



## Teachers' autonomy and learner-centered practices: Their influence on learners' performance

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### Abstract

This study investigated the extent of teachers' autonomy and learner-centered practices, as well as their influence on learners' performance in secondary schools within the Schools Division of Iloilo, Province of Iloilo, Philippines, for the School Year 2024-2025. Utilizing a descriptive-correlational research design, the study involved junior high school teachers from the five congressional districts selected through stratified sampling. Data were gathered using an adapted, modified and validated survey questionnaire covering respondents' profiles, teacher autonomy, learner-centered practices, and learners' performance. Statistical tools such as frequency, percentage, mean, standard deviation, t-test, ANOVA, and multiple linear regression were employed at a 0.05 significance level. Findings revealed that most respondents were Teachers I-III with bachelor's degrees and mid-level teaching experience. Teachers demonstrated very high autonomy, particularly in instructional planning and classroom management, while learner-centered practices were excellently practiced, emphasizing student engagement, authentic assessment, and constructive feedback. Learners' performance was rated very satisfactory. Significant differences were found in teacher autonomy and learner-centered practices across certain demographic variables, and both were shown to significantly influence learners' performance. The results imply that fostering teacher autonomy enhances instructional innovation and accountability, while learner-centered practices promote engagement and achievement. It is recommended that educational leaders institutionalize policies promoting teacher empowerment, provide continuous professional development focused on reflective and learner-centered pedagogy, and encourage collaborative assessment design. Future research may explore the long-term effects of teacher autonomy and learner-centered practices across diverse educational settings to sustain learner success.

**Keywords:** Teacher autonomy, learner-centered practices, performance

### Introduction

Teachers' autonomy and learner-centered practices are fundamental to fostering an educational environment that prioritizes student engagement and achievement. Studies emphasize that autonomy-supportive teaching—where teachers provide students with meaningful choices and respect their independence—has a positive impact on learners' motivation and academic performance. Additionally, learner-centered practices, which focus on tailoring instructional strategies to students' needs and interests, align with global educational trends promoting active, personalized learning. These approaches have shown to significantly improve psychological well-being and academic outcomes, demonstrating their relevance to modern pedagogy (Pishghadam *et al.*, 2021) [10].

In the Philippines, teacher autonomy is practiced in public schools. In fact, a study conducted by Abun and colleagues (2022) [1] entitled *Autonomy Supportive and Controlling Behavior of Senior High School and Grade XI Students' Participation in Class Discussion in Ilocos Region, Philippines* found out that teachers' behaviors, especially those that are autonomy-supportive or controlling, are linked to students' participation in classroom discussions. Moreover, it is also correlated with the implementation of the learner-centered practices inside the classroom. Furthermore, Sulaiman and Abdullah (2024) [12] in their study highly emphasized that academic institutions have been implementing reforms to increasingly adapt active learning. A noticeable shift from teaching to learning has occurred, with the learner is now considered the central focus of the educational process and teachers' autonomy is

important in implementing this type of teaching-learning process.

However, while significant research exists on the individual benefits of teacher autonomy and learner-centered practices (Donkoh *et al.*, 2024) [7], few studies explored the combined influence of these factors on learners' performance (Guo, 2021) [9]. Basically, no known studies have investigated the relationship between these variables specifically within the Schools Division of Iloilo, Province of Iloilo, Philippines.

Given this condition, the researcher posited that there was a lack of localized evidence to assess how these teaching practices influence learners' performance in the Schools Division of Iloilo. As such, the researcher believed that addressing this gap was important, as it could help understand how to empower teachers and enhance learners' performance through supportive policies and innovative classroom strategies tailored to the regional educational setting. Therefore, this study investigated the extent of teachers' autonomy and learner-centered practices, and their influence on learners' performance in the Schools Division of Iloilo, Province of Iloilo, Philippines for the School Year 2024-2025.

### Objectives of the Study

This study investigated the extent of teachers' autonomy and learner-centered practices, and their influence on learners' performance in the Schools Division of Iloilo, Province of Iloilo, Philippines for School Year 2024-2025.

Specifically, this study sought answers to the following questions:

1. What is the profile of the respondents in terms of highest educational attainment, position, length of service, school size, and congressional district?

2. What is the extent of teachers' autonomy when taken as a whole and when classified according to highest educational attainment, position, length of service, school size, and congressional district?
3. What is the teachers' learner-centered practices when taken as a whole and when classified according to highest educational attainment, position, length of service, school size, and congressional district?
4. 4. What is the learners' performance as assessed by the respondents when taken as a whole and when classified according to highest educational attainment, position, length of service, school size, and congressional district?
5. Are there significant differences in the extent of teachers' autonomy when classified according to highest educational attainment, position, length of service, school size, and congressional district?
6. Are there significant differences in the teachers' learner-centered practices when classified according to highest educational attainment, position, length of service, school size, and congressional district?
7. Are there significant differences in the learners' performance as assessed by the respondents when classified according to highest educational attainment, position, length of service, school size, and congressional district?
8. Do teachers' autonomy and learner-centered practices significantly influence learners' performance?

**Theoretical Underpinning**

This study, which focused on teachers' autonomy and learner-centered practices and their influence on learners' performance, is anchored in several key theories.

First is the Distributed Leadership Theory by Gronn (1984) [8]. Distributed Leadership Theory is an approach to leadership that emphasizes the idea that leadership should not be the sole responsibility of a single individual, such as a principal or head teacher, but rather shared across multiple people within an organization (Nadeem, 2024). In the context of education, this theory suggests that leadership tasks, decision-making, and responsibilities are spread throughout the school, involving teachers, administrators, and even students in shaping the educational environment and practices.

Meanwhile, the Constructivist Learning Theory by Jean Piaget posits that learners actively construct knowledge through meaningful experiences, with teachers serving as facilitators of this process (Chand, 2024) [3]. Technically, constructivism is a learning theory that suggests individuals build knowledge through active engagement and interactions with their surroundings. Promoting active learning strategies, such as experiments, to foster greater understanding and encourage reflection and discussion, is more effective because it highlights how students' knowledge is evolving (Chand, 2024) [3]. Learner-centered practices, rooted in constructivism, advocate for personalized and engaging instruction, allowing students to explore, question, and connect new knowledge with prior experiences.

Lastly, Bandura's self-efficacy theory highlights the role of self-efficacy in academic performance. Self-efficacy refers to a student's belief in their ability to succeed in specific tasks. When learners believe in their capabilities, they are more likely to persist, face challenges, and achieve better

academic results. Bandura also emphasizes the role of observational learning, suggesting that students can model behaviors and strategies from others, such as peers, teachers, or role models, which can positively influence their academic success (Cherry, 2024) [5].

Overall, the researcher believed that the Distributed Leadership Theory, Constructivist Learning Theory, and Self-Efficacy Theory collectively illustrated how a collaborative leadership style, active learner engagement, and confidence in one's abilities contributed to a more effective and empowering educational environment. When teachers were granted autonomy and students are encouraged to take ownership of their learning, academic performance was more likely to improve. These theoretical underpinnings reinforced the significance of fostering a school culture that supported both teacher empowerment and learner-centered approaches to achieve enhanced academic outcomes.

**Materials and Methods Research Design**

The researcher employed a descriptive-correlational research design to investigate the influence of teachers' autonomy and learner-centered practices on learners' performance in the Schools Division of Iloilo. This design was deemed most suitable as it allowed for the examination of relationships between variables without manipulating any conditions.

As Sreekumar (2024) [11] highlighted, descriptive-correlational research was useful for identifying correlations and predicting future outcomes based on existing data. Brodowicz (2024) [2] further supported this by stating that this research design was typically applied to describe the characteristics of a specific group and explore the relationship between two variables within that group. Likewise, Devi *et al.* (2023) [6] emphasized that correlational design, as a non-experimental method, was ideal for examining the nature and strength of relationships among multiple variables within a single population.

Given these insights, the researcher affirmed that this approach was the most appropriate for assessing how teacher autonomy and learner-centered practices related to and potentially affected the performance of learners in the Schools Division of Iloilo. In this study, profile of the respondents were the independent variables, while teachers' autonomy, learner-centered practices, and learners' performance served as the dependent variables.

**Respondents**

The respondents of this study were the junior high school teachers from the Department of Education within the five congressional districts of the Schools Division of Iloilo, Province of Iloilo, Philippines, during the School Year 2024-2025. To ensure fair and proportional representation across all districts, the researcher employed a stratified sampling technique. The actual distribution of respondents is shown in Table 1.

**Table 1:** Distribution of Respondents

Congressional District	N	n	%
First District	1,217	67	19.13
Second District	1,070	59	16.82
Third District	1,485	82	23.34
Fourth District	949	52	14.91
Fifth District	1,642	90	25.80
<b>Total</b>	<b>6,363</b>	<b>350</b>	<b>100.00</b>

**Data Gathering Instrument**

The researcher used an adapted, modified and validated survey questionnaire to assess the respondents’ extent of autonomy in the classroom and their learner-centered practices. The adapted and modified questionnaire was based on previous studies, including Swatevacharkul (2022) [13] for teachers' autonomy and Chen and Bergner (2021) [4] for learner-centered practices.

The research questionnaire consisted of four parts. Part I focused on the respondents' profile, including their highest educational attainment, position, length of service, school size, and congressional district. Part II assessed teachers’ autonomy based on Swatevacharkul's (2022) [13] study, Teacher Autonomy: Freedom and Capacity Perceived by EFL Teachers in Thai Public High Schools. Part III examined learner-centered practices, based on Chen and Bergner's (2021) [4] study, Survey on Student-Centered Learning Assessment and Feedback Practices – Research Brief. Finally, Part IV focused on learners' performance. Parts II and III consisted of a Likert-scale questionnaire with a five-point range. The response options for teachers’ autonomy and learner-centered practices were: Always (5), Often (4), Sometimes (3), Rarely (2), and Never (1). Meanwhile, Part IV was based on learners' average grades for the third quarter of the academic year.

**Data Analysis Procedure**

Data in this study were analyzed and interpreted by the researcher using the appropriate statistical tools using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software. To analyze data on the extent of teachers' autonomy, the scale of means below was used:

Scale of Means	Description	Interpretation
4.21-5.00	To a Very Great Extent	Teacher autonomy was exceptional in instructional practices, curriculum planning, assessment, and classroom management. Teachers independently created materials, tailored lessons, and used diverse assessment strategies to effectively meet student needs, resulting in higher engagement and improved academic performance.
3.41-4.20	To a Great Extent	Teacher autonomy was strong in selecting materials, adapting curriculum, and managing classrooms. Although this positively affected learners, there are still opportunities to further empower teachers in areas such as assessment design and policy decisions.
2.61-3.40	To a Moderate Extent	Teacher autonomy was applied to some extent in developing instructional content, assessments, and behavior plans. While some independence was evident, including the use of alternative assessments and rubric creation, institutional constraints likely limited full autonomy, leading to a moderate impact on teaching effectiveness and student outcomes.
1.81-2.60	To a Low Extent	Teacher autonomy was limited, with few opportunities to modify materials, grading policies, or behavior systems. This restriction hindered their ability to address learners' needs or apply personal teaching methods, negatively impacting instructional effectiveness and student support.
1.00-1.80	To a Very Low Extent	Teacher autonomy was minimal or nonexistent in instruction, assessment, and classroom management, with teachers relying mainly on standard policies and materials. This lack of flexibility restricted their ability to meet learners' needs, highlighting the need for reforms to increase teacher agency and improve student outcomes.

Meanwhile, the learner-centered practices were determined using the following scale of means:

Scale of Means	Description	Interpretation
4.21-5.00	Excellent Practiced	All teachers employ instructional strategies focusing on student choice, collaboration, reflection, and real-world application. Techniques such as goal-setting, self-evaluation, and technology are used to enhance learners' achievement.
3.41-4.20	Very Satisfactorily Practiced	Most teachers employ instructional strategies focusing on student choice, collaboration, reflection, and real-world application. Techniques such as goal-setting, self-evaluation, and technology are used to enhance learners' achievement.
2.61-3.40	Satisfactorily Practiced	Some teachers employ instructional strategies focusing on student choice, collaboration, reflection, and real-world application. Techniques such as goal-setting, self-evaluation, and technology are used to enhance learners' achievement.
1.81-2.60	Fairly Practiced	Few of the teachers employ instructional strategies focusing on student choice, collaboration, reflection, and real-world application. Techniques such as goal-setting, self-evaluation, and technology are used to enhance learners' achievement.
1.00-1.80	Poorly Practiced	None of the teachers employ instructional strategies focusing on student choice, collaboration, reflection, and real-world application. Techniques such as goal-setting, self-evaluation, and technology are used to enhance learners' achievement.

On the other hand, the learners’ performance was based on the School Form 9 or Progress Report Card of the Department of Education. It was interpreted as follows:

Scale	Description	Interpretation
90-100	Outstanding	Performance represents an extraordinary level of achievement and commitment in terms of quality and time, technical skills and knowledge, ingenuity, creativity and initiative.
85-89	Very Satisfactory	Performance exceeded expectations. All goals, objectives and targets were achieved above the established standards.
80-84	Satisfactory	Performance met expectations in terms of quality of work, efficiency and timeliness. The most critical annual goals were met.
75-79	Unsatisfactory	Performance failed to meet expectations, and/or one or more of the most critical goals were not met.
Below 75	Did not meet expectations or Poor	Performance was consistently below expectations and/or reasonable progress towards critical goals was not made. Significant improvement is needed in one or more important areas.

**Research Procedure**

The researcher submitted a formal request to the Dean of the Graduate School for permission to conduct the study. Subsequently, letters were sent to the Schools Division Superintendent of the Schools Division of Iloilo and the respective school principals. Upon receiving approval, the researcher proceeded with reliability testing and the actual study. Following that, the data were validated, tallied, processed, analyzed, and interpreted using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) with a significance level of 0.05.

**Data Analysis**

For the statistical analysis of the data, the following statistical tools were used: Frequency Count. This was used to get the occurrences of the responses of the respondents when categorized according to the different variables. Percentage. This was used to determine the rate index of the given variables. Standard Deviation. This was used to measure the degree of variation or dispersion of the responses from the mean. It provided insight into how consistently the respondents rated the extent of teachers’ autonomy, the level of learner-centered practices, and learners’ performance. Mean. This was used to determine the extent of teachers’ autonomy, level of learner-centered practices and learners’ performance when taken as a whole and when classified according to position. t-test. This was used to determine the significant differences in teachers’ autonomy, the level of learner-centered practices, and learners’ performance when respondents were classified according to highest educational attainment, length of service, school size, and congressional district. Multiple Linear Regression. This was used to determine the influence of teachers’ autonomy and learner-centered practices on learners’ performance in the Schools Division of Iloilo, Province of Iloilo, Philippines for the School Year 2024-2025.

**Conclusions**

This study, “Teachers’ Autonomy and Learner-Centered Practices: Their Influence on Learners’ Performance” concludes that;

1. The demographic profile of the respondents revealed that most were Teachers I-III with bachelor’s degrees and had mid-level teaching experience ranging from 10

to 20 years. The respondents were distributed across schools of varying sizes, with notable representation from Congressional Districts 3 and 5. This suggests a well-rounded pool of experienced educators whose insights reflected diverse school contexts.

2. Teachers exhibited a very high level of autonomy, particularly in areas related to instructional planning, classroom management, and pedagogical strategies. However, limitations remained in areas requiring broader policy flexibility, such as grading policies and curriculum adaptation. This high level of autonomy was consistent across various classifications, including highest educational attainment, position, length of service, school size, and congressional district. This indicates the need to sustain continuous professional development programs that nurture reflective and independent practice among all teachers.
3. Learner-centered teaching practices were highly evident among the respondents. Teachers actively engaged learners through discussions, performance-based assessments, and formative feedback. Nonetheless, there was room for improvement in providing learners with greater choice and involvement in assessment design. These practices remained consistently high across all teacher classifications. The excellent level of learner-centered practices reflects teachers' strong commitment to student engagement and meaningful learning.
4. Learners demonstrated very satisfactory academic performance across different contexts, as assessed by the respondents. This suggested a generally effective teaching-learning environment, regardless of variations in teacher classification, school size, or congressional district.
5. Teachers' autonomy did not significantly vary based on position, school size, or congressional district. However, it was significantly different when it comes to their length of service and highest educational attainment, indicating that experience and higher academic qualifications may enhance perceived professional independence.
6. There were no significant differences in learner-centered practices based on teachers' highest educational attainment and position. However, significant differences existed when teachers were grouped according to their length of service, school size, and congressional district—suggesting that contextual and experiential factors shaped the implementation of learner-centered approaches.
7. Learners' performance, as assessed by the respondents, did not significantly differ when grouped according to teachers' highest educational attainment, position, or congressional district. However, significant differences emerged when classified according to teachers' length of service and school size, indicating that these variables may have affected instructional delivery and learning outcomes.
8. Teachers' autonomy demonstrated a significant but negative influence on learners' performance, while learner-centered practices did not show a significant effect. This suggests that granting teachers autonomy must be balanced with accountability, guidance, and professional support to ensure it contributes positively to student outcomes. Likewise, while learner-centered

strategies are valuable in promoting engagement, their effectiveness in improving performance may require stronger institutional support, adequate resources, and continuous teacher training.

### Recommendations

1. Educational leaders in the Central Office should consider revising current guidelines to grant teachers greater flexibility in adjusting grading policies and modifying the curriculum based on learners' needs. Continuous dialogue between school heads and teachers in public secondary schools should also be encouraged to ensure that autonomy is supported at all levels without compromising the curriculum standards set by the Department of Education.
2. School Heads and Department Heads should promote professional learning communities and implement training programs focused on enhancing learner agency. Teachers should be encouraged and equipped to co-create assessments with learners, involve them in setting learning goals, and allow choice in project-based tasks to further strengthen learner-centered practices.
3. To sustain and improve learners' academic performance, best practices from high-performing schools and teachers should be documented and disseminated across the Schools Division of Iloilo. Additionally, ongoing support for instructional innovation and performance monitoring should be maintained to foster continuous academic growth.
4. Teacher autonomy should be strengthened through differentiated support based on years of service and academic qualifications. Mentorship programs may be established, enabling more experienced and highly educated teachers to mentor their peers—thus fostering a culture of shared autonomy and continuous professional development.
5. Tailored capacity-building programs should be designed to address variations in school size, location, and teacher experience. School-based management teams must ensure equitable access to resources and support systems that promote the consistent application of learner-centered strategies across diverse educational contexts.
6. Given the influence of school size and teacher experience on learner performance, additional resources and instructional support should be provided to larger or potentially overcrowded schools. Furthermore, experienced teachers should be tapped to lead instructional coaching and peer learning sessions aimed at building the teaching capacity of their colleagues.
7. To further enhance learners' performance, educational stakeholders should prioritize initiatives that strengthen both teacher autonomy and learner-centered practices. These may include policy reforms encouraging teacher-led innovation, increased investment in teaching resources, and the integration of student voice in classroom instruction and assessment.

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