



Teachers and Learners' Perceptions of Autonomy in English Language Learning: A Comparative Study of State Schools and Private Language Institutes in Iran

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Abstract

Autonomy, as a multi-faceted trait, is an important concept in education. The present study examined various aspects of autonomy, specifically, cognitive, interpersonal, institutional, and technological, within English language learning settings in both state schools and private language institutes. A split-plot design was effectively applied by structuring the educational settings (state schools vs. private language institutes) as the whole plot factor, while the roles of participants (teachers vs. students) and the specific dimensions of autonomy (cognitive, interpersonal, institutional, and technological) represent the subplot factors. A questionnaire was developed, drawing on key concepts from Self-Determination Theory (SDT) and previous surveys by Borg and Al Busaidi (2012) and Murase (2015). The questionnaire was tested for reliability and factorability before being administered to 400 participants, which included 100 teachers from state schools, 100 from private language institutes, as well as 100 senior high school students and 100 intermediate-level students enrolled in private institutes. The aim was to see how learners and educators perceive and experience autonomy across different educational environments. The findings indicated notable differences in the perception and application of autonomy, with participants from private language institutes reporting a greater sense of autonomy in their learning practices compared to those in state schools. This study enhances our understanding of learner autonomy and offers insights that could guide future teaching strategies in varying educational contexts. The implications for curriculum development and teacher training are also addressed

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Introduction

The concept of learner autonomy has gained increasing significance in the field of education, particularly in language learning, where fostering independent learning can greatly enhance learner productivity (Benson, 2011; Fisher, 2021; Little, 2007). Autonomy is multifaceted, encompassing dimensions such as psychological, sociological, political, and technical aspects (Murase, 2015; Savolainen & Ruckenstein, 2024), each of which influences how learners engage with, and take responsibility for, their educational experiences. In the context of English language learning, it is crucial to examine these dimensions across different educational settings, as various institutional frameworks may support or hinder autonomy in distinct ways.

State schools and private language institutes often provide contrasting environments for language education, which can lead to differing perceptions of autonomy (Murray, 2014). For instance, teachers in private language institutes may have more freedom to deal with curricula that promote autonomous learning, while state school teachers might be bound by standardized curricula and broader educational regulations. Additionally, the learner profiles in these settings vary, with private language institutes often attracting students who are more self-motivated and engaged in their learning processes (Ferlazzo, 2015).

This study employed a quantitative approach to systematically investigate the differences, focusing on the perceptions of both teachers and learners regarding autonomy in English language learning. By administering a structured questionnaire to 400 participants, the present researchers aimed to provide a comprehensive analysis of the varying experiences and attitudes towards autonomy. The outcomes of this research will not only highlight the disparities in autonomy perceptions but also contribute to a deeper understanding of how different educational contexts influence learner agency. Ultimately, these insights can inform the development of pedagogical strategies and curriculum designs that better support autonomy in language education, thereby promoting more effective learning outcomes for students in diverse settings. Given the purpose of this study, the following research question was addressed:

RQ: Are there any significant differences, according to teachers and learners' perceptions, between state schools and private language institutes on how autonomy is being practiced?

Literature Review

Contextual factors such as culture, community, institutional settings, and classroom dynamics significantly influence both language learning and teaching, affecting the perceptions and practices of learners and educators alike (Rajib & Jahan, 2024). Key elements like student motivation, the quality of teacher-student relationships, and individual self-efficacy are critical in determining learners' outcomes in language acquisition (Wang et al., 2024). Additionally, institutional policies and practices play a pivotal role in shaping teachers' instructional decisions and methodologies (Kumaravadivelu, 2012). Despite these influences, many educators encounter institutional constraints that prevent the integration of student participation in decision-making processes, even when there is a clear desire to foster enhanced teaching methods and promote learner autonomy (Balcikanli, 2010; Perry-Hazan & Somech 2023).

In his foundational work on learner autonomy, Little (2007) emphasizes the profound influence of educational contexts on the promotion of autonomy. He posits that numerous contextual elements, such as curriculum design, assessment practices, classroom interactions, and institutional policies, significantly affect learners' capacity to exercise autonomy throughout their learning process. Little (2007) further argues that an enabling educational environment, characterized by freedom, choice, and control, is essential for fostering autonomy, whereas contexts that emphasize teacher-centered pedagogies and rigid curricula may hinder its development. In subsequent research, Little (2009) also highlights the necessity of crafting empowering contexts that encourage learners to take responsibility for their education and make informed decisions regarding their objectives, strategies, and assessments.

To examine the implementation of autonomy in different institutional environments, Thang (2009) conducted a study on learner autonomy among Malaysian undergraduates enrolled in English as a Second Language (ESL) programs. The focus was on determining whether students at a private university exhibited the same teacher-centered behaviors as those at public universities. Utilizing a quantitative approach through questionnaires, the research aimed to compare the autonomy levels of learners across different university settings. Findings indicated that, while students from both types of institutes generally preferred a teacher-centered approach, the private university students displayed a tendency towards greater autonomy. Specifically, there was a significant shift among private university learners toward more autonomous learning strategies, in contrast to their public university counterparts. This suggests that the educational environment significantly influences students' learning preferences, hinting at the potential for autonomy to develop in supportive contexts despite prevailing cultural tendencies toward teacher-centeredness in Malaysian education.

In another study by Nanbedeh (2025), the constraints and strategies related to promoting learner autonomy in Iranian high school classrooms, particularly within the context of English as a Foreign Language education were investigated. The research identified three primary categories of constraints: curriculum-related, learner-related, and teacher-related. Teachers pointed out that rigid curriculum requirements often hinder flexibility, limiting their ability to incorporate strategies that foster autonomous learning. Additionally, learner-related challenges included students' lack of clarity regarding their learning goals and responsibilities, which impeded their capacity to take initiative in their learning process. Teacher-related constraints highlighted traditional teaching methods and insufficient exposure to alternative instructional strategies, restricting opportunities for active student participation. The study also explored various strategies to promote learner autonomy, such as encouraging learner decision-making, promoting self-evaluation, and teaching problem-solving skills. Through thematic analysis, the research revealed that while teachers recognized the importance of autonomy in education, they faced significant barriers in implementing LA-supportive practices. The findings suggest the need for more flexible curricula and targeted professional development for teachers to facilitate the promotion of learner autonomy effectively.

Nasri et al., (2015), further investigated the factors influencing learner autonomy in Iranian high school English language classrooms. The study employed a mixed-methods approach, combining classroom observations with teacher and student interviews. Observations showed

five key teacher practices aimed at promoting autonomy: delegating responsibility to students, offering choices in learning activities, utilizing peer learning, encouraging self and peer assessment, and extending learning beyond the classroom. However, interviews revealed significant constraints. Teachers reported limitations imposed by a pre-defined curriculum, high-stakes testing, and insufficient resources, particularly technology. These constraints were corroborated by student interviews, which further highlighted the impact of time pressures, uneven proficiency levels affecting collaborative learning, and the need for teachers to adopt more contemporary pedagogical approaches. Crucially, the study also identified the influence of a traditionally memorization-focused educational system, which has cultivated passive learning habits among students, thereby hindering the development of learner autonomy. In conclusion, the findings demonstrate complex interactions between teacher actions, systemic factors, and established learning patterns in determining the level of learner autonomy achieved within the specific context of Iranian high schools.

Khan et al. (2023) also conducted a study that aimed to investigate teachers' perceptions of the autonomy of English as a Second Language (ESL) learners in both private and public schools in Pakistan. The primary objective was to investigate how these perceptions differ between the two educational sectors and to assess the implications for learner autonomy. Utilizing grounded theory of Glaser and Strauss (1967) as its theoretical framework, the research found that ESL learners, regardless of the type of institute, generally do not exhibit autonomy in their learning due to institutional constraints, such as rules and regulations. However, the study revealed that some private schools provide a degree of autonomy to their teachers, which can help facilitate greater learner independence. Ultimately, the findings suggest a need to reduce institutional constraints to promote learner autonomy more effectively in both settings.

The integration of personalized teaching practices in blended learning contexts presents unique challenges related to the various needs of learners. Xu et al. (2024) delve into these complexities by proposing a learner profile model designed to identify and address individual differences among students. The findings underscore the significant impact of personalized teaching approaches on educational outcomes and outline a theoretical framework alongside practical guidance for implementation. However, the authors also acknowledge persistent challenges in this area and recommend future research to expand sample sizes, incorporate mixed-methods approaches, and focus on the nuanced personalized needs of learners, thereby further refining the effectiveness and applicability of personalized teaching strategies in diverse educational settings.

Finally, to align with the substantial shift toward learner-centered educational methods, modern classrooms are anticipated to emphasize the growing significance of autonomous learning. This evolution emphasizes that effective autonomous learning cannot occur without the active involvement of teachers (Han, 2014) who support and facilitate this independence. Consequently, understanding educators' attitudes toward fostering learner autonomy is essential for enhancing language education outcomes. A study by Demetrashvili et al. (2024), focusing on Georgian EFL teachers, provides valuable insights into this issue, revealing that over 100 educators view several obstacles to implementing autonomous learning. These

obstacles include a lack of resources, technical difficulties, and large class sizes that impede the learning process. Additionally, the findings indicate that educators themselves face challenges such as insufficient experience, limited professional development opportunities, and issues with time management. This research underscores the necessity of equipping teachers with the tools and support needed to successfully promote autonomous learning in their classrooms, ultimately benefiting both educators and their students.

In reviewing the existing literature on learner autonomy, several key themes and gaps emerge that underscore the purpose of the current study. While previously discussed research emphasizes the multifaceted nature of learner autonomy and the significant impact of contextual factors, including institutional settings, teacher practices, and learner characteristics, there remains a notable lack of comparative studies that investigate these dynamics across different educational environments, specifically between state schools and private language institutes. Previous studies have primarily focused on individual factors influencing autonomy but have often overlooked the broader implications of varying educational contexts on the perceptions of both learners and educators. Therefore, this study seeks to fill this gap by systematically examining how autonomy is practiced in diverse settings and how these practices are perceived differently by teachers and learners. By addressing this gap, the research aims to provide a deeper understanding of the frameworks that support or hinder learner autonomy, contributing to the development of pedagogical strategies that promote effective language learning outcomes tailored to the unique needs of different educational contexts.

Method

Design of the Study

In this research, a split-plot design was effectively applied by structuring the educational settings (state schools vs. private language institutes) as the whole plot factor, while the roles of participants (teachers vs. students) and the specific dimensions of autonomy (cognitive, interpersonal, institutional, and technological) represent the subplot factors. The study involved collecting data from state schools and private institutes, using a structured questionnaire. This design allowed the researchers to analyze the main effects of the educational settings on autonomy perceptions while simultaneously examining how these perceptions differ among teachers and students as well as across the various dimensions of autonomy.

Participants

The participants consisted of a diverse group of both male and female individuals, encompassing a total of 400 participants categorized into two main groups: teachers and learners. Specifically, the study included 100 teachers from state schools and 100 teachers from private language institutes, ensuring a balanced representation of both genders within the teaching population. Additionally, the study involved 200 students, divided into two distinct groups. One group consisted of 100 senior school students whose English exposure was limited solely to state education, lacking any prior experience with private language institutes. The second group comprised 100 intermediate-level students from private language institutes. These students had a more extensive background, having studied English for over four to five years in private institutes, thereby meeting the intermediate proficiency standards of their

respective institutes. This inclusive approach ensures that the perspectives on autonomy across different dimensions, cognitive, interpersonal, institutional, and technological, are captured from both educators and students, facilitating a comprehensive analysis of how experiences and perceptions of autonomy differ within the two educational settings.

Materials and Instruments

The research utilized a structured questionnaire aimed at evaluating various dimensions of autonomy, cognitive, interpersonal, institutional, and technological, as identified through factor analysis, within English language learning environments. This questionnaire was crafted using principles from SDT and theoretical contributions from Murase (2015), ensuring that it effectively represents important aspects of autonomy for both educators and learners. Great care was taken in the wording and structure of the questions to guarantee clarity and suitability for teachers and students from both public schools and private language centers. The questionnaire included five-point Likert scale items to allow for quantitative analysis. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure (KMO) was checked to see if data were suitable for factor analysis, yielding a value of .97, well above the .60 threshold, while Bartlett's test also indicated significance ($p < .001$).

Procedure

For data collection, a systematically structured questionnaire was designed to assess various dimensions of autonomy within English language learning environments. A total of 400 participants with the above-mentioned characteristics were surveyed. The questionnaire utilized five-point Likert scale items to facilitate clear and quantitative analysis of respondents' perceptions regarding autonomy. To ensure the reliability and validity of the questionnaire, exploratory factor analysis was conducted after data collection to verify that the items effectively represented the intended dimensions. This analysis identified four primary factors relevant to the Language Learner Autonomy Practice Scale, which were subsequently labeled as cognitive, institutional, interpersonal, and technological. A thorough review of each item, in consultation with academic advisors, ensured that these factors accurately captured the constructs of autonomy pertinent to both teachers and learners.

The reliability of the final instrument was further evaluated using Cronbach's alpha. The overall Cronbach's alpha for the total Language Learner Autonomy Practice Scale, comprising 32 items, was found to be .874, indicating good internal consistency. Individual reliability indices for the factors, as indicated below, were also calculated, and the results confirmed the reliability of the questionnaire, demonstrating its strength as a valuable tool for future research in similar settings:

Technological: $\alpha = .83$, **Cognitive:** $\alpha = .911$, **Institutional:** $\alpha = .774$ and **Interpersonal:** $\alpha = .893$

Data Analysis

Once data collection was complete, a one-way multivariate ANOVA (MANOVA) was utilized to analyze the main effects of educational settings on the perceptions of autonomy while simultaneously examining differences between teachers and students across the various autonomy dimensions. This analytical approach not only provides a comprehensive

understanding of autonomy perceptions but also ensures the replicability of the study in future research, given the validated and reliable instrument employed.

Results

The exploratory factor analysis conducted on the Language Learner Autonomy Practice Scale provided valuable insights into the underlying constructs that contribute to language learner autonomy. A KMO value above 0.6 is generally considered acceptable, and a significant Bartlett's test suggests that the correlation matrix is not an identity matrix, meaning that there is sufficient correlation between variables to proceed with factor analysis (Table 1).

Table 1. *KMO and Bartlett's Test*

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		.974
	Approx. Chi-Square	10892.414
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity		496
	Sig.	.000

Principal Component Analysis (Table 2) with Varimax rotation (Table 3) were used for factor extraction and rotation. The analysis extracted four factors with eigenvalues greater than 1, explaining 68.73% of the variance.

Table 2. *Principal Component Analysis on Language Learner Autonomy Practice Scale*

Comp.	Initial Eigenvalues			Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings			Rotation Sums of Squared Loadings
	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total
1	17.467	54.583	54.583	17.467	54.583	54.583	12.712
2	1.976	5.981	60.563	1.976	5.981	60.563	11.430
3	1.781	4.978	65.541	1.781	4.978	65.541	11.258
4	1.550	3.191	68.732	1.550	3.191	68.732	11.079
5	.838	2.619	71.351				
6	.722	2.257	73.608				
7	.671	2.098	75.706				
8	.600	1.874	77.580				
9	.568	1.774	79.354				
10	.521	1.627	80.980				
11	.460	1.437	82.418				
12	.444	1.386	83.804				
13	.398	1.244	85.048				
14	.381	1.190	86.238				
15	.365	1.140	87.379				
16	.347	1.085	88.464				
17	.343	1.071	89.535				
18	.323	1.009	90.544				
19	.284	.889	91.432				
20	.272	.850	92.283				
21	.266	.832	93.115				
22	.249	.780	93.895				
23	.240	.749	94.643				
24	.238	.743	95.386				
25	.233	.729	96.115				

26	.208	.651	96.766
27	.193	.602	97.368
28	.184	.574	97.942
29	.181	.566	98.508
30	.174	.544	99.052
31	.154	.480	99.532
32	.150	.468	100.000

Table 3. *Rotated Factor Matrix in PCA in the 32-Item Questionnaire*

Item	Factor			
	1	2	3	4
i32	.727			
i29	.710			
i31	.678			
i27	.618			
i26	.562			
i28	.552			
i30	.533			
i25	.471			
i4		.703		
i2		.696		
i6		.679		
i3		.663		
i7		.648		
i1		.641		
i5		.612		
i8		.609		
i9		.593		
i18			.732	
i19			.721	
i20			.701	
i24			.678	
i17			.662	
i21			.653	
i23			.509	
i22			.493	
i13				.693
i14				.633
i11				.595
i12				.517
i15				.494
i16				.492
i10				.407

As shown in Figure 1, there is a clear break between the fourth and fifth components, suggesting that the four extracted components should be retained. Both the scree plot (Figure 1) and the parallel analysis (Table 4) suggested a four-factor solution. This indicates that the 32 items in the Language Learner Autonomy Practice Scale can be categorized into four unique underlying constructs.

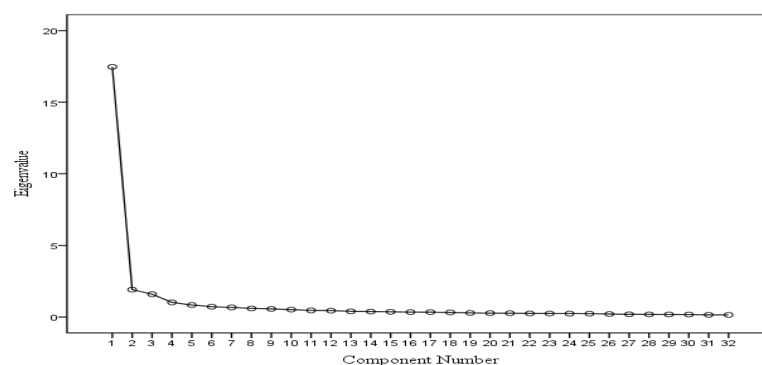


Figure 1. *Scree Plot for Language Learner Autonomy Practice Scale*

To maintain the components identified through Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) in the parallel analysis, Watkins' (2006) method was utilized. This method involves comparing the initial eigenvalues generated by SPSS with those simulated over one hundred iterations. Specifically, factors were retained when their random eigenvalues exceeded the simulated values. As shown in Table 4, the first four observed eigenvalues were greater than the simulated ones. Consequently, the parallel analysis recommended extracting four factors as the underlying constructs for the 32 items on the questionnaire.

Table 4. *Watkins' Parallel Analysis*

Component	Observed (Total variance explained)	Simulated (Random Eigenvalue)	Decision
1	17.467	1.572	KEEP
2	1.976	1.494	KEEP
3	1.781	1.440	KEEP
4	1.550	1.391	KEEP
5	.838	1.342	DROP
6	.722	1.303	DROP
7	.671	1.265	DROP
8	.600	1.229	DROP
9	.568	1.198	DROP
10	.521	1.164	DROP
11	.460	1.134	DROP
12	.444	1.101	DROP
13	.398	1.074	DROP
14	.381	1.046	DROP
15	.365	1.018	DROP
16	.347	0.988	DROP
17	.343	0.963	DROP
18	.323	0.937	DROP
19	.284	0.912	DROP
20	.272	0.885	DROP
21	.266	0.858	DROP
22	.249	0.833	DROP
23	.240	0.808	DROP
24	.238	0.783	DROP
25	.233	0.756	DROP
26	.208	0.730	DROP
27	.193	0.703	DROP

28	.184	0.674	DROP
29	.181	0.648	DROP
30	.174	0.619	DROP
31	.154	0.587	DROP
32	.150	0.547	DROP

Thus, after running exploratory factor analysis, the main categorization of Language Learner Autonomy Practice Scale for the four factors and the related reliability indices are provided in Table 5. After reading all items related to each factor carefully and consulting with some advisors, each factor was labeled. Table 5 contains the categorization of the four factors with the pertinent acceptable reliability indices as follows:

F1: Technological (Items 32, 29, 31, 27, 26, 28, 30, 25; $\alpha = .831$),

F2: Cognitive (Items 4, 3, 6, 2, 7, 1, 5, 8, 9; $\alpha = .911$),

F3: Institutional (Items 18, 19, 20, 24, 17, 21, 23, 22; $\alpha = .774$)

F4: Interpersonal (Items 13, 14, 11, 12, 15, 16, 10; $\alpha = .893$),

Generally, as seen in Table 5, the reliability of the final total Language Learner Autonomy Practice Scale containing 32 items turned out to be .874.

Table 5. Four Factors of Language Learner Autonomy Practice Scale with Related Reliability Indices

Factor	No. of Items	Reliability Method	Reliability Value
1) Technological (Items 32, 29, 31, 27, 26, 28, 30, 25)	8	Cronbach's Alpha	.833
2) Cognitive (Items 4, 3, 6, 2, 7, 1, 5, 8, 9)	9	Cronbach's Alpha	.911
3) Institutional (Items 18, 19, 20, 24, 17, 21, 23, 22)	8	Cronbach's Alpha	.774
4) Interpersonal (Items 13, 14, 11, 12, 15, 16, 10)	7	Cronbach's Alpha	.893
Total Language Learner Autonomy Practice Scale	32	Cronbach's Alpha	.874

The question of the present study inquired whether there are any significant differences, according to teachers and learners' perceptions, between state schools and private language institutes on how autonomy is being practiced. MANOVA was performed on two split files (i.e., teachers and learners) to investigate this research question. They are explained below.

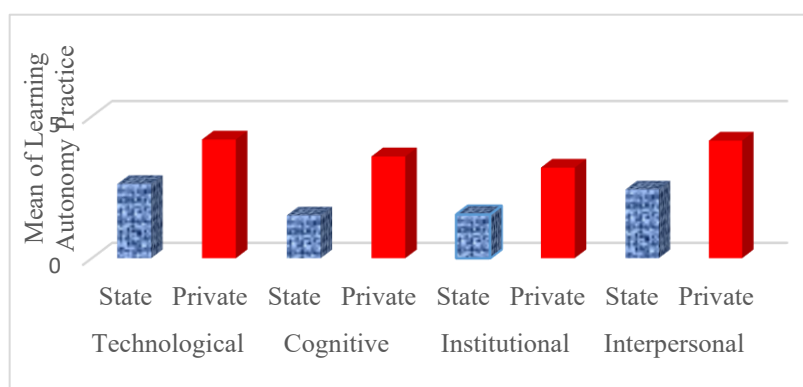
Teachers' Perceptions

As explained earlier, the Language Learning Autonomy Practice Scale containing four dimensions of 'technological', 'cognitive', 'institutional', and 'interpersonal' was used. According to Pallant (2020), multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) is an extension of analysis of variance for use when we have more than one dependent variable. These dependent variables (i.e., 'technological', 'cognitive', 'institutional', and 'interpersonal') are interrelated as different subscales of language learning autonomy practice. Before discussing the results of inferential statistics, the descriptive statistics are presented in Table 6.

Table 6. Descriptive Statistics for Autonomy in State and Private Groups (Teachers' Perceptions)

	Group	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Technological	State	2.616	0.969	100
	Private	4.187	0.377	100
	Total	3.401	1.076	200
Cognitive	State	1.506	0.351	100
	Private	3.590	0.831	100
	Total	2.548	1.223	200
Institutional	State	1.540	0.311	100
	Private	3.195	0.860	100
	Total	2.367	1.050	200
Interpersonal	State	2.420	0.950	100
	Private	4.148	0.853	100
	Total	3.284	1.250	200

As shown in Table 6 and Figure 2, based on teachers' perceptions, the mean score of the state group is superior to the private group in all the four different dimensions of language learning autonomy practice. For instance, concerning 'technological' dimension, the mean score of the private group ($M = 4.18$, $SD = 0.38$) is considerably greater than the counterpart, state group ($M = 2.62$, $SD = 0.97$). The same pattern can be observed for the 'cognitive', 'institutional', and 'interpersonal' dimensions.

**Figure 2.** Bar Graph of Language Learning Autonomy Practice Dimensions (Teachers' Perceptions)

As represented in Table 7, the assumption of homogeneity of variances was violated ($p < 0.05$) for all the language learning autonomy practice dimensions (i.e., 'technological', 'cognitive', 'institutional', and 'interpersonal').

Table 7. Levene's Test results for Dimensions of Autonomy Practice (Teachers' Perceptions)

Dimension	F	df1	df2	Sig.
Technological	68.618	1	198	0.000
Cognitive	90.745	1	198	0.000
Institutional	89.471	1	198	0.022
Interpersonal	5.363	1	198	0.000

Table 8 shows that the assumption of homogeneity of covariance was not met (Box's $M = 324.28$, $F = 31.72$, $p = 0.000$). In order to compensate for these two shortcomings, the alpha level for data analysis was decided to be reduced from 0.05 to 0.01 (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2014).

Table 8. Box's Test results for Language Learning Autonomy Practice (Teachers' Perceptions)

Box's M	F	df1	Df2	Sig.
324.281	31.722	10	187429.482	0.000

As shown in Table 9, multivariate tests indicated that, according to teachers' perceptions, there was a statistically significant difference in the overall language learning autonomy practice scores between the two groups (Wilks' Lambda = 0.209, $F_{(4, 195)} = 184.61$, $p < 0.01$) with Partial Eta Squared of 0.79, representing a strong effect size based on Cohen's guidelines (1988). Table 10 below further explores each dimension of language learning autonomy practice per se through Tests of between-subjects effects.

Table 9. Multivariate Tests for Language Learning Autonomy Practice (Teachers' Perceptions)

		Value	F	Hypothesis df	Error df	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Intercept	Pillai's Trace	0.970	1564.419	4.000	195.000	0.000	0.970
	Wilks' Lambda	0.030	1564.419	4.000	195.000	0.000	0.970
	Hotelling's Trace	32.091	1564.419	4.000	195.000	0.000	0.970
	Roy's Largest Root	32.091	1564.419	4.000	195.000	0.000	0.970
Group	Pillai's Trace	0.791	184.615	4.000	195.000	0.000	0.791
	Wilks' Lambda	0.209	184.615	4.000	195.000	0.000	0.791
	Hotelling's Trace	3.787	184.615	4.000	195.000	0.000	0.791
	Roy's Largest Root	3.787	184.615	4.000	195.000	0.000	0.791

On the basis of the results laid out in Table 10, tests of between-subjects effects indicated that there is a statistically significant difference in language learning autonomy practice between the state and private school for all the four dimensions of language learning autonomy practice: 'technological' ($F_{(1, 198)} = 227.97$, $p < .01$, $\eta^2 = 0.53$); 'cognitive' ($F_{(1, 198)} = 532.67$, $p = 0.000$, $p < .01$, $\eta^2 = 0.73$); 'institutional' ($F_{(1, 198)} = 327.42$, $p < .01$, $\eta^2 = 0.62$); 'interpersonal' ($F_{(1, 198)} = 183.07$, $p < .01$, $\eta^2 = 0.48$); accordingly, it can be claimed that based on teachers' perceptions, there are significant differences between state schools and private language institutes on how autonomy is being practiced. In other words, the results revealed that the teachers believe that private language institutes practice a higher level of language learning autonomy than state schools.

Table 10. Tests of Between-Subjects Effects for Dimensions of Language Learning Autonomy Practice Types (Teachers' Perceptions)

Source	Dependent Variable	Type III Sum of Squares	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Group	Technological	123.441	123.441	227.974	0.000	0.535
	Cognitive	217.014	217.014	532.668	0.000	0.729
	Institutional	136.951	136.951	327.418	0.000	0.623
	Interpersonal	149.398	149.398	183.071	0.000	0.480
	Interpersonal	2468.286				

Learners' Perceptions

To find out if there are any significant differences, according to learners' perceptions, between state schools and private language institutes on how autonomy is being practiced, MANOVA was utilized once again. The dependent variables (i.e., 'technological', 'cognitive', 'institutional', & 'interpersonal' in this study) are interrelated as different subscales of language learning autonomy practice. Table 11 represents the descriptive statistics.

Table 11. Descriptive Statistics for Dimensions of Language Learning Autonomy Practice in the State and Private Groups (Learners' Perceptions)

	Group	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Technological	State	2.120	0.394	100
	Private	3.555	0.922	100
	Total	2.838	1.009	200
Cognitive	State	1.641	0.246	100
	Private	3.361	0.992	100
	Total	2.501	1.124	200
Institutional	State	1.546	0.257	100
	Private	3.015	1.095	100
	Total	2.281	1.082	200
Interpersonal	State	1.753	0.312	100
	Private	3.850	0.788	100
	Total	2.801	1.209	200

As shown in Table 11 and Figure 3, the findings indicate that, based on learners' perceptions, the mean score for the private group is higher than that of the state group across all the four dimensions of language learning autonomy practice. For instance, as detailed in Table 11, within the 'Cognitive' dimension, the private group's mean score ($M = 3.36$, $SD = 0.99$) is notably greater than that of the state group ($M = 1.64$, $SD = 0.24$). A similar trend is observed in the other three dimensions.

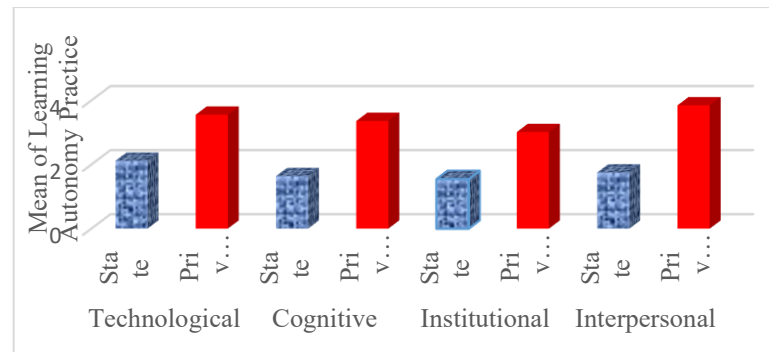


Figure 3. Bar Graph of Autonomy Practice Dimensions in the Two Groups (Learners' Perceptions)

Table 12 shows that the assumption of homogeneity of variances was not met ($p < .05$) for all the language learning autonomy practice dimensions.

Table 12. Levene's Test results for Dimensions of Language Learning Autonomy Practice (Learners' Perceptions)

Dimension	F	df1	df2	Sig.
Technological	81.055	1	198	0.000
Cognitive	221.743	1	198	0.000
Institutional	334.410	1	198	0.000
Interpersonal	78.702	1	198	0.000

According to the results summarized in Table 13, the assumption of homogeneity of covariance was also violated (Box's $M = 358.095$, $F = 35.03$, $p < 0.001$). The alpha level for data analysis was decided to be reduced from 0.05 to 0.01 to compensate for these two shortcomings (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2014).

Table 13. Box's Test results for Language Learning Autonomy Practice (Learners' Perceptions)

Box's M	F	df1	Df2	Sig.
358.095	35.030	10	187429.482	0.000

As it can be observed in Table 14, multivariate tests indicated that, according to learners' perceptions, a statistically significant difference exists in the overall language learning autonomy practice scores between the two groups (Wilks' Lambda = 0.213, $F_{(4, 195)} = 179.98$, $p < 0.01$) with a Partial Eta Squared index of 0.77, representing a strong effect size, according to Cohen's guidelines (1988). Tests of between-subjects effects were used to further inspect each dimension of language learning autonomy practice separately.

Table 14. Multivariate Tests for Language Learning Autonomy Practice (Learners' Perceptions)

		Value		Hypothesis Error df	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Group	Pillai's Trace	0.787	179.978c	4.000	195.000	0.000
	Wilks' Lambda	0.213	179.978c	4.000	195.000	0.000
	Hotelling's Trace	3.692	179.978c	4.000	195.000	0.000
	Roy's Largest Root	3.692	179.978c	4.000	195.000	0.000

As it is evident in Table 15, tests of between-subjects effects showed a statistically significant difference in language learning autonomy practice between the state and private school for all the four dimensions of language learning autonomy practice: 'technological' ($F_{(1, 198)} = 204.94$,

$p < 0.01$, $\eta^2 = 0.51$); 'cognitive' ($F_{(1, 198)} = 283.49$, $p < 0.01$, $\eta^2 = 0.59$); 'institutional' ($F_{(1, 198)} = 170.43$, $p < 0.01$, $\eta^2 = 0.46$); 'interpersonal' ($F_{(1, 198)} = 612.28$, $p < 0.01$, $\eta^2 = 0.76$). As a result, it can be declared that, according to learners' perceptions, there are significant differences between state schools and private language institutes on how autonomy is being practiced. In other words, it was uncovered that learners believe the students who study at private language institutes feel and experience higher levels of language learning autonomy than those students who go to state schools.

Table 15. Tests of Between-Subjects Effects for Dimensions Autonomy Practice Types (Learners' Perceptions)

Source	Dependent Variable	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Group	Technological	102.961	1	102.961	204.937	0.000	0.509
	Cognitive	147.920	1	147.920	283.486	0.000	0.589
	Institutional	107.861	1	107.861	170.429	0.000	0.463
	Interpersonal	219.900	1	219.900	612.282	0.000	0.756

Discussion

This study provides a comprehensive examination of learner autonomy in English language learning environments, highlighting significant differences in perceptions between state schools and private language institutes. By employing a rigorous split-plot design, the research explored how different educational contexts influence autonomy across four key dimensions: technological, cognitive, institutional, and interpersonal. Both teachers and students conveyed a distinct preference for private institutes, which are seen as more effective in fostering autonomy (Thang, 2009) due to factors such as improved access to resources, smaller class sizes, and customized educational strategies (Romanyshyn & Freiuk, 2024). The large effect sizes underscore the vital importance of institutional characteristics in shaping autonomy perceptions, with teachers in private institutes reporting much higher autonomy scores across all the dimensions.

The findings highlighted significant differences in the implementation of technology-based learning practices between state schools and private language institutes, particularly in terms of technological integration. This is in line with Romanyshyn and Freiuk (2024). State schools often face challenges such as large class sizes (Demetrashvili et al., 2024) and inflexible curricula that inhibit their ability to adopt innovative teaching methods aimed at improving problem-solving skills. Furthermore, a strong dependence on traditional face-to-face instruction hinders the shift toward more interactive and technology-enhanced learning experiences (Nasri et al.). Surprisingly, even when technological tools are available, teachers tend to default to conventional materials like whiteboards and markers, perceiving them as more suitable and easily accessible than the gadgets in state schools. Consequently, both classroom activities and post-class reinforcement often fall short of being effective, as these settings emphasize compliance with established curricula rather than fostering an engaging learning environment (Little, 2007).

In contrast, private language institutes adopt a more active stance towards technology-related principles, allowing learners to extend beyond traditional classroom settings and access

resources available at self-access centers. The average scores indicate that these institutes prioritize key elements of technology-based education with a strong emphasis on boosting student engagement and interaction. This approach fosters personalized attention and feedback from instructors (Xu et al., 2024), along with increased flexibility in using technology as a supporting tool, unlike the limitations often found in public schools. By shifting from conventional lecture formats to more student-focused methods, private language institutes cultivate environments that encourage higher levels of student participation. This strategy not only emphasizes the development of critical thinking and problem-solving abilities but also motivates students to take greater responsibility for their own learning journey.

In the context of the interpersonal dimension, observations revealed several effective practices designed to enhance learner autonomy, including collaborative group work, peer learning, peer discussions, and collaborative projects, along with the development of social skills and teamwork (Nasri et al., 2015). According to Nasri et al. (2015), educators reported facing several challenges due to a rigidly defined curriculum, high-stakes assessments, and insufficient resources. These challenges were affirmed by student interviews, which underscored the adverse effects of time constraints, varied proficiency levels that hinder collaborative learning, and the urgent need for teachers to embrace more modern pedagogical strategies. Importantly, the research also highlighted the impact of a traditional education system that emphasizes memorization, which has fostered passive learning behaviors among students and obstructed the cultivation of learner autonomy. Consistent with these findings, both teachers and learners reported that public schools demonstrated a limited capacity to facilitate collaborative learning, peer engagement, and the development of social skills essential for promoting learner autonomy. Conversely, private language institutes exhibited a more proactive approach in encouraging student cooperation and interaction. Interview data later revealed that this disparity can largely be attributed to the individual accountability placed on students in state schools for their own success or failure. In contrast, the more flexible curricula and emphasis on group work in private language institutes foster a sense of teamwork, where learners collectively take responsibility for assigned tasks.

In examining the institutional dimension, several key aspects merit discussion. This dimension encompasses factors such as the ability to select activities, the creation of personalized learning materials, the freedom to make decisions regarding cognitive processes and the agency to choose engagement methodologies with academic discourse. Kumaravadivelu (2012) emphasizes that institutional policies and practices significantly influence teachers' instructional choices and methodologies. This influence is evident in our study, which reveals that state schools lag behind private language institutes in fostering the political and institutional dimensions of learners. Notably, both teachers and students had similar mean scores regarding the promotion of the institutional dimension in both educational contexts. In other words, state schools provide a predetermined schedule that restricts the flexibility required to meet language learning needs, whereas private language institutes offer a more adaptable curriculum that allows for greater freedom and choice (Khan et al., 2023; Little, 2007). The main reason for such a difference seems to be the policies in these institutes which are often shaped in real time, reflecting a more flexible syllabus.

These findings resonate with the perspectives of other researchers who argue that institutional constraints impede student participation in decision-making processes, even when there is a genuine desire to improve teaching methods and foster learner autonomy (Balcikanli, 2010; Perry-Hazan & Somech, 2023). Consequently, these results invite a reevaluation of how institutional frameworks affect student autonomy, especially in state schools, where lower scores in the institutional dimension suggest that pedagogical limitations may restrict engagement and choice. Therefore, it is increasingly evident that fostering learner autonomy involves not only thoughtful curriculum design but also the creation of an environment in which students feel empowered to take control of their own learning.

The cognitive dimension of the study encompasses several key factors, including self-awareness, student-led evaluation, higher intrinsic motivation, goal setting, and metacognitive learning processes. Similar to the other dimensions, both private language students and teachers reported significantly higher levels of promoting the cognitive dimension of learner autonomy compared to their counterparts in state schools. Intrinsic motivation, which Wang et al. (2024) identify as essential for determining outcomes in language acquisition, appears to be stronger among private school students. This seems primarily because many of these students have voluntarily chosen to attend language institutes, viewing English as a crucial factor in achieving their future goals. In contrast, at state schools, English is a compulsory subject that students must undertake, regardless of their interest in it.

In summary, this study suggests that learner autonomy is not uniformly practiced across educational settings, with private language institutes demonstrating a more conducive environment for fostering autonomy across various dimensions. As educators strive to empower their students in an increasingly complex and demanding learning landscape, the insights from this research can inform targeted interventions that cultivate a more autonomy-friendly culture within education, ultimately enriching the learning experiences of all students (Demetrashvili et al., 2024).

Conclusion

This study offers critical insights into learner autonomy within English language learning environments, revealing substantial differences between state schools and private language institutes. The findings indicate that private institutes are perceived as more effective in fostering all the four dimensions of autonomy; technological, cognitive, institutional and interpersonal, largely due to their access to resources (Francis et al., 2025), smaller class sizes, and more personalized teaching approaches (Xu et al., 2024). In contrast, state schools often struggle with rigid curricula and larger class sizes, which hinder the implementation of innovative teaching methods and adversely affect student engagement and motivation. These differences underscore the need for reflective practices in state schools that align with the dynamic learning needs of students in today's educational landscape.

The disparities in autonomy practices further stemmed from radical differences in pedagogical philosophies and institutional support. Private institutes benefited from greater institutional flexibility, a competitive drive for teacher professional development, responsiveness to market demands, and higher goal orientation, collaboration, peer learning and willingness to take responsibility. Conversely, state schools, constrained by stringent

oversight, lacked curriculum adaptability and exhibited undervalued professional development, often resulting in prescriptive, teacher-centered environments which did not support initiation, collaboration, goal setting and ownership in one's learning. This highlights that pedagogical philosophy and institutional support are more critical than mere resource availability in promoting autonomy (Benson & Voller, 2014).

Crucially, viewed through the lens of SDT, the findings revealed that private language institutes were significantly more effective in satisfying learners' basic psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Deci & Ryan, 2012). The greater provision of choices, opportunities for self-directed learning, effective technology use, and emphasis on collaborative and supportive environments in private institutes directly fulfilled these needs. Conversely, the rigid curricula, standardized testing, and teacher-centered pedagogies prevalent in state schools appeared to thwart these fundamental needs, thereby hindering learner autonomy.

The implications of this research are twofold. First, it highlights the urgent need for state schools to reassess their pedagogical frameworks, moving away from traditional, compliance-based models towards more flexible, student-centered approaches that promote critical thinking, problem-solving, and metacognitive skills. Educators must create environments conducive to collaboration (Wu & Xu, 2024), where students can engage in meaningful interactions and take ownership of their learning journeys (Lo, 2024; Shogren & Raley, 2022). Second, the study emphasizes the importance of fostering intrinsic motivation and metacognitive awareness among students, which are vital for enhancing learner autonomy. By integrating technology and active learning strategies, state schools can engage students more effectively, enabling them to navigate their educational paths with greater confidence and autonomy.

In conclusion, this research highlights the critical need to bridge the autonomy gap between state schools and private language institutes. As educational stakeholders seek to empower learners in an ever-evolving learning environment, the insights from this study can guide targeted interventions aimed at cultivating an autonomy-friendly culture across all educational contexts. By embracing reformative practices and prioritizing student autonomy, educators can enrich the learning experience and foster a generation of motivated, self-directed learners ready to thrive in a complex world.

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