

A Comprehensive Empirical Study of the Relationship Between School Environment and Adolescent Autonomy of Senior Secondary School Students

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ABSTRACT

Adolescence is a critical developmental phase characterized by the gradual emergence of independence, self-regulation, and responsible decision-making, collectively referred to as adolescent autonomy. Schools function as primary social and academic environments where such developmental competencies are nurtured or constrained. The present empirical study examines the relationship between school environment and adolescent autonomy among senior secondary school students. A descriptive survey method was employed, and data were collected from a sample of 400 students studying in Classes XI and XII using standardized tools. Statistical analysis involving mean, standard deviation, Pearson's correlation, and regression analysis revealed a significant positive relationship between school environment and adolescent autonomy. The findings indicate that a supportive, participatory, and emotionally secure school environment plays a crucial role in fostering autonomy among adolescents. The study underscores the need for autonomy-supportive educational practices in senior secondary schools.

Keywords: School Environment, Adolescent Autonomy, Senior Secondary Students, School Climate, Educational Psychology

1. INTRODUCTION

Education during adolescence is not limited to academic achievement; it also involves the development of psychological and social competencies necessary for adult life. One of the most significant developmental outcomes of adolescence is autonomy—the ability to think independently, make informed choices, and take responsibility for one's actions.

At the senior secondary level, students face critical academic, career, and life decisions. During this phase, the school environment becomes a powerful context influencing students' confidence, motivation, and self-regulation. The school environment encompasses the academic climate, teacher–student relationships, peer interaction, leadership style, disciplinary practices, and physical infrastructure.

A positive school environment encourages student participation, nurtures emotional safety, and promotes self-directed learning. In contrast, rigid and authoritarian environments may suppress independence and foster dependency. Understanding the relationship between school environment and adolescent autonomy is therefore essential for designing developmentally appropriate educational practices, particularly in alignment with the learner-centred vision of NEP 2020.

2. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Research in educational psychology consistently highlights the role of contextual factors in adolescent development. Theoretical perspectives such as Self-Determination Theory emphasize that autonomy develops when individuals experience psychological safety, competence, and meaningful relationships within their environment.

Empirical studies have demonstrated that students studying in schools with democratic classroom practices, supportive teachers, and positive peer relationships exhibit higher levels of autonomy, motivation, and emotional maturity. Conversely, environments characterized by excessive control and punitive discipline have been associated with reduced initiative and self-regulation.

Indian studies have also indicated that school climate significantly influences adolescents' emotional adjustment, decision-making ability, and independence. Despite these findings, focused empirical research on senior secondary students remains limited, highlighting the need for the present study.

3. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The problem undertaken for the present study is stated as follows:

“To study the relationship between school environment and adolescent autonomy of senior secondary school students.”

4. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To study the level of school environment among senior secondary school students.
2. To examine the level of adolescent autonomy among senior secondary school students.
3. To determine the nature and extent of the relationship between school environment and adolescent autonomy.

5. HYPOTHESIS

H₁: There exists a significant positive relationship between school environment and adolescent autonomy among senior secondary school students.

6. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

6.1 Research Design

The study adopted a **descriptive survey method**, which is appropriate for examining existing conditions and relationships among variables without manipulation.

6.2 Population

The population comprised of senior secondary school students studying in Classes XI and XII.

6.3 Sample

The sample consisted of **400 senior secondary school students** (200 boys and 200 girls), selected using **stratified random sampling** from four senior secondary schools to ensure representation and gender balance.

6.4 Variables

- **Independent Variable:** School Environment
- **Dependent Variable:** Adolescent Autonomy

7. TOOLS USED FOR DATA COLLECTION

7.1 School Environment Scale

The School Environment Scale was used to assess students' perceptions of their school climate.

Dimensions covered:

- Teacher–student relationship
- Academic support
- Peer interaction
- Disciplinary practices
- Physical and learning facilities
- Emotional safety

Higher scores indicate a more positive perception of school environment. The tool possesses adequate reliability and validity for senior secondary students.

7.2 Adolescent Autonomy Scale

The Adolescent Autonomy Scale was used to measure students' level of independence and self-regulation.

Dimensions covered:

- Decision-making ability
- Emotional independence
- Self-control and responsibility
- Academic autonomy

Higher scores reflect higher levels of autonomy. The scale is reliable and suitable for adolescent populations.

8. PROCEDURE OF DATA COLLECTION

Permission was obtained from school authorities before data collection. Students were informed about the purpose of the study and assured of confidentiality. The tools were administered in classroom settings under standardized conditions to ensure reliability of responses.

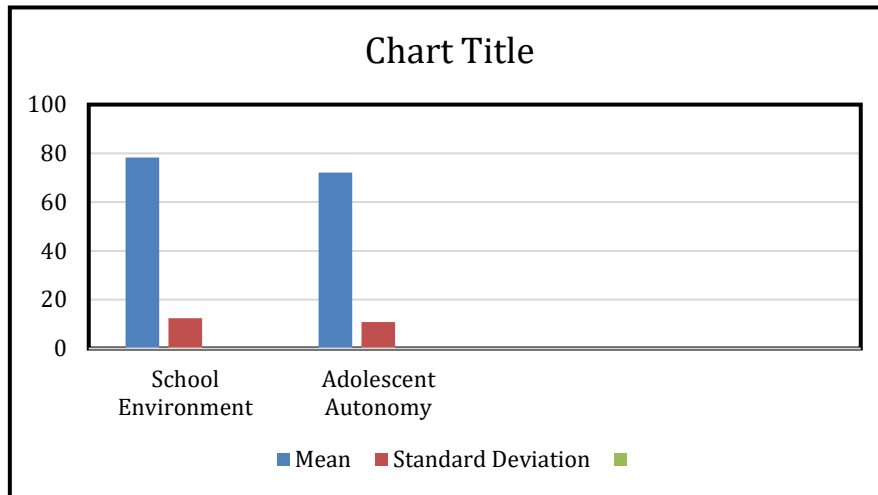
9. STATISTICAL TECHNIQUES USED

- Mean and Standard Deviation
- Pearson's Product Moment Correlation
- Regression Analysis

10. ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION OF DATA

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics of School Environment and Adolescent Autonomy

Variable	Mean	Standard Deviation
School Environment	78.34	12.45
Adolescent Autonomy	72.12	10.87

**Interpretation:**

The results indicate that students perceived their school environment as moderately positive. The autonomy scores suggest a moderate to high level of autonomy appropriate to the senior secondary stage.

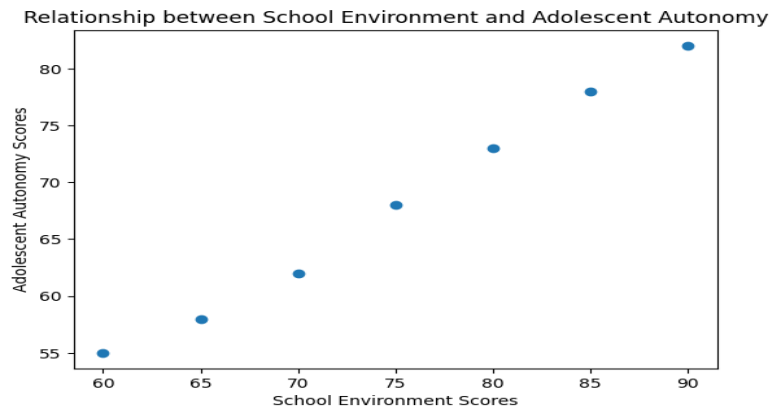
Table 2: Correlation Between School Environment and Adolescent Autonomy

Variables	r-value	Level of Significance
School Environment & Adolescent Autonomy	0.64	Significant at 0.01 level

Interpretation:

The obtained correlation coefficient ($r = 0.64$) indicates a significant positive relationship between school environment and adolescent autonomy. Thus, better school environments are associated with higher autonomy among students.

Graphical Representation**Figure 1: Scatter Plot Showing Relationship Between School Environment and Adolescent Autonomy**



The scatter plot shows a clear upward trend, indicating that as school environment scores increase, adolescent autonomy scores also increase. This visual evidence supports the statistical findings of a positive relationship between the two variables.

11. DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

The findings suggest that adolescent autonomy develops within supportive educational contexts. Schools that encourage participation, respect student voice, maintain emotional safety, and provide academic support enable adolescents to internalize responsibility and self-regulation. The results are consistent with existing theoretical and empirical literature.

12. EDUCATIONAL IMPLICATIONS

- Teachers should adopt autonomy-supportive teaching strategies.
- School leadership should foster democratic and inclusive school cultures.
- Guidance programmes should emphasize independent decision-making.
- Policymakers should prioritize school climate as a developmental factor.

13. CONCLUSION

The study concludes that school environment plays a significant role in shaping adolescent autonomy among senior secondary school students. A positive, supportive, and inclusive school environment not only enhances academic learning but also prepares students for responsible adulthood.

14. LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

- The study was limited to selected schools.
- Self-report tools may involve subjective bias.
- Other influencing variables were not included.

15. SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

- Longitudinal studies on autonomy development
- Comparative studies across school types
- Inclusion of family and socio-cultural variables

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