 2015; Tuo Liu, Xueming Chen, & Xurong Lu, 2021), whereas negative parenting predicts maladaptive emotional and behavioral patterns (Sagarmatha & Karneli, 2020; Zifu Shi, Zhihao Zhou, & Lei Xu, 2024). Similarly, a recent meta-analysis by Tian Tang et al. (2024) confirmed that parental warmth and supportive parenting are closely related to adolescents' positive development. In contrast, harsh or rejecting parenting shows weak or negative associations. Taken together, these findings highlight the importance of reducing rejecting or over-controlling parenting practices and promoting warmth and autonomy support to mitigate students' exam-related anxiety.

4.2. The mediating role of self-esteem

The results demonstrated that self-esteem mediated the relationship between parenting style and test anxiety, thereby supporting Hypothesis 2. Self-esteem represents an individual's evaluative perception of personal worth and competence (Coopersmith, 1967). While self-esteem develops primarily from internal self-evaluation, during adolescence, it is highly influenced by parental feedback and appraisal (Openshaw, Thomas, & Rollins, 1984).

Different parenting styles exert different effects on self-esteem and mental health (Singh, 2017). Specifically, positive parenting promotes the development of self-esteem, whereas negative parenting (e.g., rejection, punishment, and denial) diminishes it (Lihua Liu, Chao Fu, & Huiju Shi, 2024). Furthermore, students with higher self-esteem tend to experience lower levels of test anxiety (Sarı, Bilek, & Çelik, 2018), as positive self-regard enhances confidence and emotional regulation during evaluative situations. In the Vietnamese context, these findings imply that parental warmth, encouragement, and constructive feedback foster adolescents' self-confidence and sense of self-worth, which, in turn, buffer the adverse emotional effects of exams. Thus, nurturing self-esteem may serve as a protective mechanism, reducing test anxiety.

4.3. The mediating role of psychological resilience

The study also confirmed that psychological resilience mediated the relationship between parenting style and test anxiety, supporting Hypothesis 3. This finding aligns with previous evidence (Jinhua Shi, 2020) that emotionally warm and supportive parenting serves as a protective factor for resilience, whereas rejecting or punitive parenting constitutes a risk factor (Zhen Yang, 2015). In other words, parents who demonstrate warmth, empathy, and encouragement foster in their children a greater ability to adapt to adversity, recover from failure, and manage stress effectively. Conversely, children exposed to harsh or overprotective environments may develop lower resilience and heightened vulnerability to anxiety. Consistent with Gong and Guo (2023) and Trigueros et al. (2020), the current findings suggest that students with higher psychological resilience are more capable of regulating stress and maintaining emotional stability during exams. Therefore, by promoting positive parenting and resilience training, educators and parents can help students cope more effectively with evaluative stressors.

4.4. The chain mediating roles of self-esteem and psychological resilience

Finally, the study confirmed Hypothesis 4: self-esteem and psychological resilience jointly served as a chain mediator between parenting style and test anxiety. This means that self-esteem positively influences psychological resilience (Shu et al., 2022; Qiaolan Liu et al., 2013), and both together contribute to reducing exam-related anxiety. Adolescents with high self-esteem generally perceive themselves as competent and valuable, which strengthens their resilience and emotional stability (Lianqiong Huang, Xi Luo, & Yubo Hou, 2024). Higher resilience, in turn, enhances mental health and reduces exam-related stress (Meiying Guo et al., 2015). Moreover, the results support the integrated model proposed by Huihui Guo et al. (2016), suggesting that test anxiety arises from the combined effects of external factors (parenting) and internal factors (self-esteem and resilience). In this context, negative parenting styles - characterized by rejection, punishment, or overprotection - may cause adolescents to feel unloved and devalued, leading to lower self-esteem and weaker resilience, and consequently higher test anxiety. In contrast, positive parenting styles that foster emotional warmth, autonomy, and acceptance enhance both self-esteem and resilience, enabling students to manage exam-related stress more effectively and maintain psychological balance.

5. Conclusion

Within the scope and limitations of this study, the following conclusions were drawn:

Positive parenting styles influence test anxiety only indirectly through the chain mediating effects of self-esteem and psychological resilience among Vietnamese high school students.

Negative parenting styles not only directly increase students' test anxiety but also indirectly affect it through the chain mediating effects of self-esteem and resilience.

These findings highlight the necessity for parents to adopt positive parenting practices - characterized by warmth, encouragement, and understanding - while minimizing rejection and overcontrol. By doing so, they can help cultivate adolescents' self-esteem and resilience, ultimately reducing test anxiety and promoting mental well-being and academic adjustment.

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