

Learners' Autonomy among Higher Secondary School Students: An Influence of Tribal Background and Parental Education

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This study investigates learners' autonomy among higher secondary school students in Nagaland, India, focusing on the influence of tribal background and parental education. Using a stratified random sample of 255 students across 17 tribes, learner autonomy was measured through a validated scale encompassing goal-setting, self-directed learning, metacognition, and motivation. Descriptive analyses indicated that most students exhibited average to above-average autonomy. Inferential statistics revealed no significant differences in autonomy based on tribal affiliation, suggesting that school environments may mitigate cultural disparities. However, paternal education significantly impacted learner autonomy, with students of graduate fathers demonstrating higher autonomy compared to those with less educated fathers. Maternal education showed no significant effect. These findings highlight the critical role of family educational background, particularly paternal education, in fostering self-regulated learning, while underscoring the complex interplay of sociocultural and institutional factors. The study calls for culturally responsive pedagogies and targeted support to enhance autonomy development, especially for students from less advantaged backgrounds. Future research should explore qualitative dimensions of autonomy and consider additional contextual variables to promote inclusive educational practices.

Keywords: Learners' Autonomy, Higher Secondary Students, Nagaland, Tribal Background, Parental Education, etc.

Modern educational research has increasingly focused on Learners' Autonomy, the capacity of students to take in charge of their learning since it is so important in developing academic performance and lifelong learning skills (Benson, 2013). Someone qualifying as an autonomous learner independently chooses aims and purposes, sets goals, chooses materials, methods, and tasks, exercises choice and determination in organizing and carrying out the functions and chooses criteria for evaluation (Dam, 1990, cited in Siddiqui, 2017). The growth of Learners' Autonomy is especially important in higher secondary education, where students anticipate a shift from teacher-directed instruction to self-regulated learning

(Little, 1991). This is because it enables students to take charge of their education. Hence, it is vital to focus on the development of learners' autonomy both inside and outside the classroom. This concept is even more relevant in culturally diverse regions, where socio-cultural and familial factors can significantly shape students' educational experiences and outcomes. The matter of increased Learners' Autonomy has much concern these days because when students know how to learn autonomously, they can improve their performance through activities such as taking charge of their learning and controlling and evaluating their learning progress (Holec, 1981; Benson, 2011; Dang, 2012).

Learners' Autonomy in Secondary Education

It has been observed that fostering autonomy in students at the secondary level contributes to improved academic performance, self-motivation, and critical thinking skills (Little, 1995; Benson, 2013). The role of self-regulation, motivation, and metacognitive strategies in fostering autonomy. Self-regulation strategies, such as goal-setting and self-monitoring, significantly enhance Learners' Autonomy, particularly in language learning contexts. Similarly, intrinsic motivation has been identified as a stronger predictor of autonomy than extrinsic factors (Zimmerman, 2002; Idrus & Sohid, 2023). Ryan and Deci (2000) highlighted that self-determined learning, which aligns with autonomy, enhances intrinsic motivation and leads to greater educational engagement. These findings suggest that fostering autonomy requires a shift from teacher-centered to learner-centered approaches, where students are encouraged to take responsibility for their learning processes.

Tribal Education and Learners' Autonomy

In tribal communities, Learners' Autonomy is influenced by cultural, socio-economic, and historical factors. Students in these groups encounter difficulties, such as insufficient resources, curricula that lack cultural relevance, and traditional teacher-centered approaches (Ottaplackal & Anbu, 2022; Reeta & Singh, 2020). Yet, their resilience and collaborative learning can foster autonomy (Baidya & Barik, 2023). The cultural background has a significant impact on learning styles. In a theory, Arrindell (2003) suggests that in societies with high power distance, learners depend heavily on teachers, while those with lower power distance encourage self-directed learning. This pattern is particularly evident in Asian

contexts, where conventional methods often hinder autonomy (Chan, 2001; Dinçer, 2017).

Research on tribal populations in India indicates varying degrees of autonomy connected to historical exposure to formal education and parental literacy (Rao, 2023). Although educational reforms in Northeast India advocate for autonomous learning, empirical evidence for comparisons among tribes remains limited (Lalkulhpuia, 2024; Longchar & Dutta, 2024).

Parental Education and Learners' Autonomy

Parental education is a significant determinant of Learners' Autonomy, influencing students' learning behaviors and self-regulated skills. Research indicates that higher levels of parental education are associated with greater academic support, encouragement for autonomous learning, and exposure to independent thinking and problem-solving at home (Hofer & Pintrich, 1997; Sigit & Anam, 2024; Fan & Chan, 2001; Davis-Kean, 2005). Studies by Anshu et al. (2022) and Wang and Eccles (2013) further emphasize that students with highly educated parents are more likely to exhibit self-directed learning behaviors and greater confidence in managing their education independently. However, in contexts where parental education levels are low, schools and teachers play a critical role in compensating for this gap by providing structured support and guidance (Sigit & Anam, 2024). The existing studies in Northeast India, particularly Nagaland, remain limited. The intersection of tribal identity, parental education, and Learners' Autonomy in higher secondary school learners is an underexplored area. In order to close this gap, this study looks at Learners' Autonomy in Nagaland across various tribes and evaluates how parental education affects self-directed learning practices.

Objectives

1. To examine the learners' autonomy among higher secondary school students.
2. To analyze the significance of differences in learners' autonomy with their tribal backgrounds and parental education levels.

Hypotheses

1. There is no significant difference in the learners' autonomy of students belonging to different tribes.
2. There is no significant difference in the learners' autonomy of students with respect to their father's education.
3. There is no significant difference in the learners' autonomy of students with respect to their mother's education.

Method

Sample

The target population comprised higher secondary school students from four districts (Kohima, Dimapur, Chumoukedima, and Mon) in the state of Nagaland, representing a total of 16 schools. The focus was on capturing the diversity of the state, so students from all 17 officially recognized tribes (Angami, Ao, Chang, Chakhesang, Khiamnungan, Konyak, Kuki, Kachari, Lotha, Pochury, Phom, Rengma, Sema, Sangtam, Tikhir, Yimkhiung, and Zeliang) were included.

To ensure fair representation, a stratified random sampling method was employed. This involved first organizing the student list according to tribal affiliation, effectively creating 17 distinct groups or strata. From each of these tribal groups, 15 students were randomly chosen, resulting in a total sample size of 255 students. The sampling frame, therefore, consisted of all higher secondary students from the 17 tribes enrolled in the

selected schools across the four districts. Whereas the parental (both mother and father) education was categorized as illiterate, matric, and graduate.

Tool

For data collection, a Learners' Autonomy Scale, developed and standardized by the researcher, was used to measure the Learners' Autonomy of the students. To construct a Learners' Autonomy Scale, the investigator has referred to and consulted books, journals, internet sources, encyclopedias, and other available literature that can be experienced by the individual while pursuing the study. With the help of test-retest and split-half methods, the reliability of the Learners' Autonomy Scale was administered to 30 students. The test-retest method was administered to a sample of 30 students, and after 30 days, it was again administered to the same sample. For the split-half, reliability was found out by the odd and even items. The odd-numbered items were put in one group, and the even-numbered items were put in another group. The Test-retest reliability coefficient of the scale was 0.83, and the split-half reliability coefficient of the scale was 0.80, which were significant at the 0.01 level of significance.

Results

Table 1. Levels of Learners' Autonomy

Levels	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Below Average	1	0.4	0.4
Average	77	30.2	30.6
Above Average	167	65.5	96.1
High	10	3.9	100.0
Total	255	100.0	

Table 1, shows the levels of learners' autonomy among higher secondary school students. It has been found that 65.5% of the respondents have above average levels

of learner 'autonomy, followed by 30.2% who have average levels, 3.9% who have high levels, and only 0.4% of students who reported below average levels of learners' autonomy. Almost all the learners reported average to high levels of autonomy in their learning endeavors, which is evident from the given pie chart.

Inferential statistics (ANOVA) were used to assess the impact of tribal origin and parental education levels on learners' autonomy. There is no significant difference in the learners' autonomy of students belonging to different tribes.

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics Showing Learners' Autonomy among Students in Relation to Tribal Background

	N	Mean	S.D	S.E	95% Confidence Interval for the Mean		Min	Max
					Lower	Upper		
Angami	15	107.33	13.58	3.507	99.81	114.86	72.00	125.00
Ao	15	109.40	3.13	0.810	107.66	111.14	104.00	114.00
Chakhesang	15	111.13	10.17	2.626	105.50	116.76	92.00	131.00
Chang	15	110.13	10.21	2.637	104.48	115.79	96.00	136.00
Khiamniungan	15	109.33	9.86	2.546	103.87	114.79	96.00	129.00
Kuki	15	107.60	13.47	3.479	100.14	115.06	89.00	134.00
Konyak	15	109.73	8.89	2.296	104.81	114.66	97.00	128.00
Kachari	15	100.67	9.02	2.330	95.67	105.66	83.00	112.00
Lotha	15	100.87	8.69	2.244	96.05	105.68	89.00	113.00
Phom	15	104.60	9.66	2.493	99.25	109.95	89.00	122.00
Pochury	15	108.40	9.45	2.441	103.16	113.64	87.00	122.00
Rengma	15	109.13	11.70	3.022	102.65	115.61	89.00	141.00
Sumi	15	101.27	7.19	1.858	97.28	105.25	92.00	114.00
Sangtam	15	106.33	11.72	3.026	99.84	112.82	82.00	127.00
Tikhir	15	108.07	10.00	2.583	102.53	113.61	96.00	123.00
Yimkhiung	15	106.33	12.46	3.217	99.43	113.23	87.00	129.00
Zeliang	15	107.00	11.33	2.924	100.73	113.27	90.00	128.00
Total	255	106.90	10.48	0.656	105.61	108.19	72.00	141.00

Table 2, showed Learners' Autonomy among 255 higher secondary students across 17 Nagaland tribes, revealing an overall mean score of 106.90. Chakhesang students showed the highest autonomy

(111.13 mean), while Kachari had the lowest (100.66). Several tribes, including Ao, Chang, Khiamniungan, and Rengma, demonstrated higher scores (above 109), contrasting with lower scores from Sumi,

Lotha, and Kachari. Score variability differed, with Angami, Kuki, and Yimkhiung showing greater spread (higher standard deviations) and Ao exhibiting tight clustering (low standard deviation). Despite score variations, overlapping confidence intervals shows no significant differences in autonomy across tribes, though individual scores ranged widely from 72 (Angami) to 141 (Rengma).

Table 3. Summary Table of ANOVA showing Significance of Difference in Learners' Autonomy in relation to Tribal Background

	Sum of Squares	DF	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	2561.749	16	160.109	1.504	.099
Within Groups	25328.800	238	106.424		
Total	27890.549	254			

Table 3 shows a p-value of .099, which is larger than 0.05. Therefore, the null hypothesis is accepted. There is no significant difference in learning autonomy

among higher secondary school students based on tribal affiliation. There is no significant difference in the learners' autonomy of students with respect to their father's education.

Table 4. Summary Table of ANOVA showing the Significance of Difference in Learners' Autonomy in relation to their Father's Education

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	2497.716	2	1248.858	12.394	<.001
Within Groups	25392.833	252	100.765		
Total	27890.549	254			

The p-value in Table 5 is 0.001, which is less than 0.05. Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected. This suggests that there is a significant difference in the learning autonomy of higher secondary school students across the three levels of fathers' education (illiterate, matric, and graduate).

Table 5. Significance of Difference in Learners' Autonomy with respect to Different levels of Father's Education

	(I)Father's Education	(J)Father's Education (Pair-wise)	Mean Dif. (I-J)	S.E	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
						Lower	Upper
Tukey HSD	Illiterate	Matric	-3.39914	1.71466	.119	-7.4417	.6434
		Graduate	-8.03145*	1.69142	<.001	-12.0192	-4.0437
	Matric	Illiterate	3.39914	1.71466	.119	-.6434	7.4417
		Graduate	-4.63230*	1.41368	.003	-7.9653	-1.2993
	Graduate	Illiterate	8.03145*	1.69142	<.001	4.0437	12.0192
		Matric	4.63230*	1.41368	.003	1.2993	7.9653

*The mean difference is statistically significant at the 0.05 level.

Table 5, presents the post-hoc tests (Tukey's HSD) to determine which groups (illiterate, matric, graduate) differ significantly from each other. The Tukey HSD test indicates that the father's educational attainment significantly influences students' learning autonomy, especially among those

with graduate fathers, who exhibit greater autonomy than the other two groups. The absence of any significant distinction between the illiterate and matriculate groups indicates the father's education level must reach a specific threshold (e.g., graduation) before having a significant impact on learning

autonomy. There is no significant difference in the learners' autonomy of students with respect to their mother's education.

Table 6. Summary Table of ANOVA showing the Significance of Difference in Learners' Autonomy in relation to their Mother's Education

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	365.830	2	182.915	1.668	.191
Within Groups	27524.709	251	109.660		
Total	27890.539	253			

Table 6 shows a p-value of 0.191, which is larger than 0.05. Therefore, the null hypothesis is not rejected. There is no significant difference in learning autonomy among the higher secondary school students whose mothers are illiterate, matric, or graduates. The findings show that mothers' education level does not significantly influence students' learning autonomy.

Findings

1. The findings revealed that the majority of higher secondary students in the sample demonstrated at least average levels of learner autonomy. Specifically, 65.5% of students were found to have above average autonomy, 30.2% had average autonomy, and 3.9% reached a high level of autonomy. Only 0.4% of students were categorized as below average in terms of autonomy.
2. The results showed that there was no significant difference in learner autonomy among students from different tribal backgrounds ($p = 0.099$). This shows that tribal affiliation does not play a significant role in determining the level of autonomy among higher secondary students in the context of this study.
3. The results indicated a significant difference in learner autonomy based

on the father's education level ($p < 0.001$). Post-hoc analysis (Tukey HSD) revealed that students whose fathers were graduates exhibited significantly higher autonomy compared to those whose fathers were either illiterate or had completed only matriculation. However, there was no significant difference between the illiterate and matriculate groups. This indicates that a higher level of paternal education, particularly at the graduate level, is associated with greater learner autonomy among students.

4. Finally, the mother's education level yielded a p-value of 0.191, indicating no significant difference in learner autonomy among students whose mothers had different educational backgrounds (illiterate, matriculate, or graduate). This means that, in this study, the mother's education level did not have a significant impact on the learner autonomy of higher secondary students.

Educational Implications and Recommendations

1. Learners' Autonomy varies due to differences in learning environments, cultural influences, parental education levels, teaching methods, socioeconomic status, school infrastructure, and parental involvement. These factors impact autonomy more significantly than tribal identity or mother's education.
2. Students with lower autonomy require tailored support through self-regulated learning programs, critical thinking exercises, and digital tools.
3. Culturally responsive teaching methods should be implemented, particularly for tribes or groups exhibiting lower autonomy scores, to ensure inclusivity and relevance in educational practices.

4. Parental involvement is crucial in fostering Learners' Autonomy. Parents with lower educational qualifications need additional support through workshops and training sessions to equip them with the necessary skills to support their children's education.
5. Students with higher-educated fathers exhibit greater autonomy due to better access to resources, guidance, and a supportive learning environment. Students with illiterate fathers demonstrate lower autonomy, highlighting the need for academic and emotional support programs to bridge this gap.
6. Beyond a mother's education, teaching quality, school environment, socio-economic status, and student motivation play a more significant role in autonomy development.
7. Ensuring equitable access to resources, such as books, technology, and extracurricular activities, is essential to support autonomy development and reduce disparities among students.
8. Educators should use varied teaching techniques to foster autonomy, particularly for students with lower self-directed learning traits. Programs like project-based learning, peer teaching, self-assessment, and goal setting.
9. Policymakers must acknowledge the influence of cultural identity and parental education on learning practices and provide tailored support to disadvantaged groups.
10. Schools should offer personalized guidance, such as mentoring or structured learning plans, to help students build self-regulation skills.
11. Lastly, further research is needed to explore other factors like socio-economic status, school infrastructure, and gender, which influence Learners' Autonomy. Additionally, regular monitoring and assessment of interventions are necessary to ensure effectiveness across diverse student groups.

Conclusion

This study contributes to the understanding of learners' autonomy within culturally diverse educational settings, emphasizing its pivotal role in fostering self-regulated learning and academic success. The predominance of average to above-average autonomy levels among higher secondary students in Nagaland reveals a generally positive disposition toward independent learning. However, the significant impact of paternal education on learner autonomy underscores the influential role of family background in shaping students' self-directed learning capabilities, consistent with extant research linking parental education to cognitive and motivational support (Zimmerman, 2002; Wang & Eccles, 2013). Contrary to expectations, tribal affiliation did not produce significant differences in autonomy levels, indicating that shared school environments and instructional practices may moderate cultural variability. This finding aligns with theoretical perspectives that recognize the complex interaction between cultural background and institutional factors in educational outcomes (Ryan & Deci, 2000). The absence of a significant effect of maternal education invites further inquiry into gendered dynamics of parental involvement and its influence on learner autonomy. Overall, the findings illuminate the multifaceted nature of autonomy development, shaped by individual, familial, and sociocultural factors. To advance equitable educational outcomes, future research should incorporate qualitative methodologies to explore student

experiences across tribal groups and investigate targeted school interventions that support autonomous learning. Practitioners are encouraged to implement learner-centered pedagogies while recognizing and addressing disparities in home learning environments influenced by parental education and cultural contexts.

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