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GENDER, EDUCATIONAL LEVEL AND STUDENTS` PREFERENCES TOWARDS AUTONOMY SUPPORT BY TEACHERS

Anna Studenska (a)*
*Corresponding author

(a) University of Silesia in Katowice, Katowice, Poland. E-mail: astud@poczta.fm

Abstract

Literature findings indicate that persons vary in their responses to autonomy supportive environments. The main problem of the research presented in the article was: are students` preferences towards learning autonomy support provided by teachers related to students` gender and educational level? The study aimed to learn about students` preferences concerning making independent learning choices, being provided with justification of marks obtained and rationale for suggested actions and to test the relationship between gender and educational level of students and their preferences towards learning autonomy support from teachers. In the research Learning Autonomy Support Preferences Questionnaire was used consisting of four pairs of sentences (KR20 = 0,546). Each pair requires indication of a preference of either high or low learning autonomy conditions in a class. There were 450 participants in the study - 150 middle school students (73 men and 77 women) and 302 secondary school students (131 men and 171 women). The data showed that students generally prefer learning autonomously during classes. However, they attach much importance to availability of teacher`s explanations. Teachers of middle schools should take advantage of their students` natural tendency to learn autonomously.

Keywords: Learning autonomy support, student preferences.

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1. Introduction

The article presents research concerning students` preferences towards the ways in which teachers support learning autonomy during classes and differences in these preferences in groups of students varying in terms of gender and educational level.

1.1. Learning autonomy, self-regulation and their support in the classroom

Autonomy generally is defined as "individuals` capacity to fully accept responsibility for her or his course of development, and to engage in interpersonal relation and generative endeavours out of a sense of integrity and conscious choice" (Labouvie-vief, 2015, p. 99). Learning autonomy is defined as "the capacity to take charge of, or taking responsibility for, one`s own learning (Benson, 2001). The notion close to learning autonomy is learning self-regulation understood as "ways that learners systematically activate and sustain their cognitions, motivations behaviours and affects, toward the attainment of their goals" (Schunk & Greene, 2018).

Students` learning autonomy development can be to a great extent enhanced by teachers by autonomy support defined as "the interpersonal sentiment and behaviour the teacher provides during instruction first to identify, then to vitalize and nurture, and eventually to develop, strengthen and grow students` inner motivational resources (Reeve, 2016, p. 130). Theoretical basis for autonomy support can be found in self-determination theory, claiming that fostering students` autonomous behaviours in learning contributes to their development through satisfying one of students` basic needs of autonomy, competence and relatedness. Teachers` behaviours which were empirically proven to support students` autonomy are: providing students with opportunity to work independently, allowing students to talk, listening to them, answering students` questions and reacting to their comments, giving directions when students are not able to advance with work, encourage students to make effort, acknowledging students` progress and points of view (Ryan & Deci, 2017). Reeve (2016) classifies teacher autonomy-supportive behaviours into six groups: taking students` perspective by listening to students and taking their interests and wants into account, vitalizing students`s inner motivational resources by developing their curiosity and satisfying basic needs, providing explanations and rationales concerning actions suggested, using language which avoids pressure and provides students with information, acknowledging students` negative affect and expressing understanding and finally, and finally by exercising patience by allowing students to work in their own pace and waiting for their initiative.

The effects of autonomy support in the classroom were shown to be related to the increase of students` achievement, self-efficacy and motivation to learn (Furtak & Kunter, 2012). Research by Jang, Reeve and Halusic (2016) showed that students prefer highly autonomy supportive activities over mildly-autonomy supportive ones and when they have opportunity to engage in their preferred activities during a class, they learn more effectively. In the study students were asked to rate classroom activities in terms of predicted interest and enjoyment they would feel during participation in them. Data showed that participants preferred highly autonomy supportive activities like watching video- clip, group discussion and answering questions from worksheet over mildly autonomy supportive individual work with materials and using them as a support to generate answers to questions from worksheet. The data revealed that being in experimental

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group which attended preferred highly autonomy-supportive class was related both to students` sense of autonomy, need satisfaction and higher level of new knowledge acquired as well as to the sense having mastered learning material.

1.2. Students` reactions towards autonomy supportive environments

Despite unquestionable benefits of autonomy supportive teaching, research show that people differ in terms of their preferences towards autonomy-supportive environment. Originally studies were focused on factors influencing preferences in making a choice. Thompson & Beymer (2015) in the research review concluded that persons prefer to choose from various options when they come from individualistic western culture, evaluate probability of loss as low, feel competent, are interested in activities offered, have clear preferences, the number of possible choices is not very high, opportunities from which it is possible to choose are categorized and peers encourage independent choice making.

Further studies concerning preferences of autonomous environments were based on help-seeking styles, regulatory mode theory and self-determination theory. Research showed that people differ in terms of their attitude towards seeking and receiving help. Instrument developed by Komissarouk, Harpaz & Nadler (2017) allowed for identification of dependency-oriented, autonomy-oriented and avoidance-oriented help-seeking styles. Autonomy – oriented help-seeking style proved to be related to being brought up in individualistic western culture, approach temperament characterized by being easily motivated to action and setting mastery goals associated with acquiring understanding and competence.

Research performed by Pierro, Presaghi, Higgins and Kruglanski (2009) on the ground of regulatory mode theory showed that students differ in terms of their acceptance of autonomy-supportive teaching climate. Students with high locomotion orientation preferring quick generation of means of attaining a goal and being active rather than reflecting on possibilities experienced the greater satisfaction from classes the more teaching climate was autonomy supportive. Students with high assessment orientation preferring generating many means to attain a goal and evaluating this means thoroughly were the more satisfied with classes the more controlling was the teaching climate.

On the grounds of self-determination theory a mini-theory of causal orientations was formulated. It assumes that although people have a natural tendency for growth, exploration, and integration of social norms, deprivation of basic needs may cause individual differences in the way persons orient towards their environment. Three causal orientations were distinguished: autonomy, controlled and impersonal orientation. In the environment persons with high autonomy orientation seek sources of information and opportunities to make choices, those with high controlled orientation tend to pay attention to external sources of rewards and punishments, whereas persons characterized by high impersonal orientation are characterized by perceiving obstacles to goal attainment. People tend to interpret their environment according to personality traits and their causality orientations and at the same time actively seek social context corresponding to their dominant causal orientation. People with high autonomy orientation will search for environmental contexts which will satisfy their need to choose and provide opportunity to show initiative (Ryan & Deci 2017).

On the grounds of self-determination theory Flunger, Mayer and Umbach (2019) compared of the effects of physics class conducted in classical way and in a way, which supports students' autonomy via

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provision of choices, rationales and informational language. The basis of the study was self-determination theory. The data showed that higher joy and effort put in learning during autonomy supportive class was observed in students with high physics grades than in students with low physics grades. It was proved that this effect of autonomy – supportive intervention was not mediated by students` interest in the subject, their extrinsic motivation and self-efficacy. As far as gender differences are concerned, joy experienced and effort put in learning during intervention which supports autonomy was positively related to students` perceptions of their autonomy during class in the group of boys but not in the group of girls.

Research showed that students perceptions of teachers' actions aimed at fostering learning autonomy depend on the interplay of students characteristics and classroom climate. Study by Furtak and Kunter (2012) shows that students may not feel that their autonomy is supported in way as it is intended by a teacher. Contrary to teacher`s intentions and expectations, students may not be ready for a challenge which a new teacher`s behavior poses for them and experience negative affect when their critical thinking is fostered and they have to find solutions and draw conclusions on their own. Authors experimentally tested effects of autonomy support during physics class. Students` perceived autonomy – supportive climate and intrinsic motivation were measured among dependent variables. The group of 48 teenage students was distributed into 4 subgroups varying in the level of procedural autonomy support which provides students with opportunities to choose and cognitive autonomy support which requires students to solve problems, reflect on the way of action they have chosen and provides students with feedback. The results showed that students who attended lessons with high cognitive autonomy support reported less sense of choice and more controlling behavior on the part of teacher than in groups where cognitive autonomy support was low. No significant differences between four groups after treatment were observed in terms of students` motivation to learn.

A student can experience a sense of lost control and negative emotions when his or her competences do not match opportunities offered by autonomy – supportive environment (Pekrun & Linnenbrink-Garcia 2013). Especially autonomy support strategy of providing students with rationale was shown to be effective in enhancing students' internal motivation to perform a task in the environment free of coercion, pressure, providing acceptance of students` negative affect and rich in other autonomy supportive characteristics (Vansteenkiste et al., 2018). Research by Wallace and Sung (2017) showed that students' vulnerability may influence their reactions to teachers` efforts aimed at fostering autonomy in the classroom. Twelve students watched selected and coded video clips of autonomy supportive practices recorded during real classes in which they participated. Researchers controlled students' level of vulnerability understood as tendency to seek help in caregiver or support group and attaching importance to feeling accepted. Researchers analysed whether students in their reactions during discussion indicated that an autonomy supportive teachers behaviour they watched increased their learning motivation. The greatest number of students attributed the power to raise their learning motivation to experiencing actions aimed at promoting their independent thinking. Having opportunity to choose and teachers` flexibility were judged as having power to evoke learning motivation by fewer respondents. Students` appraisal of fostering their independent thinking and of teachers` flexibility proved to be dependent on classroom climate. Students indicated that they regarded being prompted to think independently and sharing their reflections as useful only if they felt comfortable in classroom environment and did not expect to be ridiculed. Teacher`s flexible reactions, for example

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answering students` questions or allowing students to use various resources during class, made most students feel comfortable and happy. However, students also reported their irritation and stated that it could be relieved when a teacher presented his or her flexibility as way of showing care.

Preference of autonomous learning was also studied in the context of using new technologies. Pinto, Fernández-Pascual and Marco (2019) showed that preferences of autonomous learning are connected with interest in the subject, sense of self-efficacy and gender. Authors by means of IL-HUMASS survey gathered data from 1575 students to study their preferences towards self-directed learning in mastering information literacy. The results revealed that students preferred directed learning over autonomous learning in all four analysed dimensions of learning: searching for information, its evaluating, processing and dissemination. Discriminant analysis involving belief of competency importance and sense of self –efficacy regarding given competence showed that students with higher self-efficacy level concerning given competence prefer to master it using directed learning style, whereas those who attach high importance to the competence are prone to learn it in autonomous way. Inspecting gender differences showed that men preferred autonomous learning to a greater degree in the case of processing information. Analysis of particular competencies revealed that men preferred autonomous over directed learning more than women in the case of using electronic sources of secondary information, being acquainted with subject terminology, handling statistical software and installing computer programmes.

2. Problem Statement

On the basis of literature review it may be concluded that students benefit from learning in autonomy granting environments and prefer when their autonomy in acquiring knowledge and skills is fostered. Empirical data also show that students` preferences towards situations in which they make independent decisions concerning their learning are related to their level of competence, vulnerability and importance attached to the subject being learned. The role of sense of safety in the classroom environment where solutions to problems are presented and reflections shared also proved very important to attitudes of autonomy supportive teaching. These results show that to thrive in situations where leaning autonomy is fostered, students should not only be cognitively and metacognitively but also emotionally and socially ready for independent action, thinking sharing the way of learning or solutions they have chosen and results they have obtained. This indicates that students` preferences towards autonomy support provided by their teacher may be related to educational status. Moreover, the differences between men and women in the level of autonomy orientation (Deci & Ryan 1985) and gender differences in students` effort and joy experienced during autonomy supportive intervention found by Flunger and coworkers (2019) indicate that students preferences towards fostering their autonomous learning may be related to gender. Therefore, the main problem of the research was formulated as follows: **What are students` preferences towards the ways in which teachers support learning autonomy during classes and are these preferences related to students` gender and educational level?**

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3. Research Questions

The main research problem was specified in the form of three research questions:

Q1 What is the general level of students` preferences towards the ways in which teachers support learning autonomy during classes?

Q2 What are students` preferences towards specific ways in which teachers foster learning autonomy during a class?

Q3 Is there a relationship between students` gender and educational level and their preferences towards the ways in which teachers support learning autonomy during a class?

4. Purpose of the Study

There were three aims of the study. The first one was to learn about students` preferences concerning making independent learning choices, being provided with justification of marks obtained and rationale for suggested actions. The second aim was to test the relationship between students` gender and their preferences towards learning autonomy support by teachers. The second aim was to test the relationship between students` educational level and their preferences towards teachers` actions supporting learning autonomy.

5. Research Methods

5.1. Research tool

To measure the preferences of students towards the ways in which teachers foster learning autonomy six pairs of sentences were used. These sentences were constructed on the basis of teacher actions which are regarded as contributing positively to the students` learning autonomy (Reeve 2016; Ryan & Deci 2017). The measurement included such autonomy supportive actions as providing students with opportunity to choose task and deciding on the way and means of action as well as giving students rationale and informative feedback concerning their achievements. Each pair of sentences refers to situations which may take place during a class at school. In each pair one sentence describes circumstances requiring high level of learning autonomy and the other - conditions connected with low learning autonomy. The task of each participant is to choose from each pair of sentences the one describing situation they prefer more. One point is awarded for choosing the sentence presenting circumstances requiring high autonomy. No points are awarded for choosing the sentence concerning situation demanding low autonomy. The sentences used, their discriminating power and the way of awarding points for choices is presented in Table 01.

Discriminating power and the general reliability index allowed for selection of four pairs of items and creating Learning Autonomy Support Preference Inventory (LASPI).

Items numbered from 3 to 6 were included in the final version of the instrument. Reliability of the measurement tool was expressed by the Kunder Richardson Index (KR20) and equaled $r_{tt} = 0{,}546$. The value obtained may result from the low number of items.

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Table 01. The sentences used to measure students` preferences toward the ways in which teachers support learning autonomy

Item no.	Item	Points awarded for choosing the sentence	Item discriminative power (D_{50}) - - original version of the instrument	Item discriminative power (D_{50}) final version of the instrument
1a	During this class you learn independently using materials brought by your teacher and from sets of questions and tasks attached to these materials.	1	0,018	Not included in the final version of the instrument
1b	During a class your teacher explains everything thoroughly, you listen and perform tasks according to the instructions given to you.	0		
2a	Your teacher determines what will be needed to perform well the work assigned to you.	0	0,219	Not included in final version of the instrument
2b	You have to decide independently what you will need to perform the work you are assigned to do.	1		
3a	Your teacher assigns you the task you are to do.	0	0,578	0,643
3b	Your teacher provides several tasks and you can choose the one you will tackle.	1		
4a	You can independently make the decision concerning what you will do, the sequence of your actions and kind of materials you will use to perform your task.	1	0,452	0,433
4b	Your teacher determines what you are to do, what sequence of actions you are to follow and what materials will be used to perform the task.	0		
5a	Your teacher informs you about the mark you received for your work.	0	0,418	0,536
5b	Your teacher informs you about the mark you received and explains what was good in your work and what demands improvement.	1		
6a	Your teacher tells you how you should act and provides reasons why the presented course of actions should be followed and not the other.	1	0,382	0,536
6b	The teacher tells you how you should act.	0		

5.2. Participants

Four hundred and fifty-four students took part in the research. Among the participants there were 150 students from middle school and 304 students attending secondary school. The average age of all participants was 16,47 years (sd=1,56). The arithmetic mean of the age of middle school students was 14,63 years (sd=0,93) while for secondary school students it equaled 17,38 years (sd=0,83). The whole group of participants consisted of 204 men (73 from middle school and 131 from secondary school) and 248 women (77 studied in middle school and 171 in secondary school). Two persons did not provide the data concerning their gender.

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6. Findings

6.1. The general level of students` preferences towards the ways in which teachers support learning autonomy during a class

The level in which students accept various ways of fostering their learning autonomy by teachers was determined by analyzing descriptive statistics and distribution of Preference towards teachers` ways of learning autonomy support questionnaire total score. The results obtained are shown in Table 02 and Figure 01.

The total result of Learning Autonomy Support Preference Inventory (LASPI) may theoretically range between 0 and 4. As is shown in Table 02, the value of arithmetic mean of this score obtained in the research was equal to M=2,54 (sd=1,23), while the median equaled to 3. Skewness was found to be within the range between -0,50 to 0,50. Kurtosis equal to -0,87 did not exceed the range of (-1:1). Significance level of KS test, which was lower than 0,05, as well as skewness and kurtosis values show the bias of Learning Autonomy Support Preference Inventory total score towards high results.

Table 02. Descriptive and distribution statistics of Learning Autonomy Support Preference Inventory (LASPI) total score

Statistics	Value
Number of persons	454
Minimum	0
Maksimum	4
Median	3
Skewness	-0,42
Skewness/Skewness error	-3,69
Kurtosis	-0,87
Kurtosis/kurtosis error	-3,78
KS normality test value with Lilliefors ammendment	0,20
KS normality test significance level	0,001
95% confidence interval for arithmetic mean	2,42-2,65
Arithmetic mean	2,54
Standard deviation	1,23

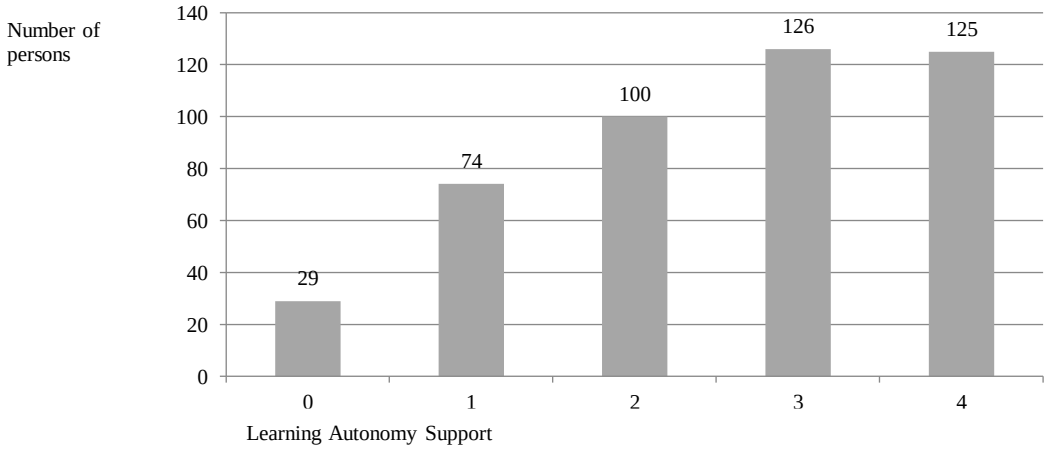

Figure 01. The distribution of the total result of Learning Autonomy Support Preference Inventory (LASPI)

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As can be seen in Figure 01, the majority of students taking part in the research (131 persons, 55,3% of the participants) had the questionnaire total score equal of higher than the median result, which means high level of participants` preference towards experiencing situations which demand independence of learning.

6.2. Students' preferences towards specific ways in which teachers support learning autonomy during class

Table 03 presents the number and percent of choices made for six pairs of items belonging to the Learning Autonomy Support Preference Inventory (LASPI), including four pairs which constitute the final version of the Inventory (items number 3-6) and two pairs of items not included in calculating instrument`s total score.

As is shown in Table 03, among the situations described, the participants most often indicated the option requiring high autonomy in the case of the decisions concerning choosing and performing a task, which are presented in an item pair no. 4. About seventy percent of the respondents declared that they would prefer to decide independently what they will do, what materials they would use and what will be the sequence of their actions. The remaining 30 percent of the participants indicated that they would prefer the situation in which the teacher decides about the range and stages of work as well as about the materials used.

Similarly, almost 70% of the students participating in the research choose the option requiring greater independence and responsibility for learning in pairs of items no. 5 and 6. Among participants 68% would prefer their teacher to provide them not only with information about the mark they received for their work but also about strong and weak points of their performance and suggestions what should be improved. Likewise, 68% of students declared that they expect from their teacher not only an indication how to act but also arguments explaining why a given way of acting is recommended and not the other.

The least number of participants chose a situation requiring greater autonomy out of two possibilities presented in item pair no.1, describing two different models of class. About one fourth of the students participating in the research (23%) declared that they would prefer to work independently and choose themselves with which materials and sets of questions prepared by their teacher they will work than to attend the class where a teacher presents and explains everything and students task is to listen and perform all the tasks prepared by the teacher.

Table 03. Choices between items of Learning Autonomy Support Preference Inventory (LASPI) which describe actions requiring high and low learning autonomy

No.	Item	Number of choices	Percent of choices	Percent of choices of the option describing higher autonomy during a class
1a	During this class you learn independently using materials brought by your teacher and from sets of questions and tasks attached to these materials.	104	22,9	22,9

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1b	During a class your teacher explains everything thoroughly, you listen and perform tasks according to the instructions given to you.	350	77,1	
2a	Your teacher determines what will be needed to perform well the work assigned to you.	256	56,4	43,6
2b	You have to decide independently what you will need to perform the work you are assigned to do.	198	43,6	
3a	Your teacher assigns you the task you are to do.	239	52,6	47,4
3b	Your teacher provides several tasks and you can choose the one you will tackle.	215	47,4	
4a	You can independently make the decision concerning what you will do, the sequence of your actions and kind of materials you will use to perform your task.	319	70,3	70,3
4b	Your teacher determines what you are to do, what sequence of actions you are to follow and what materials will be used to perform the task.	135	29,7	
5a	Your teacher informs you about the mark you received for your work.	145	31,9	68,1
5b	Your teacher informs you about the mark you received and explains what was good in your work and what demands improvement.	309	68,1	
6a	Your teacher tells you how you should act and provides reasons why the presented course of actions should be followed and not the other.	309	68,1	68,1
6b	The teacher tells you how you should act.	145	31,9	

Among 454 participants of the research, 256 (44%) indicated that they prefer to choose independently what will be needed to perform their work than to be in the situation where their teacher indicates what will be indispensable to perform a task. Almost half of the respondents (47%) indicated that they prefer to have the possibility to choose from the set of tasks prepared by their teacher the ones they will perform than not to have such an opportunity.

6.3. Gender, educational level and participants preferences of teachers` behaviours aimed at fostering learning autonomy

It was verified whether there is a difference between men and women as well as between middle school students and secondary school students in terms of their preferences towards teachers` ways of learning autonomy support. The total score of Learning Autonomy Support Preference Inventory (LASPI) and its distribution in the subgroups of participants differentiated in terms of gender and educational status were analysed. Descriptive statistics of Learning Autonomy Support Preference Inventory (LASPI) total score are shown in Table 04.

The data presented in Table 04 show that no significant differences were registered either between men and women or between middle school and secondary school students in terms of in the total score of Learning Autonomy Support Preference Inventory (LASPI). Likewise, significant differences in general preferences towards teachers` actions aimed at stimulating independence in mastering knowledge and skills were not detected between male and female middle school students and between men and women from secondary school.

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Data concerning the distribution of sum of points awarded for the answers to four Item pairs constituting Learning Autonomy Support Preference Inventory (LASPI) can be found in Table 05.

As can be seen from the data depicted in Table 05, middle school and secondary school students were the only subgroups of participants which differed in terms of the distribution of Learning Autonomy Support Preference Inventory (LASPI) total score (Chi square = 10,28; p<0,04). The LASPI total score distribution in middle and secondary school students is illustrated in Figure 02.

Table 04. Comparison of Learning Autonomy Support Preference Inventory (LASPI) in subgroups varied in terms of gender and age

Statistics	**Men**	**Women**	**Middle school students**	**Secondary school students**	**Middle school students**		**Secondary school students**	
					men	**women**	**men**	**women**
Number of participants	204	248	150	304	73	77	131	171
Minimum	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Maximum	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4
Median	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3
Skewness	-0,35	-0,49	-0,42	-0,44	-0,40	-0,43	-0,32	-0,53
Kurtosis	-0,91	-0,80	-0,58	-0,97	-0,54	-0,62	-1,07	-0,86
K-S normality test value with Lilliefors ammendment	0,19	0,21	0,19	0,20	0,18	0,19	0,19	0,22
K-S normality test significance level	0,001	0,001	0,001	0,001	0,001	0,001	0,001	0,001
95% confidence interval for arithmetic mean	2,29-2,64	2,45-2,75	2,28-2,66	2,43-2,71	2,25-2,79	2,15-2,71	2,21-2,66	2,49-2,86
Arithmetic mean	2,45	2,60	2,47	2,57	2,52	2,43	2,43	2,68
Standard deviation	1,25	1,22	1,18	1,25	1,14	1,22	1,30	1,21
Mann Whitney`s test U value	23746,50		21578,50		2716,00		10057,00	
Mann Whitney`s test Z value	-1,16		-0,96		-0,37		-1,57	
Mann Whitney`s test significance level	0,25		0,34		0,71		0,12	

Table 05. Differences in the distribution of Learning Autonomy Support Preference Inventory (LASPI) total score in subgroups of participants different in terms of gender and educational level.

LASPIscore in points	**Number of participants**		**Number of participants**		**Number of middle school students**		**Number of secondary school students**	
	Men	**Women**	**Middle school students**	**Secondary school students**	**Men**	**Women**	**Men**	**Women**
0	15	14	11	18	4	7	11	7
1	34	39	18	56	9	9	25	30
2	49	51	44	56	22	22	27	29
3	53	72	43	83	21	22	32	50
4	53	72	34	91	17	17	36	55
	Chi square= 1,93; p=0,75		**Chi square = 10,28 p=0,04**		Chi square = 0,74; p=0,95		Chi square = 0,74; p=0,95	

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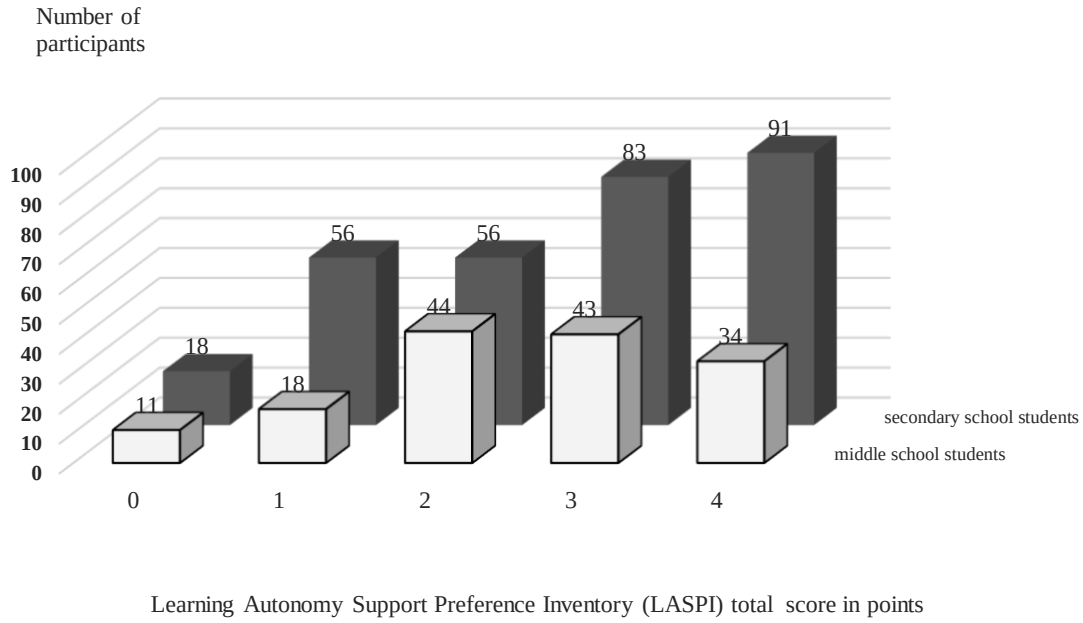

Figure 02. The distribution of Learning Autonomy Support Preference Inventory (LASPI) total score in participants from middle and secondary school

The data presented in Table 05 and Figure 02 show, that more participants from middle school in comparison with those from secondary school obtained high score of 3 and 4 points for their answers. It indicates that more persons attending middle school than secondary school students to high degree prefer when their independence in learning is fostered by teachers.

7. Conclusion

The research presented in the article aimed to get knowledge concerning students` preferences towards autonomy support provided by a teacher. It aim was also to test the relationship between gender and educational level of students and their preferences towards teachers` actions supporting learning autonomy. Data was gathered from 150 middle school students (77 women and 73 men) and 302 secondary school students, including 171 women and 131 men. Preference of Learning Autonomy Support Inventory (LASPI) was constructed. Autonomy supportive actions included in the final version of the instrument were: providing students with opportunity to choose a task to perform, choosing activity to do, the way to complete it and materials which will be used, providing students with informative justification of a mark awarded for their work and rationale for suggested actions. The study provided four findings:

- Most participants generally prefer to attend a lesson where a teacher plays directive role to autonomy supportive independent work with various materials.
- Teacher`s behavior fostering learners` autonomy most preferred by the participants of the study was providing them with opportunity to independently decide on the task and the way to perform it. The majority of students taking part in the research also indicated high preference of being offered informative feedback concerning their progress and rationales for actions over being informed about their marks and being told what to do.

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- No differences in Learning Autonomy Support Preference Inventory (LASPI) total score were found between:
    - male and female participants regardless of educational level,
    - participants from middle and secondary school regardless of gender,
    - male and female participants from middle school, and
    - male and female participants from secondary school.
- LASPI total score distribution analysis revealed that more students from middle school than from secondary school prefer high degree of learning autonomy support during class.

Results of the present study are consistent with finings form research by Furtak and Kunter (2012); Pekrun and Linnenbrink-Garcia (2013) indicating that students generally prefer situations in the classroom with which they are familiar to more challenging ones. Contrary to the results obtained by Flunger and co-workers (2019) no gender differences were found.

From the results of the own research it may be concluded that:

- Students should be provided opportunities to choose tasks as well as ways and materials to perform them during lessons. Equally important is that they were given informative feedback concerning their performance and rationales for suggested ways of action.
- Safe classroom climate for independent study and problem solving should be ensured in the classroom because students may still be attached to the directive teacher`s role.
- Opportunities for intensive of autonomous learning and diverse ways of fostering independence during lessons should be especially provided to middle school students.

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