



Effects of Parenting Styles on Adolescents' Moral Competence: Mediating Role of Personality Traits

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Abstract

The way parents interact with their children significantly affects how adolescents think, feel, and behave. This study investigated the impact of parenting styles on the adolescents' moral competence, focusing on the mediating role of Big Five Personality traits. It was a cross-sectional survey research design. Data were gathered from both the Public and Government sectors, located in Abbottabad, Mansehra, and Haripur, from 400 middle and secondary school students with equal representation of both male and female students through convenience sampling. Data was gathered by using the Perceived Dimensions of Parenting Scale (PDPS) (Batool, 2016), NEO Five-Factor Inventory (NEO-FFI) (Chisti & Kamal, 2002), Padua Moral Judgment Scale (PMJS-Urdu version) (Zulfiqar, 2023), and The Scale of Emotional Intelligence (Batool & Hayat, 2018). The findings showed that parenting styles are associated with moral competence, whereas personality traits mediate the relationship between parenting styles and moral competence among adolescents. The findings of the study emphasize focusing on both individual and family factors that can help young people grow, adapt, and navigate the challenges of an ever-changing world.

Keywords: Parenting Styles, Personality Traits, Moral Competence



Introduction

The period of adolescence represents a pivotal phase in human development, characterized by significant transformations across physical, emotional, cognitive, and social dimensions. This stage is crucial in shaping a person's identity and laying the foundation for future well-being, social engagement, and overall success (Mastorci et al., 2024). Research highlights the intricate nature of adolescent development, demonstrating the dynamic interplay between individual traits, social environments, and cultural contexts (Mansour & Alsagheer, 2025). In contemporary society, the role of parenting is paramount to the development of adolescents. Darling and Steinberg (1993) characterized parenting styles as a synthesis of approaches employed by parents to interact with their children (Vijay et al., 2022). Parenting can be classified into four distinct types, informed by the dimensions of responsiveness and demandingness, as articulated by Baumrind (1978) and further developed by Maccoby and Martin (1983) (Doinita & Maria, 2015). Parents who adopt an authoritative approach offer both support and compassion, all the while setting clear norms and applying consistent disciplinary strategies (Chen et al., 2022; Altaf et al., 2022). An authoritarian approach to parenting is marked by rigidity and a notable absence of attunement to the child's needs. Parents employing this approach rarely offer responses or participate in dialogue with their offspring. Rather, they consistently implement rigorous regulations or impose harsh penalties to guarantee their children comply with them (Lanjekar et al., 2022). Permissive parents, marked by an abundance of kindness, inadequately manage their children's behaviour and neglect to set clear behavioral standards, thereby granting children considerable freedom in their decision-making (Pinquart, 2017). Neglectful parenting is characterized by a lack of adequate attention to the child and minimal expectations regarding their potential. In instances where parents display negligence or indifference, they frequently place their own desires above the needs of their children, demonstrating minimal engagement in the responsibilities associated with child-rearing. They do not convey warmth nor articulate the guidelines to their offspring (Marianowicz-Szczygieł, 2023). In this context, the methodologies employed in parenting profoundly impact the growth and development of adolescents, with moral competence emerging as a crucial aspect frequently overlooked by carers (Mansour & Alsagheer, 2025).

Piaget posits that adolescents are expected to attain the pinnacle of moral development, enabling them to formulate new norms. Kohlberg concurs with Piaget, who theorized that teenagers need to attain conventional and post-conventional stages of moral development. During these phases, adolescents may proficiently navigate and sustain meaningful interactions within their community (Gibbs, 2020). Emotional connections within the family provide the foundation for imparting values and fostering moral competence in adolescents (Pizarro & Salovey, 2002). Moral competence refers to an individual's ability to make ethical choices and judgments grounded in internal beliefs and to behave accordingly. Consequently, strong moral competence is crucial for teenagers to effectively navigate and prosper in society (Dwyer, 2019). Furthermore, studies indicate that moral competence is influenced by alterations in an individual's personality (Karamavrou et al., 2016), which is characterized as the collection of psychological traits and mechanisms that are structured and relatively stable, affecting one's interactions with and adaptations to the intra-psychic, physical, and social environments (Larsen & Augustine, 2013). Despite the extensive research on adolescent development, a gap persists



in comprehending the complex interactions of parent-adolescent attachment, personality characteristics, and moral competence. Most research has mostly examined parenting methods in isolation, neglecting to include adolescents' personality qualities to assess their collective impact on moral competence in adolescents. This research seeks to address this gap by examining the interconnections among these elements, thereby offering a more thorough picture of teenage development. This study is innovative due to its integrative methodology, which investigates both the direct impact of parent-adolescent attachment and the mediating influence of personality factors. This research provides a comprehensive perspective on the many factors affecting adolescent moral competence, a topic that has been little addressed in prior studies.

Methodology

The study adopted a cross-sectional survey research design using a quantitative approach. Data were collected from 12 different educational institutions, with equal representation from both the Public and Government sectors, located in Abbottabad, Mansehra, and Haripur. To ensure equal representation of both genders, a convenience sampling method was used, dividing the sample evenly between males and females. This resulted in 200 male and 200 female participants, maintaining gender balance and ensuring statistical rigor and generalizability within the population. For data collection, standardized research tools were employed, i.e.

Perceived Dimensions of Parenting Scale (PDPS) (Batool, 2016).

Shahida Batool developed the Perceived Dimensions of Parenting Scale (PDPS) in 2016. It's a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). This scale has 35 items, with five subscales measuring supportive parents, controlling parents, compassionate parents, aggressive parents, and orthodox parents. Items # 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 34, 35 measure supportive parents, items# 2, 4, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11 measures controlling parents, item# 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20 measure compassionate parents, item# 1, 32, 33 measure avoidant parents and item# 21, 22, 23, 24 measure orthodox parents. These subscales measure authoritarian (controlling, aggressive, and orthodox), authoritative (compassionate & supportive), and permissive parenting styles (Compassionate) (Batool, 2016).

NEO Five-Factor Inventory (NEO-FFI) (Chisti & Kamal, 2002)

The NEO Five-Factor Inventory (NEO-FFI), developed by Paul T. Costa Jr. and Robert R. McCrae in 1989, is a widely used psychometric instrument designed to assess the five major dimensions of personality: Neuroticism, Extraversion, Openness to Experience, Agreeableness, and Conscientiousness. The inventory has been translated and validated in the Urdu version adapted by Chishti and Kamal in 2002. The inventory consists of 60 items, with each item rated on a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Items 1, 3, 8, 9, 12, 14, 15, 16, 18, 23, 27, 29, 30, 31, 33, 38, 39, 42, 44, 45, 46, 48, 54, 55, 57, 59 are reverse-scored. A high score on each factor depicts that the subject is high on that trait and vice versa.

Padua Moral Judgment Scale (PMJS-Urdu version) (Zulfiqar, 2023)

The Padua Moral Judgment Scale (PMJS) was originally developed in English by Anna Laura Comunian and Uwe P. Gielen in 2001 at the University of Padua, Italy. The primary purpose of the PMJS is to assess the development of moral judgment in individuals, drawing upon Lawrence Kohlberg's theoretical framework of moral development (Comunian, 2012). Zulfiqar (2023) translated PMJS into the Urdu language. This scale is a



self-report and easy-to-administer measure. It comprises 28 items across four subscales: power, deal, mutual, and system. Each subscale has 7 items, and each item corresponds to seven socio-moral values that Gibbs used as a moral judgment development stage of his famous “Gibbs’s theory”. Respondents rate each item on a four-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (not at all) to 4 (very much), indicating their level of agreement with each statement (Zulfiqar, 2023).

Findings

The descriptive analysis reveals that the data included an equal representation of males and females among the 400 participants. Forty-eight percent of the participants were between 13 and 14 years old, while the remaining 52% were between 15 and 16 years old. Out of 400 participants, 120 were from grade 8, 143 were from grade 9, and 137 were from grade 10. As the data was collected from the educational institutions, there was equal representation of both private and government schools. Participants were also asked about the family system they were living. Their responses revealed that 56% of the participants were living in the nuclear family system, while the rest 44% were living in the joint family system.

Table 1: Pearson Correlation among Study Variables(N=400)

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. Authoritative Parenting	--	.36**	.07	.49**	.43**	.25**	-.27**	.24**	.40**
2. Authoritarian Parenting		--	.17*	-.22**	-.44**	-.27**	.26**	-.43**	-.54**
3. Permissive Parenting			--	.25*	.02	-.38**	.05	.24*	.08
4. Extraversion				--	.19*	.22*	-.46**	.54**	.40**
5. Agreeableness					--	.39**	-.20**	.33**	.52**
6. Conscientiousness						--	-.12	-.14*	.56**
7. Neuroticism							--	-.23**	-.15
8. Openness to Experience								--	.33**
9. Moral Competence									--

Note. *** $p < .001$, ** $p < .01$

The associations of the table above show that authoritative parenting showed significant positive correlations with extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, openness to experience, and moral competence, indicating that individuals raised in an authoritative parenting environment tend to develop adaptive personality traits and higher moral reasoning. Authoritarian parenting demonstrated significant negative correlations with extraversion, agreeableness, openness, moral competence, and emotional intelligence, suggesting that a rigid and controlling parenting style may suppress emotional expression, social adaptability, and moral sensitivity among individuals. Permissive parenting showed negative correlations with conscientiousness and emotional intelligence, indicating that a lack of parental structure and discipline may hinder the development of responsibility. Permissive parenting non-significant relationship with moral competence. Moreover, personality traits such as extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, and openness had significant positive correlations with moral competence, reflecting that socially expressive, cooperative, responsible, and open-minded individuals tend to exhibit stronger moral judgment. Neuroticism showed a significant negative correlation



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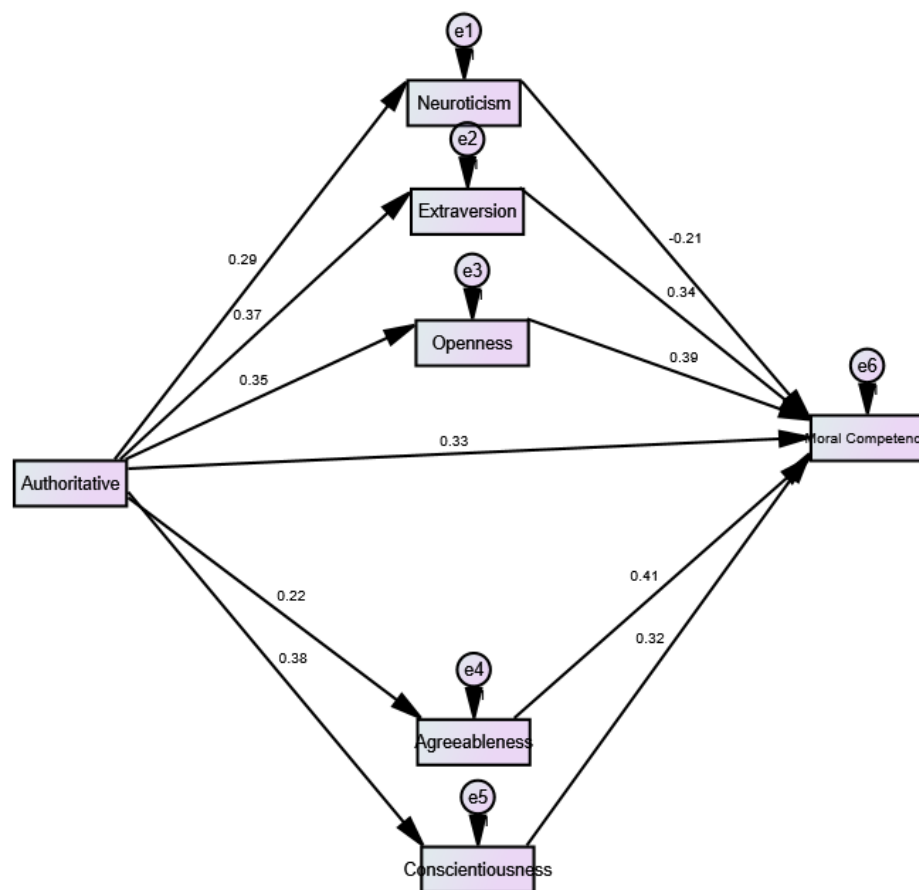
with moral competence, suggesting that emotional instability and anxiety may weaken moral reasoning.

Table 2: Model Fit Indices of Final Model for the Mediating Effect of Personality Traits in the Relationship between Authoritative Parenting Style and Moral Competence, (N=400)

Model	NFI	CFI	GLI	RMSEA	X ²	p
Default Model	.90	.95	.98	.039	32.23	.12
Saturated Model	.95	.95	1.00	.044	21.45	.19

The table above presents structural equation modelling within a theoretical framework. The saturated model has been identified as the most appropriate fit for the present study, with X² = 21.99 and p > .05. A RMSEA score of .044, which is below the threshold. The model indicates a commendable alignment, as evidenced by the value of 05.

Figure 1: Final Model of the Study with Direct and Indirect Effects: Authoritative Parenting Style and Personality Traits on Moral Competence (N=400)



The above shows the direct effect of authoritative parenting style on neuroticism was significant ($\beta = -0.19, p < .01$), extraversion ($\beta = 0.17, p < .01$), openness ($\beta = 0.15, p < .05$), agreeableness ($\beta = 0.22, p < .01$), and conscientiousness ($\beta = 0.18, p < .01$). Similarly direct effect of authoritative parenting on moral competence was also significant ($\beta = .15, p < .01$). Results revealed that personality traits mediated the relationship between authoritative



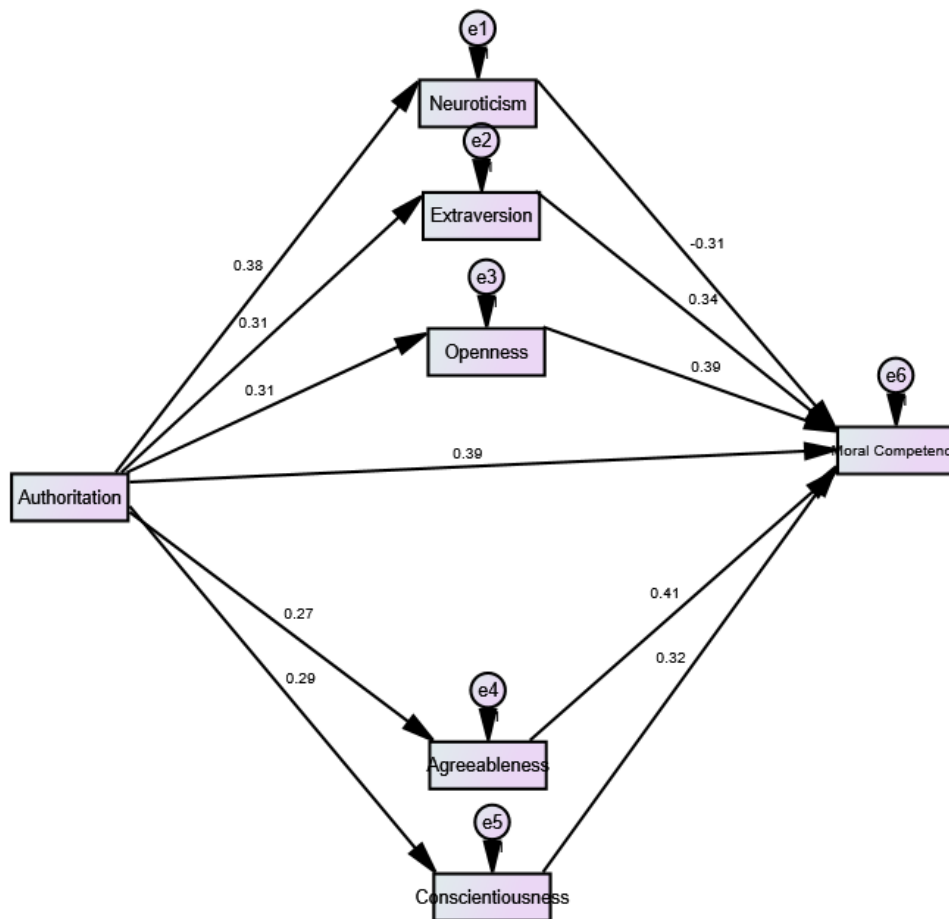
parenting with moral competence. Neuroticism significantly negatively mediated the relationship between authoritative parenting and moral competence ($\beta = -0.31, p < .01$). Extraversion significantly mediated the relationship between authoritative parenting and moral competence ($\beta = 0.34, p < .01$). Openness mediated the relationship between authoritative parenting and moral competence ($\beta = 0.39, p < .01$). Agreeableness mediated the relationship between authoritative parenting and moral competence ($\beta = 0.41, p < .01$). Similarly, conscientiousness also mediated the relationship between authoritative parenting and moral competence ($\beta = 0.32, p < .01$).

Table 3: Model Fit Indices of Final Model for the Mediating Effect of Personality Traits in the Relationship between Authoritarian Parenting and Moral Competence (N=400)

Model	NFI	CFI	GLI	RMSEA	X ²	p
Default Model	.99	.98	.95	.049	18.78	.24
Saturated Model	1.00	1.00	1.00	.033	19.99	.36

The above shows the structural equation modeling of a hypothetical model. It was found that the saturated model was the best-fitted model of the current study, $X^2 = 19.99, p > .05$. An RMSEA value of .033, less than .05, which indicates that the model is well-fitted.

Figure 2: Final Model of the Study with Direct and Indirect Effects: Authoritarian Parenting Style and Personality Traits on Moral Competence (N=400)





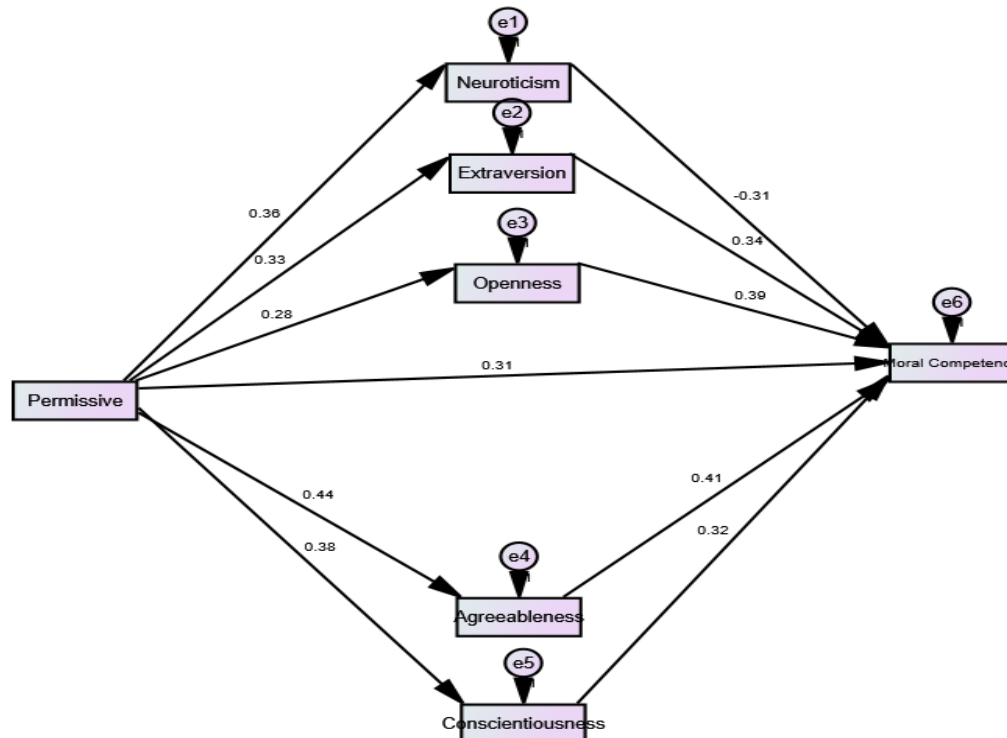
The above figure shows the direct effect of authoritarian parenting style on neuroticism was significant ($\beta = 0.38, p < .01$), extraversion ($\beta = 0.31, p < .01$), openness ($\beta = 0.31, p < .05$), agreeableness ($\beta = -0.27, p < .01$), and conscientiousness ($\beta = 0.29, p < .01$). Similarly direct effect of authoritarian parenting on moral competence was also significant ($\beta = 0.39, p < .01$). Results revealed that personality traits mediated the relationship between authoritarian parenting with moral competence. Neuroticism significantly negatively mediated the relationship between authoritarian parenting and moral competence ($\beta = -0.31, p < .01$). Extraversion significantly mediated the relationship between authoritative parenting and moral competence ($\beta = 0.34, p < .01$). Openness mediated the relationship between authoritarian parenting and moral competence ($\beta = 0.39, p < .01$). Agreeableness mediated the relationship between authoritarian parenting and moral competence ($\beta = 0.41, p < .01$). Similarly, conscientiousness also mediated the relationship between authoritarian parenting and moral competence ($\beta = 0.32, p < .01$).

Table 4: Model Fit Indices of Final Model for the Mediating Effect of Personality Traits in the Relationship between Permissive Parenting and Moral Competence (N=400)

Model	NFI	CFI	GLI	RMSEA	X ²	p
Default Model	.99	.98	.95	.037	14.78	.15
Saturated Model	1.00	1.00	.99	.042	17.99	.21

The above shows the structural equation modeling of a hypothetical model. It was found that the saturated model was the best-fitted model of the current study, $X^2 = 17.99, p > .05$. An RMSEA value of .042 is also less than .05, which indicates that the model is well-fitted.

Figure 3: Final Model of the Study with Direct and Indirect Effects: Permissive Parenting Style and Personality Traits on Moral Competence (N=400)



The above figure shows the direct effect of permissive parenting style on neuroticism was significant ($\beta = 0.36, p < .01$), extraversion ($\beta = 0.33, p < .01$), openness ($\beta = 0.28, p < .05$),



agreeableness ($\beta = 0.44, p < .01$), and conscientiousness ($\beta = .38, p < .01$). Similarly direct effect of permissive parenting on moral competence was also significant ($\beta = 0.31, p < .01$). Results revealed that personality traits mediated the relationship between permissive parenting with moral competence. Neuroticism significantly negatively mediated the relationship between permissive parenting and moral competence ($\beta = -0.31, p < .01$). Extraversion significantly mediated the relationship between permissive parenting and moral competence ($\beta = 0.34, p < .01$). Openness mediated the relationship between permissive parenting and moral competence ($\beta = 0.39, p < .01$). Agreeableness mediated the relationship between permissive parenting and moral competence ($\beta = 0.41, p < .01$). Similarly, conscientiousness also mediated the relationship between permissive parenting and moral competence ($\beta = 0.32, p < .01$).

Discussions

The findings of this study underscore the significance of parenting in the moral development of adolescents. The bond between parents and children fosters love and respect, forming the foundation for moral competence (Batool & Shehzad, 2019). In contemporary society, moral competence significantly impacts individuals' lives, with parents acting as the primary agents of their children's moral development (Obasola, 2015), with the exhibition of moral behaviors, values, norms, and behavioral expectations that collectively form the foundation of ethics (Dwyer, 2019). In this regard, parents' main job is to raise individuals who are morally strong with a basic sense of right and wrong (Killen & Smetana, 2015). The results indicated a significant positive correlation between authoritative parenting and moral competence, implying that individuals raised in a nurturing, structured, and communicative familial environment are predisposed to develop adaptive personality traits, improved moral reasoning, and increased ethical awareness (Ikromova, 2025). These findings are consistent with previous research (Farhadi & Beiranvand, 2023) that similarly emphasized the facilitative role of authoritative parenting in promoting moral competence. Bornstein et al. (2022) asserted that diverse parenting styles cultivate unique stages of moral development. Parents who are authoritative have a close relationship with their kids. An authoritative parenting style is based on a clear understanding of the rights of both parents and kids (Batool & Shehzad, 2019).

On the other hand, the findings of the current study revealed that authoritarian parenting showed a strong negative relationship with moral competence. This means that a strict, punishing, and controlling parenting style may make it harder for children to show their feelings, adapt to new situations, and be morally sensitive (Tan & Yasin, 2020). This finding corresponds with previous literature indicating that excessive control constrains children's opportunities for open moral discourse and the internalisation of ethical principles (Smetana & Jambon, 2017). Additionally, the findings of the current study also revealed that permissive parenting exhibited a non-significant and negative correlation with moral competence, suggesting that excessive freedom devoid of guidance may inadequately establish consistent moral boundaries for children (Feinberg, 2020). It is also essential to acknowledge that the impact of parenting styles on moral development is intricate and multifarious. There are other things that can affect a child's moral development, like their personality, their relationships with peers, and the culture they live in (Fatima et al., 2022). The findings of the study also revealed the significant mediating role of personality traits in explaining how parenting styles develop moral competence.



These findings align with the previous study by Mestvirishvili et al. (2023), which shows that conscientiousness has a higher predictive value for moral competence.

Openness to Experience is the subsequent personality trait that is associated with moral competence. The results of the present study indicated that Openness to Experience served as a moderating factor in the connection between parenting styles and moral competence. Therefore, it can be argued that the capacity to maintain responsibility and demonstrate self-discipline is more closely associated with moral competence. In contrast, the results of the present study demonstrated that neuroticism showed a negative correlation with moral competence, aligning with earlier studies that suggest emotional instability hinders moral judgment (Decety & Cowell, 2018; Suleman et al, 2021). The characteristics of personality are closely connected to empathy, self-regulation, and responsible behavior, which are fundamental elements of emotional intelligence and moral reasoning. The interaction between stress and environmental factors plays a crucial role in shaping these traits; for example, social stress can impact the stability of conscientiousness, which in turn affects adolescents' emotional regulation and moral reasoning (Raufelder et al., 2021). Moreover, it is essential to acknowledge various limitations present in this study. The use of self-reported measures may have resulted in the introduction of response biases, such as social desirability and distorted self-perception, which could compromise the accuracy and validity of the findings. The limitations associated with the sample size and demographic diversity hinder the broader applicability of the results. The application of convenience sampling may result in a sample that fails to accurately reflect the broader community, thereby compromising external validity. The exclusion of specific students in the data collection phase could have further constrained the sample's representativeness. The study conducted a comprehensive analysis of parenting approaches, yet it failed to differentiate between maternal and paternal behaviors, thereby overlooking the gender-specific differences in the impacts of parenting. The current mediation findings provide preliminary insights into how personality traits serve as intermediaries linking parenting styles to emotional intelligence and moral competence. Future investigations should delve into further mediators, including coping strategies, intrinsic motivation, and attachment styles, as well as moderators such as cultural values and gender, to more accurately define the conditions that foster these psychological outcomes. Advancing in this domain is essential for understanding how supportive family settings can foster individuals who are emotionally intelligent and ethically grounded in diverse academic and social situations.

Conflict of Interest: There is no conflict of interest.

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