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Research Article

Learning-Centered Leadership and Learning Climate as Predictors of Teacher Autonomy

Öğretmen Özerkliğinin Yordayıcıları Olarak Öğrenme Merkezli Liderlik ve Öğrenme İklimi

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Abstract

This study aims to determine the predictive effect of learning-centered leadership and learning climate on teachers' autonomy in schools. This is a quantitative study designed with a correlational survey model. The sample of the study consisted of 343 teachers employed in state schools in central districts of Ankara. The results of the study showed that professional interest, which is one of the sub-dimensions of learning climate, and building a learning vision and providing learning support, which are sub-dimensions of learning-centered leadership, are positive and significant predictors of teacher autonomy. Moreover, the results of regression analysis and path analysis conducted on total scores revealed that learning climate and learning-centered leadership are positive and significant predictors of teacher autonomy. Furthermore, in addition to the direct predictive effect of learning-centered leadership on teacher autonomy, learning-centered leadership also indirectly predicts teacher autonomy via learning climate. This study, which addresses the relationship between teacher autonomy and learning-centered leadership in our centralized and hierarchically structured education system, is thought to contribute to the literature and practice.

Keywords: *Teacher autonomy, leadership, learning-centered leadership, learning climate, school administrator.*

Öz

Bu araştırma okullardaki öğrenme merkezli liderlik ile öğrenme ikliminin öğretmenlerin özerklikleri üzerindeki yordayıcılıklarını belirlemeyi amaçlayan ilişkisel tarama modelinde tasarlanmış nicel bir araştırmadır. Araştırmanın örneklemini Ankara ili merkez ilçelerinde kamu okullarında görev yapan 343 öğretmen oluşturmuştur. Araştırma sonuçları öğrenme ikliminin alt boyutlarından mesleki ilginin ve öğrenme merkezli liderliğin alt boyutlarından öğrenmeye dönük bir vizyon oluşturma ile öğrenme desteği sağlamanın öğretmen özerkliğinin pozitif yönlü ve anlamlı yordayıcıalrı olduğunu göstermiştir. Bununla birlikte toplam puanlar üzerinden yapılan regresyon analizi ve path analizi sonuçları öğrenme iklimi ve öğrenme merkezli liderliğin öğretmen özerkliğinin pozitif yönlü ve anlamlı yordayıcıları olduğunu ortaya koymuştur. Bununla birlikte path analizi sonuçlarına göre öğrenme merkezli liderlik doğrudan yordayıcılığına ek olarak öğrenme iklimi üzerinden dolaylı olarak da öğretmen özerkliğini yordamaktadır. Merkeziyetçi ve hiyerarşik olarak yapılanmış eğitim sistemimizde öğretmen özerkliği ile öğrenme merkezli liderliğin ilişkisini ele alan bu çalışmanın alanyazına ve uygulamaya katkı sağlayacağı düşünülmektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: *Öğretmen özerkliği, liderlik, öğrenme merkezli liderlik, öğrenme iklimi, okul yöneticisi.*

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1. Introduction

The subject of autonomy has frequently been included in research studies from past to present. However, autonomy has generally been studied in the form of learner autonomy (Little, 2007; Phan, 2012; Vazquez, 2018), while teacher autonomy has been disregarded. Previous studies have focused mainly on either learner autonomy alone or the relationship between learner autonomy and teacher autonomy. Together with the changing and developing views on autonomy, it is emphasized that the autonomous behaviors encouraged in students should also be displayed by teachers (Ramos, 2005). It is noteworthy that the number of studies on teacher autonomy has recently increased, and that teacher autonomy is attracting increasing interest among educational researchers, policy makers, administrators and practitioners (Haapaniemi, Venäläinen, Malin & Palojoki, 2021; Knight, 2019; Ramos, 2005; Salokangas, Wermke & Harvey, 2020; Wilches, 2007).

Teacher autonomy is associated with a number of positive outcomes in educational processes. Firstly, teacher autonomy plays an important role in empowering teachers. In this way, teacher autonomy contributes positively to teachers' ability to cope with multifaceted processes in schools and develop more positive relationships with students, and directly to the teaching process (Lawson, 2016). According to the 2009 PISA (Program for International Student Assessment) results, autonomy is associated with the development and capacities of schools. The fact that schools have more autonomy in the teaching and assessment process has a positive effect on improving student performance. Moreover, schools with more autonomy in resource allocation are likely to be more successful than schools with less autonomy (OECD, 2010). Furthermore, the results of a study conducted on the 2009 PISA results revealed that in addition to the aforementioned areas of autonomy, autonomy in discipline and assessment policies also increases student achievement (Ayral et al., 2014). Similarly, the results of the study by Machin and Vernoit (2011) showed that the quality of student intake increased and a significant improvement in student performance was achieved in schools that gained a more autonomous structure through academy conversion. It was pointed out that this situation positively benefited the education processes of other schools in the region. In other words, an increase in a school's autonomy makes a positive contribution not only to the internal performance of the school in question, but also to the performance of other schools in the surrounding area.

In addition to student performance, teacher autonomy has also been associated with certain work-related psychometric characteristics of teachers. The literature indicates that teacher autonomy predicts numerous concepts as well as being predicted by a number of concepts. One of these is commitment. The literature points out that as teachers' organizational commitment increases, their autonomy also increases. Accordingly, as the internalization dimension of teachers' commitment increases, professional development and teaching autonomy increase. The compliance dimension of commitment, however, naturally produces a negative relationship with the perception of autonomy (Bayraktar, 2019). Other concepts associated with teacher autonomy are professionalism, empowerment, professional self-efficacy, stress, and job satisfaction. Studies have shown that an increase in teachers' autonomy reduces work stress. In addition, as teachers' perception of autonomy increases, their job satisfaction, perception of empowerment (Pearson & Moomaw, 2005), professional self-efficacy (Guvenç, 2011) and professionalism (Karatay, Günbey & Taş, 2020) also increase.

When we consider the case of teachers' autonomy in Turkey, it is stated that their autonomy in the areas of preparation of teaching plans and professional development is low, whereas their perception of autonomy towards the teaching process is higher (Çolak & Altınkurt, 2017; Öztürk, 2012). It can be said that one of the reasons for this is the central preparation of instructional plans in Turkey, the standardized distribution of textbooks to students by the Ministry of National Education, and the planning of in-service training for professional development opportunities by the Ministry or provincial organization. However, another study shows that teachers in Turkey have a perception of autonomy above the medium level in all sub-dimensions of autonomy, including the teaching process, curriculum, professional development and professional communication (Karatay et al., 2020).

Although teacher autonomy is regarded positively by many studies in the literature, there are also some criticisms of teacher autonomy. Anderson (1987) stated that with increasing autonomy, teachers work alone more and their work and achievements are less likely to be noticed by others. She stated that as a

result, teachers may feel isolated and believe that they are not appreciated. Moreover, as autonomy increases, the bond with the organization is loosened, and autonomy can lead to alienation. Furthermore, attention is drawn to the tendency of autonomy to support the status quo. Consequently, an increase in autonomy can reduce the likelihood of long-term changes. Lawson (2016) points out that teacher autonomy can reach a controlling dimension. Accordingly, teacher autonomy is in itself neither wholly empowering nor wholly controlling for teachers. However, it has the potential to enable both. It is considered important that policies related to gaining autonomy establish the balance between emancipation and control. Hoyle and Wallace (2006) pointed out that the efforts to increase teacher autonomy in England and Wales ended when the view developed that excessive teacher autonomy led to various problems in schools and reduced the quality of education to an unacceptable extent.

Although there are various criticisms of teacher autonomy, it is noteworthy that the subject criticized is excessive autonomy. A balanced autonomy is an element that enhances teachers' job satisfaction (Lawson, 2016). In this study, teacher autonomy is regarded as a structure that empowers teachers and supports learning, as long as it remains within reasonable limits. As well as predicting various concepts, teacher autonomy is also predicted by various concepts. This study focuses on learning-centered leadership and learning climate, which are constructs that can predict teacher autonomy.

1.1. Teacher Autonomy and Learning-Centered Leadership

The concept of teacher autonomy is defined as a sense of personal freedom to perform necessary actions and maintain control over the school environment. Autonomy is related to adequate opportunities for decision-making and risk-taking in the institutions where teachers work (Wilches, 2007). In teacher autonomy, the role of the teacher is that of facilitator, consultant, and director of learning resources. The main task of an autonomous teacher is to create and maintain a learning community (Little, 2004). In a general sense, the components of autonomy are the responsibility for analyzing possibilities, making choices, and influencing changes in one's life and activities. Ramos (2005) draws attention to certain features of autonomy. Accordingly, a) autonomy is not an all-or-nothing concept. It is a concept that can be developed and might be present in some aspects of an individual's life and absent from others. Individuals can be autonomous to varying degrees, and age and maturity may also have an effect on this; b) responsibility, awareness of one's needs, motivation, critical thinking, self-evaluation and a certain degree of freedom are necessary elements of autonomy; c) autonomy does not mean that teachers hand over all control to students; d) students need teacher cooperation in order to gain some levels of autonomy; e) learner autonomy accompanies teacher autonomy.

In the context of teacher autonomy, factors such as school culture (Wu, 2015), policies, and relationships with those in school and outside the school, etc. (Wermke, Rick & Salokangas, 2019) form the basis of the existence of teacher autonomy. In other words, the presence and support of certain elements is required for teacher autonomy to exist. One of the elements believed to form the basis of teacher autonomy and increase the perception of autonomy is the leadership behaviors exhibited by school administrators.

One of the most traditional views on the key role of contemporary school administrators is that the school principal should serve as an instructional leader. Definitions of the instructional leadership roles of school administrators have recently shifted from that of an instructional leader focused on teaching towards that of the leader of a professional community focused on learning. Learning-centered leadership is a concept that goes beyond mere instructional leadership. While instructional leadership focuses on the inputs of the learning process, learning-centered leadership shifts the focus from the inputs to the outputs and from the intentions to the results. The main purpose of learning-centered leadership is to encourage learning in students and teachers (DuFour, 2002).

It is stated that learning-centered leadership is a positive predictor of students' academic outcomes, irrespective of their socioeconomic level. The focus of learning-centered leadership on a rigorous curriculum and performance accountability offers a holistic contribution to students' learning (Reardon, 2011). In addition to student outcomes, learning-centered leadership increases teacher professionalism (Polat & Kılınç, 2022), trust in administrators (Fransworh, Hallam & Hilton, 2019), and teachers' creation of a learning vision, provision of learning support, management of the learning program and being a model, and collaboration (Kılınç, Bellibaş and Polatcan, 2022).

In the literature, leadership and autonomy are regarded as structures that support each other. The research results of Wang and Cheng (2009) revealed that benevolent leadership and work-oriented autonomy are positively correlated. Similarly, the research results of Kalshoven, Hartog and Hoogh (2012) indicated that ethical leadership is an element that supports autonomy. Moreover, the presence of shared leadership in an organization is also regarded as an element that increases employees' autonomy (Imam, 2021). Therefore, it can be said that leadership in general is an element that supports teacher autonomy. It can also be stated that like other leadership styles, learning-centered leadership will increase the perception of autonomy. Studies indicate that learning-centered leadership enables empowerment in teachers by creating an environment of participatory decision-making, an environment of accountability, an environment that supports professional development, an enabling school environment, and an environment that supports autonomy (Akgün, 2021). Learning-centered leadership is a leadership approach that focuses mainly on learning, while teacher autonomy focuses on the teaching process, curriculum, professional development and professional communication in its sub-dimensions. In this context, it can be said that both of these concepts focus mainly on learning. It can be argued that these two constructs, whose theoretical foci largely overlap, can support each other. Another construct that is focused on learning in schools is the learning climate.

1.2. Teacher Autonomy and Learning Climate

Creating and developing a learning climate in schools is essentially focused on facilitating and improving learning, increasing the perception of organizational support, and developing employees' knowledge and skills (Carmeli, Tishler & Edmondston, 2012). A climate that supports learning stands out as a factor that increases participation, achievement and perceived competition (Dinçer, Yeşilyurt & Takkaç, 2012; Şahin-Toptaş, 2023). The learning climate is conceptualized as a construct that includes sufficient time to learn and perform, autonomy and responsibility, team style, development opportunities, and instructions on how the job is to be done (Bartram, Foster, Lindley, Brown & Nixon, 1993).

School climate is a construct directly related to the working conditions of teachers. Accordingly, the school climate is considered to be directly related to the amount of control over teachers and it is stated that the way control is implemented is associated with the management style. Teachers view schools as effectively functioning organizations in cases where there is more professionalism and the decision-making process is more participatory and less centralized. Individuals' autonomous behaviors come to light in stages depending on the suitability of the conditions they find themselves in (Dondero, 1997). Research results show that school climate is associated with teacher autonomy. Teachers' perceptions of autonomy increase as the school climate becomes positive (Özdemir & Çakalcı, 2022). According to the research results of Çolak and Altınkurt (2017), in the context of school climate, principals' supportive behaviors increase teachers' autonomous behaviors, while principals' authoritarian behaviors decrease them. The results of another study similarly indicate that the general school climate and the general perception of autonomy are positively correlated, and that furthermore, as the degree of positivity of the school climate increases, teachers' autonomy in freedom of control, avoiding insecurity and freedom from influence increases (Erpelding, 1999). However, the complexity of the curriculum reduces curricular autonomy (Prichard & Moore, 2016). In the context of learning climate, it is stated that learning climate is an element that increases empowerment, which is a construct that also includes autonomy (Maruping & Magni, 2012).

1.3. Learning-Centered Leadership and School Climate

Instructional leaders create a shared sense of purpose in school by setting clear goals that focus on learning in school; develop a school culture that seeks innovation and improvement in teaching and learning based on high expectations; It is stated that they organize various activities aimed at the continuous development of staff and they are a visible model of school culture (Hallinger, 2005). In addition, it is pointed out that instructional leaders support the learning climate with a reward system that includes various rewards at school (Hallinger & Murphy, 2005). The instructional leadership model points out that it is essential to create and maintain a school climate that supports teaching and learning practices and teachers' professional development (David Ng, Nguyen, Wong, & Choy, 2015).

The research results of Ross and Cozzens (2016) showed that the instructional leadership behaviors of school administrators are effective in teachers' perceptions of school climate. Accordingly, school principals' instructional leadership behaviors affect teachers' perceptions of the social, emotional, and physical school climate. The increase in this perception of climate also increases organizational citizenship performance and task performance. Similarly, Akram, Shah, and Rauf's (2018) research showed that school administrators' instructional leadership practices were positively related to school climate.

The literature indicates that in a general context, leadership and school climate are associated with teachers' perceptions of autonomy in general, and emphasizes that some of the concepts that sustain teacher autonomy are leadership and school climate. Moreover, the concepts of learning-centered leadership, learning climate and teacher autonomy are focused on improving learning. In this context, these constructs can reveal a structure that forms the three legs of a tripod in improving learning. In this study, these concepts are examined through structural equation modeling in a tripartite structure, and the predictive effects of learning-centered leadership and learning climate on teacher autonomy and the indirect predictive effect of learning-centered leadership on teacher autonomy via learning climate are examined.

2. Methodology

2.1. Research Model

Since the aim of this study was to determine the predictive effect of learning-centered leadership and learning climate in schools on teachers' autonomy, a correlational survey model was selected as the research design. A structural equation model was used in this study to determine the direct predictive effect of learning climate and the direct and indirect predictive effect of learning-centered leadership on teacher autonomy. Structural equation modeling is a technique that allows the researcher to combine the predictive structural relationship between the variables in the regression model and the latent factor structures in factor analysis in a single comprehensive analysis (Büyüköztürk, Çakmak, Akgün, Karadeniz & Demirel, 2010).

2.2. Population and Sample

The population of the study consisted of teachers employed in state secondary schools in central districts of Ankara. According to the data for the 2019-2020 academic year, 18,493 teachers worked in 576 state secondary schools in central districts of Ankara. The highest number of schools are in Çankaya district, while the fewest schools are in Pursaklar district. The district with the highest number of teachers is Keçiören, while the district with the fewest teachers is Pursaklar. In the study, the sample was selected by convenience sampling. According to Fraenkel and Wallen (2009), it is frequently difficult to select a random or systematic non-random sample in research studies. In such cases, researchers can use the convenience sampling method. The purpose of convenience sampling is to include individuals who are appropriate and accessible for the study. In this type of sampling, information about the demographic and other characteristics of the sample studied should also be included in the study. Some demographic data related to the sample are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Distribution of Teachers Based on Certain Variables

Variable		1	2	3	4	Total
		Female	Male			
Gender	n	173	170			343
	%	50.4	49.6			100
		1-5	6-10	11-15	15+	
Seniority (years)	n	25	81	124	113	343
	%	7.3	23.6	36.2	32.9	100

When we examine the data on the distribution of teachers in the study sample according to some variables (Table 1), it can be seen that the sample is approximately equally distributed between female

and male teachers. When the data on seniority is examined, the most teachers are in the group with 11-15 years of seniority, while the fewest teachers are in the group with 1-5 years of seniority.

2.3. Data Collection Tools

Three different scales were used as data collection tools in the study. Information on the scales is presented in detail below.

2.3.1. Learning Climate in Schools Scale

The "Learning Climate in Schools Scale" developed by Savaş and Demirkasımoğlu (2020) was used to measure learning climate in schools in this study. The scale originally consisted of four sub-dimensions, namely collaborative environment, school principal support, school facilities, and professional interest, and a total of 22 items. Based on the results of the exploratory factor analysis (EFA) applied to the scale, it was seen that the KMO value of the scale was .96 and that Bartlett's ($\chi 2$) statistic was 7513.38 ($p < .001$). These values can be interpreted to say that the scale is suitable for exploratory factor analysis (EFA). When the results were examined, it was seen that the items were grouped under four factors. The 18th item, which did not have an appropriate factor loading, was removed from the scale and EFA was performed again on the remaining items. According to the EFA results, the school principal support sub-dimension explained 27.3%, the professional interest sub-dimension explained 16.3%, the collaborative environment sub-dimension explained 21.9% and the school facilities sub-dimension explained 14.7% of the total variance. The scale as a whole explained 80.1% of the total variance. When the reliability coefficients for the scale were examined, it was seen that the reliability coefficients were .94 for the school principal support sub-dimension, .94 for the professional interest sub-dimension, .88 for the collaborative environment sub-dimension, .95 for the school facilities sub-dimension, and .97 for the whole scale.

The results of the confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) applied to the Learning Climate in Schools Scale showed that the chi-square (x^2) value was 581.067, the degree of freedom (df) was 183, and the chi-square/degree of freedom was 3.18. This finding shows that the data set supports the factor structure (x^2/df = 3.18). Furthermore, RMSEA (0.080), CFI (0.95), GFI (0.87), AGFI (0.83), RMR (0.04) and NFI (0.92) values indicate a good fit for the model. When all the findings are evaluated together, it can be said that the four-factor structure shows a good fit.

2.3.2. Learning-Centered Leadership Scale

The "Learning-Centered Leadership Scale" developed by Liu, Hallinger and Feng (2016) and adapted into Turkish by Kılınç, Bellibaş and Gümüş (2017) was used to measure learning-centered leadership in the study. The scale originally consisted of three sub-dimensions, namely building a learning vision, providing learning support, and managing the learning program and modeling, and 19 items. Based on the results of the EFA applied to the scale, it was seen that the KMO value of the scale was .97, and that Bartlett's statistic was 7662.0 ($p < .001$). These values can be interpreted to say that the scale is suitable for EFA. When the results were examined, it was seen that the items were grouped under three factors. Items 4, 5, 6, 9, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18 and 21, whose factor loadings were inappropriate, were removed from the scale and EFA was performed on the remaining items. Based on the EFA results, the sub-dimension of building a learning vision explained 23.8%, the sub-dimension of providing learning support explained 30.3%, and the sub-dimension of managing the learning program and modeling explained 28.8% of the total variance. The scale as a whole explained 82.9% of the total variance. When the reliability coefficients of the scale were examined, it was concluded that the reliability coefficients were .95 for the sub-dimension of building a learning vision, .89 for the sub-dimension of providing learning support, .93 for the sub-dimension of managing the learning program and modeling, and .97 for the whole scale.

The results of the CFA applied to the Learning-Centered Leadership Scale showed that the chi-square (x^2) value was 152.992, the degree of freedom (df) was 51, and the chi-square/degree of freedom was 3. This finding shows that the data set supports the factor structure (x^2/df = 3). Moreover, RMSEA (0.076), CFI (0.98), GFI (0.93), AGFI (0.90), RMR (0.03) and NFI (0.97) values indicate a good fit for the model. When all the findings are evaluated together, it can be said that the three-factor structure shows a good fit.

2.3.3. Teacher Autonomy Scale

The "Teacher Autonomy Scale" developed by Çolak and Altınkurt (2017) was used to measure teacher autonomy in this study. The scale originally consisted of four sub-dimensions, namely teaching process autonomy, curricular autonomy, professional development autonomy, and professional communication autonomy, and 17 items. Based on the results of the EFA applied to the scale, it was found that the KMO value was .93 and that Bartlett's statistic was 3279.0 ($p < .001$). These results show that the scale is suitable for EFA. Based on the EFA results, the scale items were grouped under four factors. The teaching process autonomy sub-dimension of the scale explained 25.3%, the curriculum autonomy sub-dimension explained 17.9%, the professional development autonomy sub-dimension explained 15.1%, and the professional communication autonomy sub-dimension explained 15.6% of the total variance. The scale as a whole explained 73.9% of the total variance. The reliability coefficients of the scale were .90 in the teaching process autonomy sub-dimension, .84 in the curriculum autonomy sub-dimension, .85 in the professional development autonomy sub-dimension, and .81 in the professional communication autonomy sub-dimension.

Based on the results of the CFA applied to the Teacher Autonomy Scale, the chi-square (x^2) value was calculated as 265.454, the degree of freedom (df) was 83, and the chi-square/degree of freedom was 3.20. According to this finding, the data set supports the factor structure (x^2/df = 3.20). Furthermore, RMSEA (0.080), CFI (0.94), GFI (0.90), AGFI (0.86), RMR (0.06) and NFI (0.92) values indicate a good fit of the model. When all the findings are evaluated together, it can be said that the four-factor structure shows a good fit.

2.4. Data Collection and Analysis

The research data were collected online through the Google Form developed by the researchers. The data collection process took approximately 2 weeks. In the study, the predictive effect of learning climate and learning-centered leadership, which are the independent variables, on teacher autonomy, which is the dependent variable, was determined. For this purpose, multiple linear regression analysis was performed on the total scores for the scales and the total scores for the sub-dimensions. In addition, since the aim of the study was to determine the direct and indirect predictive effect of learning-centered leadership on teacher autonomy, path analysis was conducted within the framework of structural equation modeling. The SPSS 20 software package was used for multiple linear regression analysis and the AMOS 18 software package was used for path analysis. The research was carried out by Gazi University Ethical Comission ethic approval dated 23.02.2023 and numbered E-77082166-604.01.02-595573.

3. Findings

The findings for the prediction of teacher autonomy by learning climate and learning-centered leadership are presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Multiple Linear Regression Analysis Results for Prediction of Teacher Autonomy

Variable	*B*	Standard Error $_B$	β	*t*	*p*
Constant	1.70	1.42		12.01	.00
Learning climate	.36	.07	.39	5.08	.00
Learning-centered leadership	.22	.06	.27	3.48	.00

$F = 117.615$, $p = .00$; $R = .64$. $R^2 = .41$

When Table 2 is examined, it can be seen that teacher autonomy is significantly correlated with learning climate and learning-centered leadership ($R = .64$, $p < .05$). Learning climate and learning-centered leadership together explain 41% of the variance in teacher autonomy. Furthermore, learning climate ($\beta = .39$, $p < .05$) and learning-centered leadership ($\beta = .27$, $p < .05$) are each positive and significant predictors of teacher autonomy. Based on the standardized regression coefficients (β), the order of importance of the predictive variables in predicting teacher autonomy is learning climate followed by learning-centered leadership.

Table 3: Multiple Linear Regression Analysis Results for Prediction of Teacher Autonomy by Sub-Dimensions

Variable	*B*	Standard Error $_B$	β	*t*	*p*
Constant	1.57	.15		10.50	.00
School principal support	-.09	.07	-.11	-1.22	.23
Professional interest	.17	.06	.22	2.73	.01
Collaborative environment	.09	.07	.11	1.33	.19
School facilities	.09	.06	.10	1.51	.13
Learning Vision	.18	.06	.22	2.95	.00
Learning Support	.15	.07	.20	2.12	.04
Modeling	.02	.08	.02	.22	.83

F = 36.768, p = .00; R = .66. R^2 = .43

When Table 3 is examined, it can be seen that teacher autonomy creates a significant model with the sub-dimensions of learning climate and learning-centered leadership (R = .66, p < .05). Together, these variables explain 43% of the variance in teacher autonomy. Based on the results of the regression analysis, among the sub-dimensions of learning climate, professional interest (β = .22, p < .05) and building a learning vision (β = .22, p < .05), and among the sub-dimensions of learning-centered leadership, providing learning support (β = .20, p < .05) are positive and significant predictors of teacher autonomy. Based on the standardized regression coefficients (β), the order of importance of the predictive variables in predicting teacher autonomy is as follows: professional interest, followed by building a learning vision and providing learning support, respectively.

Path analysis was conducted to determine the direct and indirect predictive effect of learning climate and learning-centered leadership on teacher autonomy. By using path analysis, both the direct and indirect predictive effect of the predictive variables on the predicted variable were observed. The fit indices calculated for the fit of the model in this study are shown in Table 4.

Table 4: Model Fit Indices

χ^2	df	(χ^2/df)	RMSEA	CFI	NFI	GFI	AGFI	RMR
23.77	8	2.97	.07	.99	.98	.98	.94	.02

The fit indices calculated for the model fit in this study indicate that the model fits the data well (x^2/df = 2.97 < 5, RMSEA = .07, CFI = .99, NFI = .98, GFI = .98, AGFI= .94, RMR = .02). The standardized path coefficients for the degree to which and the direction in which learning climate and learning-centered leadership predict teacher autonomy are given in Figure 1.

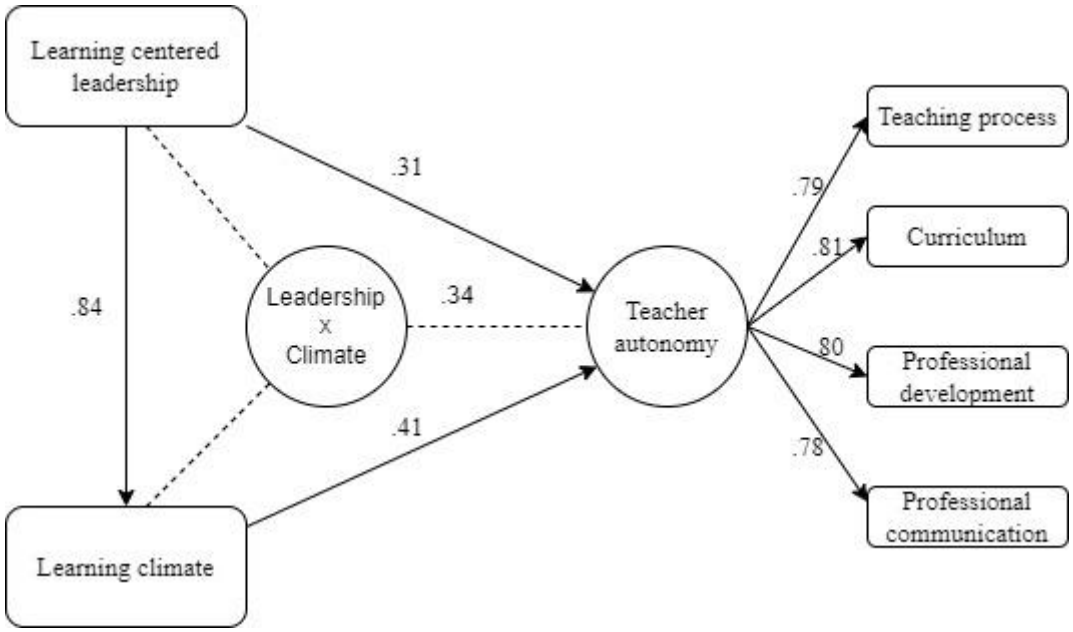

Figure 1: Standardized Path Coefficients

The direct predictive effect of the independent variables on the dependent variables is shown in Table 5.

Table 5: Direct Predictive Effect of Independent Variables on Dependent Variables

Independent Variable	Effect	Dependent Variable	Standardized Estimate (*Estimate)*	Standard Error *(SE)*	Critical Ratio *(CR)*	Significance *(p)*
Learning-centered leadership	→	Teacher autonomy	.31	.06	3.73	***
Learning climate	→	Teacher autonomy	.41	.07	4.86	***
Learning-centered leadership	→	Learning climate	.84	.03	29.08	***

*** $p < .001$

Table 5 shows that learning-centered leadership (β = .31) and learning climate (β = .41) are positive and significant predictors of teacher autonomy. Furthermore, learning-centered leadership is a direct (β = .84) predictor of learning climate and an indirect (β = .34) predictor of teacher autonomy via learning climate. The direct, indirect and total predictive effects of the independent variables on teacher autonomy are shown in Table 6.

Table 6: Direct, Indirect and Total Predictive Effects of Independent Variables on Teacher Autonomy

Variables	Effects*		
	Direct	Indirect	Total
Learning-centered leadership	.31	.34	.65
Learning climate	.41	-	.41

* Standardized path coefficients

According to Table 6, learning-centered leadership (β = .31) and learning climate (β = .41) predict teacher autonomy directly and positively. Moreover, learning-centered leadership is an indirect (β = .34) predictor of teacher autonomy via learning climate. The total predictive effect of learning-centered leadership on teacher autonomy is β = .65.

4. Results, Discussion and Recommendations

The results of the study reveal that learning climate is a positive and significant predictor of teacher autonomy. However, in the sub-dimensions of learning climate, only professional interest is a significant predictor of teacher autonomy. The results of Wu's (2015) study showed that school culture was correlated with teacher autonomy. Hierarchy, professionalism and innovation, and participation and communication in school positively predicted teacher autonomy as well as the curricular autonomy and instructional autonomy sub-dimensions of autonomy. In addition, the research results of Wermke et al. (2019) also indicated that school policies and the relationship structure at school were associated with teacher autonomy. Although these studies do not directly focus on the relationship between learning climate and autonomy, they focus on concepts such as hierarchy, professionalism, participation, relationship structure and communication that can be associated with climate. These are concepts related to organizational culture, but they are also among the sub-components of organizational climate. In this regard, the findings of this study revealing the positive and significant prediction of teacher autonomy by learning climate are consistent with the results of the aforementioned studies.

Although there are no studies that directly address the relationship between learning climate and teacher autonomy, there are studies that discuss the relationship between school climate and teacher autonomy. The results of the study by Özdemir and Çakalcı (2022) revealed that school climate was positively associated with teacher autonomy. In that study, the dimensions of climate were self-employment, team spirit and supporting climate, stress, hierarchical and bureaucratic climate, negative communication and interaction, and innovative climate. Analyses were made on the total scores and it was concluded that as the school climate progressed towards the positive, teacher autonomy also increased. Similarly, in this study, it was concluded that as the general learning climate scores increased, teachers' autonomous behaviors also increased. Based on the research results of Çolak and Altınkurt (2017), supportive principal behaviors in the context of school climate increased teachers' autonomous behaviors, while authoritarian principal behaviors decreased them. According to the results of this study, however, school principal support, one of the sub-dimensions of learning climate, did not significantly predict teacher autonomy. One reason for this may be that teachers perceive principal support as a behavior that limits their autonomy. Similar to the findings of this study, the results of Erpelding's (1999) study also indicated that school climate and teacher autonomy were positively correlated. Along with the positive climate, teachers perceive that they have freedom of control by escaping from influence, and their feelings of insecurity decrease. However, Prichard and Moore's (2016) research results revealed that curricular autonomy decreased as the curriculum became more complex. In a school climate that is supportive of learning, the complexity of the curriculum is an unexpected situation. In this regard, the results of the abovementioned study and those of this study are consistent in terms of curricular autonomy. Short and Rinehart (1992) stated that in schools where teachers participate more in joint decision-making processes and act more autonomously, greater organizational conflict may arise and this may shift the school climate in a negative direction. In this respect, the results of this study are not consistent with those of the aforementioned study.

The results of this study show that learning-centered leadership is a positive and significant predictor of teacher autonomy. Moreover, among the sub-dimensions of learning-centered leadership, building a learning vision and providing learning support are positive and significant predictors of teacher autonomy. However, the modeling sub-dimension does not significantly predict autonomy. In the literature, leadership has been associated with autonomy, and it has been stated that as the level of leadership that is supportive and inclusive and encourages learning increases, autonomy also increases. The results of Wang and Cheng's (2009) study revealed that benevolent leadership and work-oriented autonomy are positively correlated. Similarly, the research results of Kalshoven, Hartog and Hoogh (2012) indicated that ethical leadership is an element that supports autonomy. Furthermore, the presence of shared leadership in an organization is also regarded as an element that increases employees' autonomy (Imam, 2021). In terms of the positive relationship between learning-centered leadership,

which is a leadership style, and autonomy, the results of this study are consistent with those of the aforementioned studies.

It is stated that one of the main focuses of learning-centered leadership is, like teacher autonomy, to support learning in students and teachers (DuFour, 2002). In this regard, these two constructs can support each other in terms of unity of purpose. At the same time, learning-centered leadership is a construct that supports teacher professionalism, and it can support teacher autonomy in terms of being positively associated with managing the learning program and being a model (Kılınç, Bellibaş & Polatcan, 2022; Polat & Kılınç, 2022). According to the results of the study by Kocabaş et al. (2021), learning-centered leadership makes a significant contribution to the teacher empowerment process as a whole as well as to creating an environment that supports autonomy, which is a sub-dimension of empowerment. Supporting teachers' professional development, being a role model for teachers and enabling them to learn, which are the main focuses of learning-centered leadership, contribute to teachers' structural empowerment. Akgün's (2021) research results indicate that learning-centered leadership enables teachers' empowerment by creating an environment of participatory decision-making, an environment of accountability, an environment that supports professional development, an enabling school environment, and an environment that supports autonomy. In this regard, the positive and significant prediction of teacher autonomy by learning-centered leadership determined in this study is consistent with the results of other studies in the literature.

Another finding obtained in the study is that learning-centered leadership indirectly predicts teacher autonomy via learning climate. In other words, learning-centered leadership positively supports teacher autonomy directly, and in addition, learning-centered leadership indirectly supports teacher autonomy by improving the climate that facilitates learning. Moreover, there is a positive and high-level relationship between learning-centered leadership and learning climate. The results of Şentürk and Şağnak's (2012) study revealed a significant relationship between school principals' leadership behaviors and school climate. Accordingly, as the leadership behavior exhibited by school principals increased, the disengagement, hindrance and aloofness behaviors in the organizational climate decreased. Conversely, as leadership behaviors increased, sincerity, close control, work orientation and consideration behaviors increased. In other words, as the leadership behaviors of school administrators increases, the school climate turns positive. Similarly, the findings of Bakkal and Radmard's (2020) study indicated the existence of a high-level, positive and significant relationship between school administrators' educational leadership behaviors and school climate. The results of the study, which confirm those of this study and the aforementioned studies, indicated that toxic leadership behaviors in school administrators had a negative effect on school climate. In this context, the results of this study are consistent with those of the studies mentioned above.

Teacher autonomy, learning climate, and learning-centered leadership are constructs that mainly focus on the improvement of instruction. While the individual entities of these constructs support learning in schools, these three constructs together can contribute more strongly to instruction. The results of this study have shown that the existence of learning-centered leadership is important in the context of teacher autonomy. Learning-centered leadership supports teacher autonomy both directly and by improving the school climate. In this regard, studies discussing the co-movement of these constructs can contribute to the literature and practice. In the context of autonomy in particular, it is important to determine the constructs that predict autonomy in teachers. Through further research, identifying other constructs that also support teacher autonomy can contribute to theory and practice.

Contribution Rates of Authors to the Article

The authors state that each author made an important contribution to every stage of the study. All authors were responsible for conducting the research. First author designed and conceptualized the study, Second and third author was responsible for data collection. All authors were responsible for the analysis, and writing of the paper.

Statement of Interest

There is no conflict of interest from the authors to declare.

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Araştırma Makalesi

Learning-Centered Leadership and Learning Climate as Predictors of Teacher Autonomy

Öğretmen Özerkliğinin Yordayıcıları Olarak Öğrenme Merkezli Liderlik ve Öğrenme İklimi

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Genişletilmiş Özet

Giriş

Özerklik konusu geçmişten günümüze araştırmalarda sıklıkla kendine yer bulmuştur. Ancak özerklik genellikle öğrenen özerkliği biçimiyle çalışılmış (Little, 2007; Phan, 2012; Vazquez, 2018) ve öğretmen özerkliği ihmal edilmiştir. Önceki araştırmalar yoğunlukla ya sadece öğrenen özerkliğine ya da öğrenen özerkliği ile öğretmen özerkliğinin ilişkisine odaklanmıştır. Değişen ve gelişen özerklik görüşleriyle birlikte öğrencilerde teşvik edilen özerklik davranışlarının öğretmenlerde de olması gerektiğine vurgu yapılmaktadır (Ramos, 2005). Son zamanlarda öğretmen özerkliğini konu alan araştırmaların arttığı dikkat çekmekte ve öğretmen özerkliği eğitim araştırmacıları, politika yapıcılar, yöneticiler ve uygulayıcılar arasında artan bir ilgi görmektedir. (Ramos, 2005; Wilches, 2007).

Öğretmen özerkliği eğitim-öğretim süreçlerinde pek çok olumlu çıktı ile ilişkilendirilmektedir. Öncelikle öğretmen özerkliği öğretmenlerin güçlendirilmesinde önemli bir rol oynamakta ve öğretmenlerin okullardaki çok boyutlu süreçlerle mücadele edebilmesine, öğrencilerle daha olumlu ilişkiler geliştirebilmesine ve doğrudan öğretim sürecine olumlu katkılar sunmaktadır (Lawson, 2016). PISA (*Programme* for International Student Assessment) 2009 sonuçlarına göre özerklik okulların gelişimi ve kapasitelerinin artmasıyla ilişkilidir. Okulların öğretim ve değerlendirme süreci konusunda daha fazla özerkliğe sahip olması öğrenci performansını olumlu şekilde geliştirmektedir. Bununla birlikte kaynak tahsisinde daha fazla özerkliğe sahip olan okullar daha az özerkliğe sahip olan okullara göre daha başarılı olma eğilimindedir (OECD, 2010). Bunlara ek olarak yine PISA 2009 sonuçları üzerinden yapılan bir araştırmanın sonuçları bahsi geçen özerklik alanlarına ek olarak disiplin ve değerlendirme politikalarındaki özerkliğin de öğrenci başarısını artırdığını ortaya koymuştur (Ayral vd., 2014). Benzer şekilde Machin ve Vernoit'in (2011) araştırma sonuçları akademik dönüşümle daha özerk bir yapıya kavuşan okullarda öğrenci alımlarında kalitenin arttığı ve öğrencilerin performansında önemli bir gelişim sağlandığını göstermiştir. Bu durumun bölgede bulunan diğer okulların da öğretim süreçlerine olumlu katkı sağladığına işaret edilmiştir. Başka bir ifade ile bir okulun özerkliğinin artması hem söz konusu okulun iç performansına hem de civar okulların performansına olumlu katkı sunmaktadır.

Öğretmen özerkliği öğrenci performansının yanı sıra öğretmenlerin işe dönük bazı psikometrik özellikleriyle de ilişkilendirilmiştir. Literatür öğretmen özerkliğinin pek çok kavramı yordadığını bunun yanı sıra pek çok kavram tarafından da yordandığına işaret etmektedir. Bunlardan bir tanesi bağlılıktır. Literatür öğretmenlerin genel bağlamda örgütsel bağlılıkları arttıkça özerkliklerinin de arttığına işaret

etmektedir. Buna göre öğretmenlerde bağlılığın içselleştirme boyutu arttıkça mesleki gelişim ve öğretim süreci özerkliği artmaktadır. Bağlılığın uyum boyutu ise doğası gereği özerklik algısı ile negatif ilişki vermektedir (Bayraktar, 2019). Öğretmen özerkliğiyle ilişkilendirilen diğer bazı kavramlar profesyonellik, güçlendirme, mesleki öz yeterlik, stres ve iş doyumudur. Araştırmalar öğretmenlerin özerkliğinin artmasının iş stresini azalttığını ortaya koymuştur. Buna ek olarak öğretmenlerin özerklik algısı attıkça iş tatminleri, güçlendirmeye dönük algıları (Pearson ve Moomaw, 2005), mesleki öz yeterlikleri (Güvenç, 2011) ve profesyonellikleri (Karatay, Günbey ve Taş, 2020) de artmaktadır.

Öğretmen özerkliğine dönük çeşitli eleştiriler bulunmakla birlikte eleştirilen hususun aşrı özerklik olduğu dikkat çekmektedir. Dengeli bir özerklik öğretmenlerin işlerindeki tatminlerini artıran bir unsurdur (Lawson, 2016). Bu çalışmada öğretmen özerkliği makul sınırlar içinde kalınmak kaydıyla öğretmenleri güçlendiren ve öğrenmeyi destekleyen bir yapı olarak görülmektedir. Öğretmen özerkliği çeşitli kavramları yordadığı gibi çeşitli kavramlar tarafından da yordanmaktadır. Bu çalışmada öğretmen özerkliğini yordayabilecek yapılardan olan öğrenme merkezli liderlik ve öğrenme iklimine odaklanılmaktadır.

Öğretmen özerkliği bağlamında okula ilişkin okul kültürü (Wu, 2015), politikalar, okul içi ve dışıyla ilişkiler vb. (Wermke, Rick ve Salokangas, 2019) faktörler öğretmen özerkliğinin varlığında altyapıyı oluşturmaktadır. Başka bir anlatımla öğretmen özerkliğinin var olabilmesi için bazı unsurların varlığı ve desteği gerekmektedir. Öğretmen özerkliğine temel oluşturacağı ve özerklik algısını artıracağı düşünülen unsurlardan biri okul yöneticilerinin sergiledikleri liderlik davranışlarıdır.

Çağdaş okul yöneticilerinin temel rolüne ilişkin kabul edilen en geleneksel görüşlerden biri okul yöneticisinin eğitim lideri olarak hizmet etmesi gerektiğidir. Okul yöneticilerinin öğretimsel liderlik rollerine ilişkin tanımlamalar son zamanlarda öğretmeye odaklanan öğretimsel liderden öğrenmeye odaklanan mesleki bir topluluğun liderine doğru kaymaktadır. Öğrenme merkezli liderlik öğretimsel liderliğin ötesine geçen bir kavramdır. Öğretimsel liderlik öğrenme sürecinin girdilerine odaklanmakta iken öğrenme merkezli liderlik odağı girdilerden çıktılara ve niyetlerden sonuçlara kaydırmaktadır. Öğrenme merkezli liderliğin temel amacı öğrencilerin ve öğretmenlerin öğrenmesini teşvik etmektedir (DuFour, 2002).

Alanyazın genel bağlamda liderlik ve okul iklimi ile öğretmenlerin özerklik algılarının ilişkili olduğuna ve öğretmen özerkliğinin beslendiği kavramlardan bazılarının liderlik ve okul iklimi olduğuna işaret etmektedir. Bununla birlikte öğrenme merkezli liderlik, öğrenme iklimi ve öğretmen özerkliği kavramlarının odağında öğrenmeyi geliştirmek bulunmaktadır. Bu bağlamda söz konusu bu yapılar öğrenmeyi geliştirmede bir sacın üç ayağını oluşturan bir yapı gösterebilirler. Bu araştırmada söz konusu bu kavramlar üçlü bir yapı halinde yapısal eşitlik modellemesi ile incelenmiş ve öğrenme merkezli liderliğin ve öğrenme ikliminin öğretmen özerkliği üzerindeki yordayıcılıkları ile öğrenme merkezli liderliğin öğrenme iklimi üzerinden öğretmen özerkliği üzerindeki dolaylı yordayıcılığı incelenmiştir.

Yöntem

Bu araştırmada, okullardaki öğrenme merkezli liderlik ile öğrenme ikliminin öğretmenlerin özerklikleri üzerindeki yordayıcılıkları belirlenmek istendiğinden araştırma deseni ilişkisel tarama modeli olarak belirlenmiştir. Bu araştırmada öğretmen özerkliği üzerinde öğrenme ikliminin doğrudan ve öğrenme merkezli liderliğin doğrudan ve dolaylı yordayıcılıklarının belirlenmesi amacıyla yapısal eşitlik modeli kullanılmıştır. Araştırmanın örneklemini Ankara ilinin merkez ilçelerinde bulunan resmi ortaokullarda görev yapan 343 öğretmen oluşturmuştur.

Bulgular, Tartışma, Sonuç ve Öneriler

Araştırma sonuçları öğrenme ikliminin öğretmen özerkliğinin pozitif yönlü ve anlamlı yordayıcısı olduğunu göstermiştir. Bununla birlikte öğrenme ikliminin alt boyutlarında sadece mesleki ilgi öğretmen özerkliğinin anlamlı yordayıcısıdır. Bu araştırmanın sonuçları öğrenme merkezli liderliğin öğretmen özerkliğinin pozitif yönlü ve anlamlı bir yordayıcısı olduğunu göstermiştir. Bununla birlikte öğrenme merkezli liderliğin alt boyutlarından öğrenmeye dönük bir vizyon geliştirme ve öğrenme desteği sağlama öğretmen özerkliğinin pozitif yönlü ve anlamlı birer yordayıcısıdır. Model olma alt boyutu ise özerkliği anlamlı şekilde yordamamaktadır. Alanyazında liderlik özerklikle ilişkilendirilmiş ve genel bağlamda liderlik düzeyi arttıkça özerkliğin de arttığı belirtilmiştir. Araştırma sonucunda elde

edilen bir diğer sonuç öğrenme merkezli liderliğin öğrenme iklimi üzerinden öğretmen özerkliğini dolaylı olarak yordadığıdır. Başka bir anlatımla öğrenme merkezli liderlik öğretmen özerkliğini doğrudan olumlu şekilde desteklemektedir. Bununla birlikte öğrenme merkezli liderlik öğrenmeyi kolaylaştırıcı iklimi artırarak dolaylı yoldan da öğretmen özerkliğini desteklemektedir. Ayrıca öğrenme merkezli liderlik ile öğrenme iklimi arasında pozitif yönlü ve yüksek düzeyli bir ilişki bulunmaktadır.

Öğretmen özerkliği, öğrenme iklimi ve öğrenme merkezli liderlik temelde öğretimin geliştirilmesine odaklanan yapılardır. Bu yapıların tekil varlıkları okullarda öğrenmeyi desteklemekle birlikte söz konusu bu üç yapı birlikte daha güçlü şekilde öğretime katkı sunabilir. Bu araştırmanın sonuçları öğretmen özerkliği bağlamında öğrenme merkezli liderliğin varlığının önemli olduğunu göstermiştir. Öğrenme merkezli liderlik hem doğrudan hem de okul iklimini geliştirmek suretiyle öğretmen özerkliğini desteklemektedir. Bu bağlamda bu yapıların birlikte hareketini ele alan çalışmalar alanyazına ve uygulamaya katkı sunabilir. Özellikle özerklik bağlamında öğretmenlerin özerkliklerini yordayan yapıların belirlenmesi önemlidir. Öğretmen özerkliğini destekleyen diğer yapıların da yapılacak araştırmalarla belirlenmesi teoriye ve uygulamaya dönük katkılar sunabilir.