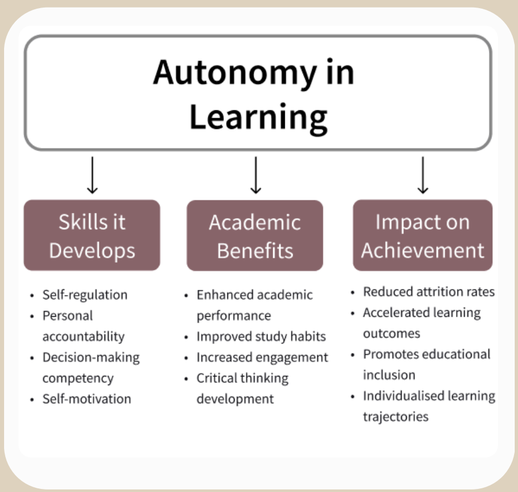
PERCEPTIONS, BARRIERS AND ENABLERS OF LEARNING AUTONOMY IN INDIGENOUS SECONDARY EDUCATION CONTEXTS.

Authors Jessica Cristina Acuapa Juárez / Natalí Alcala Moreno (Mentor)

Affiliations Universidad Autónoma de Nuevo León (UANL) – Autonomous University of Nuevo León

Introduction

Schools located in Indigenous contexts [1] in Mexico have historically faced greater educational disadvantage compared with rural and urban settings. This is reflected in lower academic achievement indicators, limited school infrastructure and pedagogical resources, and reduced access to trained teachers and culturally relevant materials (INEGI, 2022; SEP, 2023).



Strengthening learner autonomy can enhance motivation, achievement, and educational continuity in marginalized contexts. Teachers are central actors in enabling these processes. (Deci & Ryan, 2020; Zimmerman, 2013; UNESCO, 2022; Reeve & Cheon, 2021).

OBJECTIVE: Examine how teachers and students understand and evaluate autonomous learning, identifying factors that support or constrain it in context.

{1] Sociocultural and territorial environment of Indigenous peoples, defined by their ancestral connection to the land, their own ways of life, and a historical context of inequality and identity-based resistance.

Methodology

Mixed-methods approach

Instrument Design
A six-question survey, four open-ended items and two Likert-scale items (1 to 10), was developed to explore perceptions of learning autonomy among secondary school students and teachers.

Data Collection
Administered in two Indigenous secondary schools in Michoacán (**Cherán and Santa Fe de la Laguna**) using printed surveys (n=40) and oral interviews (n=5). to ensure comprehension and linguistic accessibility.

Data Analysis
Likert responses were analyzed using descriptive statistics, and open-ended responses through content analysis, identifying categories on autonomy understanding, practices, barriers, and facilitators.

Interpretation
Quantitative and qualitative results were integrated to compare teacher and student perspectives, identifying similarities and differences in how autonomy is understood and practiced.



PARTICIPANTS

45 Students aged 13 to 14

12 Teachers aged 29 to 61

INSTRUMENT

OPEN QUESTIONS

01 Definition of Autonomy

02 Perceived Barriers

03 Perceived Enablers

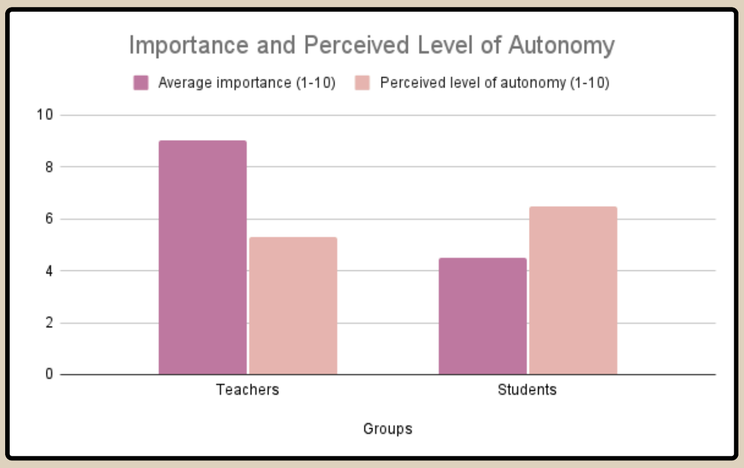
LIKERT SCALE QUESTIONS

04 Importance of Autonomy

05 Level of Student Autonomy

Results

Importance and perceived level of autonomy:



- Teachers regard autonomy as a very important aspect, yet they perceive that their students have not fully developed it
- Students, rate themselves as more autonomous than teachers perceive them to be, although they assign it slightly less importance
- This suggests a gap between teachers' evaluation and students' self-perception

Actions that develop student autonomy:

Group	Examples of responses
Teachers	"Teamwork", "inquiry and research", "my personal history", "projects".
Students	"I research, I ask questions", "practising by reading", "making summaries", "looking for information on my own".

- Both groups mention research and the active search for information, indicating coherence in the idea of learning by doing
- However, teachers incorporate more reflective and collaborative strategies, whereas students focus on individual and concrete actions

Conceptions of autonomy in teachers and students:

Category	Teachers	Students
Learning by oneself	16%	11%
Responsibility / Self-regulation	16%	–
Learning process	16%	–
Lack of knowledge / No response	–	84%
Other / Ambiguous	5%	4.5%
Total cases	12	45

- Teachers generally understand autonomy as a process of self-regulation and metacognitive reflection.
- Students mainly associate autonomy with "learning on their own"
- The majority of them (38 out of 45) either did not respond or expressed a lack of knowledge about the term
- This reveals a conceptual gap and the need to strengthen reflective understanding of autonomous learning

Factors that inhibit or promote students' autonomy in learning:



- For teachers, autonomy is supported by reflection and self-confidence.
- For students, it depends on interest and familiarity with the content.
- The internal factors coincide in that autonomy is strengthened when there is motivation and clarity about the learning process.

- Teachers attribute the lack of autonomy to contextual and cultural factors.
- Students, however, relate it to a lack of resources or technical support.
- This shows that teachers view the problem as structural, while students experience it as a practical or guidance-related limitation.

Conclusion

Autonomy is constructed collectively → a shared language is needed. This study raises a key question: Can autonomy exist without full metacognitive awareness of it?

Technological Reflections

Education in Indigenous communities requires adaptive, culturally relevant systems that promote metacognitive reflection, decision-making, and progressive self-evaluation. How can we develop technologies that strengthen collective –as well as individual– autonomy while respecting and enhancing community-based ways of learning and decision-making?

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