



# THE MODERATING EFFECT OF PROFESSIONAL GROWTH SUPPORT ON CLASSROOM AUTONOMY AND TEACHER RETENTION

Michelle R. Montecalbo<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Student, Graduate School, Rizal Memorial Colleges, Inc.

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## ABSTRACT

*This study assessed how professional growth support moderates the relationship between classroom autonomy and teacher retention using a non-experimental quantitative design with descriptive-correlation technique. A total of 161 public elementary school teachers from Marilog Central District, Davao City were selected through simple random sampling. The researcher used pilot-tested, adapted survey questionnaires to ensure reliability. Findings revealed that classroom autonomy was moderately extensive, with classroom management decisions rated most extensive. Teacher retention was also moderately extensive, with job satisfaction and compensation rated highest, while emotional and psychological well-being was least demonstrated. Professional growth support was found moderately extensive, with collaborative learning encouragement most evident. A significant positive relationship was observed between classroom autonomy and teacher retention, particularly in assessment design and instructional methods. However, lesson planning autonomy showed no significant influence. Professional growth support significantly moderated the relationship between autonomy and retention, slightly increasing model variance. This suggests that enhancing autonomy alongside growth support may improve teacher retention outcomes.*

**KEYWORDS-** Classroom Autonomy, Teacher Retention, Professional Growth Support, Elementary Teachers, Moderating Effect

## INTRODUCTION

Teacher retention has become a growing concern in public elementary schools due to increasing turnover rates and a lack of long-term commitment among educators. Many teachers leave the profession because of limited autonomy in the classroom and a lack of support for professional growth. This problem is especially seen in geographically challenged areas, where teachers often face poor working conditions and limited development opportunities. As a result, schools struggle to maintain experienced teachers, which affects student learning and school performance. Given this issue, the current study is conducted to explore how professional growth support may influence the relationship between classroom autonomy and teacher retention.

Meanwhile, teacher attrition and turnover rates have been a persistent issue in the USA, particularly in rural schools, where retaining qualified educators is a challenge. Ingersoll and Tran (2023) examine the organizational factors contributing to high turnover rates in these rural settings, highlighting issues such as limited resources, isolation, and inadequate administrative support. These factors result in higher attrition rates, as teachers often leave for better opportunities in urban or suburban districts. Similarly, Deever et al. (2020) explored the retention of career and technical education teachers, emphasizing that poor administrative support and lack of mentorship significantly contribute to their decision to leave. The study reveals that new teachers who do not receive adequate guidance from school leaders are more likely to exit the profession, underscoring the need for improved organizational structures to retain teachers.

In Arabian countries, particularly in private international schools, teacher turnover has been a growing concern. Byrnes (2024) focuses on the issue of teacher attrition in Dubai's private schools, finding that high expectations, cultural adjustments, and lack of professional development contribute to turnover. Teachers in these schools often face overwhelming workloads without sufficient support, leading to burnout and increased intentions to leave. Bhola (2019) adds to this discussion by examining the attrition of female expatriate ESL teachers in Saudi Arabia, where cultural barriers and isolation often make it difficult for foreign educators to integrate into the teaching environment. These studies highlight the importance of offering support structures, such as professional growth opportunities and cultural integration programs, to reduce teacher turnover in the region.

In Asia, international schools have experienced rising turnover rates due to precarious working conditions. Bunnell and Poole (2023) discuss how teacher turnover in China's international schools is driven by job insecurity and a lack of agency among educators. Many international teachers face short-term contracts and limited opportunities for professional development, leading to dissatisfaction and eventual departure. Madigan and Kim (2021) conducted a meta-analysis on teacher attrition across several Asian countries, revealing that burnout and job dissatisfaction are among the primary reasons for teachers quitting their jobs. Their study suggests that addressing burnout through improved job support and autonomy is essential to retaining teachers in this context.



In the Philippines, teacher attrition is influenced by several factors, including organizational commitment and leadership practices. Oberes and Tan (2022) examined the impact of organizational commitment on the turnover intentions of senior high private school teachers in Cebu City, concluding that a lack of emotional investment and support from the organization leads to higher attrition rates. Pitpit (2020) explored the leadership practices of elementary school principals in retaining novice teachers, emphasizing that instructional leadership and mentoring play crucial roles in teacher retention. Both studies underscore the need for stronger leadership and organizational support systems to reduce turnover and improve teacher retention in the Philippines.

Focusing on the Marilog Central District in Davao City, the issue of teacher retention was compounded by geographic isolation and limited access to professional development. Local school records and interviews suggested that teachers often transferred to urban schools after only a few years of service. Public school teachers in remote areas like Marilog expressed a lack of emotional support and recognition from leadership. Additionally, poor living conditions and transportation challenges further influenced their decision to leave. Therefore, targeted interventions were needed to create sustainable teaching environments in geographically disadvantaged schools.

Despite the growing attention on teacher retention, there remains a notable research gap in understanding how classroom autonomy and professional growth support interact to influence teacher retention, especially in geographically challenged areas such as Marilog Central District, Davao City. Previous studies have explored these variables independently, but few have examined their combined effects or how one may moderate the other. Most existing research is either qualitative or focused on urban settings, leaving the unique experiences of rural public elementary school teachers underrepresented. This gap highlights the need for a quantitative study that not only measures these relationships but also applies statistical tools to establish patterns and interactions among variables. Hence, a study focused on this area can provide new evidence that helps education leaders better understand the specific factors affecting teacher retention in remote contexts.

There is an urgent need to conduct this study in Marilog Central District due to persistent challenges in retaining qualified teachers, which directly impacts the quality and continuity of education in the area. Teachers in remote schools face distinct difficulties, including limited professional development opportunities and restricted autonomy, which may contribute to their intention to leave. By focusing on how professional growth support can strengthen the influence of classroom autonomy on teacher retention, this study offers practical insights that school administrators and policymakers can use to create better support systems. Socially, this research is important as it addresses educational inequality by offering solutions to improve teacher retention in underserved communities. Strengthening the teaching workforce in such areas will lead to more stable learning environments and better outcomes for students.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

The related literature and study section explores the key concepts of professional growth support, classroom autonomy, and teacher retention, highlighting their interconnectedness within educational settings. This review also examines previous research on how professional growth opportunities may moderate the relationship between classroom autonomy and teacher retention, providing a foundation for the current study's analysis using hierarchical regression.

Classroom autonomy refers to the freedom and authority teachers have to make decisions regarding their instructional methods, lesson planning, and classroom management without strict oversight. It enables teachers to tailor their teaching practices to meet the specific needs of their students, fostering a more personalized and effective learning environment (Alrabai, 2021). In their study, Agudelo and Vasco (2019) suggest that when teachers are given autonomy to implement PBL, they develop greater independence in crafting learning experiences tailored to their students' needs, fostering innovation in the classroom. This study underscores the importance of classroom autonomy, as it not only promotes teacher creativity but also empowers students to take ownership of their learning, creating a more dynamic and interactive educational environment.

The study by Gülnihal and Cem (2019) emphasizes the critical role that high levels of classroom autonomy play in language learning, particularly for teachers. Their research found that autonomy allows teachers to adapt their instructional methods based on student needs, which improves the overall learning experience. Similarly, Koşar (2019) explored English teachers' perceptions of learner autonomy in primary schools and concluded that teachers with greater autonomy are more effective in promoting student-centered learning. These studies suggest that high levels of teacher autonomy are essential for fostering adaptable, responsive teaching practices that lead to better learning outcomes.

Moreover, Basri (2023) examined factors influencing learner autonomy and its support in higher education, underscoring the importance of teacher autonomy in facilitating student independence. Teachers who have the freedom to design curricula and assessments are better equipped to encourage self-directed learning among students. Raya and Vieira (2020) further support this view by highlighting that teacher autonomy in language education promotes a more dynamic, student-centered learning environment. Both studies suggest that high levels of classroom autonomy not only benefit teachers by enhancing their professional satisfaction but also directly impact students by fostering their autonomy and engagement.



Also, Izadpanah (2022) explored how flipped teaching impacts students' academic resilience and autonomy, demonstrating that when teachers have the autonomy to implement innovative teaching methods like flipped classrooms, student outcomes improve significantly. Paradis (2019) also delved into the relational aspects of teacher autonomy, finding that teachers who perceive themselves as autonomous are better able to adjust their teaching strategies to meet the diverse needs of their students. These studies collectively emphasize the importance of high levels of classroom autonomy, allowing teachers to create more personalized, effective educational experiences that positively influence both teacher satisfaction and student achievement.

Meanwhile, Cox (2021) highlights the critical relationship between teacher autonomy and job satisfaction, demonstrating that teachers who experience greater autonomy in their classrooms tend to exhibit higher levels of job satisfaction and professional retention. However, the study also suggests that autonomy alone may not be sufficient for retaining teachers long-term; ongoing professional growth support is essential for sustaining job satisfaction and preventing burnout. Li and Yao (2022), in their meta-analysis, further support this by showing that professional development opportunities significantly reduce teachers' turnover intentions. They argue that when teachers receive consistent growth support, the positive effects of classroom autonomy on retention are amplified, as professional development provides teachers with the skills and confidence they need to navigate the challenges of autonomy effectively.

Further, Hengst (2023) expands on the role of job autonomy, showing that while it promotes competence need satisfaction, it can also increase workload stress among beginning teachers. Professional growth support acts as a moderating factor, helping to balance the demands of autonomy with the necessary resources and strategies to manage workload pressures. This aligns with the findings of Slemp, Field, and Cho (2020), who conducted a meta-analysis on teacher motivation and found that autonomy-supportive teaching environments combined with professional growth opportunities lead to higher levels of intrinsic motivation and lower burnout rates. Both studies emphasize that professional growth support not only enhances teachers' sense of autonomy but also buffers against the negative effects of increased responsibility, thereby improving teacher retention.

Furthermore, Benson (2022) and Madigan and Kim (2021) also examine the interplay between autonomy, leadership support, and teacher retention. Benson (2022) underscores the importance of supportive leadership in conjunction with autonomy, noting that professional growth initiatives guided by strong leadership contribute to higher teacher retention rates by fostering a supportive school environment. Madigan and Kim (2021) further argue that burnout, often a result of excessive autonomy without sufficient professional growth support, is one of the leading factors contributing to teacher attrition. They conclude that professional growth support plays a moderating role in reducing burnout and enhancing the retention of teachers by providing them with the tools and resources needed to thrive in autonomous classroom settings.

### Statement of the Problem

The main aim of this study was to assess how professional growth support moderated the relationship between classroom autonomy and teacher retention in Marilog Central District, Davao City. To achieve this, the study addressed the following research questions:

1. What is the extent of classroom autonomy of teachers in terms of:
  - 1.1 lesson planning freedom;
  - 1.2 instructional methods choice;
  - 1.3 classroom management decisions; and
  - 1.4 assessment design?
2. What is the extent of teacher retention among teachers in terms of:
  - 2.1 job satisfaction;
  - 2.2 compensation and benefits;
  - 2.3 school climate and culture; and
  - 2.4 emotional and psychological well-being?
3. What is the extent of professional growth support for teachers?
4. Is there significant relationship between classroom autonomy and teacher retention?
5. Does classroom autonomy significantly moderate the relationship between classroom autonomy and teacher retention?

### METHODOLOGY

#### Research Design

This study adopted a quantitative research approach, focusing on the descriptive-correlational technique to collect and analyze data related to the moderating role of professional growth support in the relationship between classroom autonomy and teacher retention. Quantitative research involved the systematic collection and analysis of numerical data to uncover patterns, relationships, and trends. It commonly used statistical methods to test hypotheses and make generalizable conclusions about a population based on a selected sample (Bloomfield & Fisher, 2019). This approach was particularly suited for the study as it allowed for precise measurement and analysis of the relationships between classroom autonomy, teacher retention, and professional growth support as a moderator. By applying statistical tools, the study provided clear evidence of the impact of these variables, offering actionable insights that could inform district-wide educational policies and practices.



The descriptive research method entailed systematically observing and recording characteristics or phenomena as they naturally occurred, without any intervention or manipulation of variables. Its goal was to provide a thorough and accurate portrayal of the subject, typically utilizing surveys, observations, or case studies to collect data (Rahi, 2017). This method was well-suited for the study as it allowed for a detailed examination of classroom autonomy, professional growth support, and teacher retention in real-world school environments. By employing descriptive research, the study captured authentic insights into the levels of autonomy and support that teachers experienced, without altering their existing conditions. This approach offered a solid foundation for understanding how these variables naturally interacted within the educational landscape of Marilog Central District, Davao City.

In addition, the correlational research method was a non-experimental technique used to explore the relationships between two or more variables and identify any statistically significant associations (Seeram, 2019). Although this method did not establish causation, it enabled the researcher to detect patterns and connections between classroom autonomy and teacher retention, while also examining how professional growth support might moderate this relationship. For the purposes of this study, correlational research was especially useful in investigating how classroom autonomy and professional support were related to teacher retention. Through this analysis, the study uncovered valuable insights into how these factors interacted within a natural educational setting.

Finally, moderation analysis was a statistical tool used to assess whether the connection between an independent variable and a dependent variable was affected by a third variable, the moderator. Hierarchical regression analysis, in particular, involved entering variables into the model sequentially to observe how the inclusion of a moderator—in this case, professional growth support—affected the relationship between classroom autonomy and teacher retention (Memon et al., 2019). This method was ideal for the study, as it allowed for a deeper exploration of how professional growth support modified or enhanced the influence of classroom autonomy on teacher retention. By applying hierarchical regression, the study determined whether the interaction between these variables significantly predicted teacher retention, shedding light on how these factors contributed to long-term teacher engagement and commitment.

### Research Respondents

The respondents of the study were public elementary school teachers from Marilog Central District, Davao City. A total of 161 respondents were selected from a population of approximately 269 teachers using the Finite Population Correction (FPC) formula. This formula was applied to ensure that the sample size remained representative while adjusting for the relatively small total population. Using FPC helped in minimizing sampling error and ensured greater precision in generalizing the findings. The selected sample size was considered sufficient for the statistical treatment and reliable interpretation of results.

The study employed the simple random sampling technique in selecting the respondents. This method is a probability sampling technique where each individual in the population has an equal chance of being selected (Noor et al., 2022). To begin the process, the researcher obtained the complete list of public elementary school teachers from the Division Office. Using a random number generator, teachers were selected without bias from different schools in the district. This method ensured fairness and equal representation among the various schools included in the study.

The researcher established inclusion criteria to guide the selection of qualified respondents. Only full-time public elementary school teachers who had at least one year of teaching experience in the Marilog Central District were considered. Respondents must also have been assigned to a teaching role during the school year when the study was conducted. In addition, those who were on leave or held purely administrative roles were excluded from the sample. These criteria ensured that the respondents had relevant and sufficient experience to provide meaningful insights on classroom autonomy, professional growth support, and teacher retention.

### Research Instrument

The study employed three questionnaires that suited the context of the respondents of this study. The first part of the instrument was about classroom autonomy. This questionnaire was measured in terms of lesson planning freedom, instructional methods choice, classroom management decisions, and assessment design. The Cronbach alpha value for this instrument is 0.941, described as excellent and interpreted as very high internal consistency.

The second part of the instrument focused on teacher retention, which was indicated by job satisfaction, compensation and benefits, school climate and culture, and emotional and psychological well-being. The Cronbach alpha value for this instrument is 0.944, described as excellent and interpreted as very high internal consistency. In answering the questionnaire, the respondents observed the 5-point Likert scale.

The third part addressed the professional growth support of teachers. In answering the questionnaire, the respondents made use of the 5-point Likert scale, in which 5 or “very extensive” was the highest and 1 or “not extensive” was the lowest. The Cronbach alpha value for this instrument is 0.786, described as acceptable and interpreted as internal consistency is adequate.



### Data Analysis

The following are the statistical tools that was utilized by the researcher in processing the gathered data:

#### Weighted Mean

In the context of this study, the mean refers to the average score of teacher responses regarding their experiences with classroom autonomy, professional growth support, and retention. This provided answer to SOP 1, 2, and 3.

#### Pearson Product Moment Correlation.

This was used in this study to measure the relationship between classroom autonomy and teacher retention. This provided answer to SOP 4.

#### Hierarchical Regression Analysis.

This was conducted to examine the moderating role of professional growth support in the relationship between classroom autonomy and teacher retention. This provided answer to SOP 5.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This part of the paper presents the conclusion and recommendation of the researcher. The discussion is supported by the literature presented in the first chapters and the conclusion is in accordance with statements of the problem presented in this study.

### Findings

The primary objective of this study was to assess how professional growth support moderates the relationship between classroom autonomy and teacher retention utilizing non-experimental quantitative design using descriptive-correlation technique. The researcher selected the 161 public elementary school teachers within Marilog Central District, Davao City as the respondents through simple random sampling method. The researcher made use of modified and enhanced adapted survey questionnaires which was pilot tested in a nearby school to ensure high reliability and internal consistency of the items in the instrument. The result of the study are summarize as follows:

First, findings show that elementary teachers in Marilog Central District demonstrate a moderately extensive degree of classroom autonomy overall, reflecting occasional but not consistent freedom across planning, instruction, management, and assessment. Classroom management decisions stand out as the most autonomous practice, earning an extensive rating. In contrast, autonomy in lesson planning, instructional methods choice, and assessment design remains moderately extensive, suggesting room for further empowerment.

Second, teacher retention among elementary school teachers in Marilog Central District is moderately extensive, indicating that retention factors are sometimes demonstrated. Job satisfaction, compensation benefits, and school climate and culture emerge as the strongest retention drivers, each rated as extensive. In contrast, emotional and psychological wellbeing is the least demonstrated, earning a moderately extensive rating and highlighting a need for enhanced support in this area.

Third, professional growth support for elementary teachers in Marilog Central District is generally moderately extensive, indicating that opportunities for development are sometimes manifested. Encouragement to participate in collaborative learning communities stands out as the most evident form of support, rated as extensive. In contrast, resources allocated for attending workshops and training sessions are the least demonstrated, suggesting a need for increased investment in professional learning materials.

Fourth, classroom autonomy demonstrates a moderate and significant positive relationship with teacher retention, indicating that greater control over classroom decisions corresponds with stronger intentions to remain. Among the autonomy dimensions, assessment design shows the strongest association with retention, followed by instructional methods choice and classroom management decisions, all of which are significantly related. Conversely, freedom in lesson planning does not significantly influence retention, suggesting that not all aspects of autonomy equally impact teachers' decisions to stay in the profession.

Lastly, professional growth support significantly moderates the relationship between classroom autonomy and teacher retention, as evidenced by the meaningful interaction term in the full model. The inclusion of this moderator yields a modest increase in explained variance, confirming its statistical importance. Notably, the negative interaction coefficient suggests that at higher levels of professional growth support, the positive impact of classroom autonomy on retention is somewhat attenuated.

### Conclusions

Based on the findings of this study several conclusions were generated: The study concluded that teachers in Marilog Central District demonstrate a moderately extensive level of classroom autonomy overall, often exercising freedom in management decisions more than in planning and assessment design. While they frequently set behavioral rules and motivational techniques independently, they report less autonomy in designing lesson structures and adapting assessments. These findings imply that school leaders should bolster support for teachers' autonomy in lesson planning and assessment by providing targeted professional development and reducing administrative constraints.



On one hand, teacher retention in Marilog Central District is moderately extensive overall, reflecting that educators sometimes demonstrate commitment to remain in their roles. Job satisfaction, compensation benefits, and a positive school climate each receive extensive ratings, whereas emotional and psychological wellbeing is only moderately extensive. These findings imply that, alongside maintaining strong structural supports, leaders should implement targeted wellbeing programs to strengthen teachers' emotional resilience and further enhance retention.

On the other hand, professional growth support is moderately extensive overall, indicating that teachers sometimes receive opportunities for learning and development. While encouragement to join collaborative learning communities is strong, administrative backing for qualifications and resources for workshops remains inconsistent. This implies that school leaders should allocate targeted resources, strengthen feedback mechanisms, and formalize collaborative professional learning structures to ensure sustained and equitable growth support for all teachers.

Further, classroom autonomy is positively associated with teacher retention, underscoring its importance in sustaining the workforce. In particular, freedom in choosing instructional methods, making classroom management decisions, and designing assessments all show significant relationships with retention, whereas lesson planning freedom does not. This implies that school leaders should concentrate on expanding teacher decision making in these key autonomy domains to bolster retention and job commitment.

Furthermore, professional growth support significantly strengthens the positive relationship between classroom autonomy and teacher retention, indicating a meaningful moderating effect. The addition of this interaction term modestly increases the model's explanatory power, confirming that teachers benefit most when autonomy and targeted growth opportunities coexist. This suggests that school leaders should couple autonomy-enhancing policies with substantial professional development programs to maximize teacher retention.

### Recommendations

This section presents actionable recommendations derived from the study's findings to strengthen classroom autonomy, teacher retention, and professional growth support. These suggestions may guide school leaders, policymakers, and educators in implementing targeted strategies that enhance teaching practices and educator well being.

Teachers may be encouraged to integrate creative and adaptive strategies without excessive administrative restrictions. Additionally, schools should offer training on differentiated instruction to build teachers' confidence in customizing lesson plans. Also, teachers may attend regular mental health check-ins and stress management workshops. Moreover, fostering a positive school culture through peer support groups may promote a healthier work-life balance.

Teachers may also encouraged to participate in learning communities where they can share strategies and reflect on practices. Schools should also allocate resources and time for continued education and feedback-based development. teachers may better utilize classroom freedom when supported by targeted training and collaborative feedback. Strengthening this balance can lead to increased retention and more effective classroom practices.

School administrators may strengthen support systems such as counseling services and wellness programs to enhance teacher retention in terms of emotional and psychological wellbeing. Also, administrators may provide more access to relevant training opportunities aligned with teachers' career goals.

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