International Journal of Innovations & Research Analysis (IJIRA)
ISSN :2583-0295, Impact Factor: 5.449, Volume 03, No. 04(I), October- December, 2023, pp 85-90

# EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGY AND LOCUS OF CONTROL: A NEXUS FOR STUDENT SUCCESS AND WELL-BEING

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**ABSTRACT**

*Locus of control, a psychological construct, reflects an individual's belief regarding the control they possess over events in their lives. The impact of one's locus of control on academic performance has garnered substantial attention, with internal locus of control being associated with better academic outcomes. This review paper explores the intricate interplay among locus of control, academic performance, mental health, and educational psychology. Additionally, the paper delves into the intricate relationship between locus of control and mental health, highlighting how one's perceived control over life events can influence their psychological well-being. Educational psychology, a critical field, encompasses understanding various factors influencing learning and performance within educational settings, making it essential to consider the role of locus of control in educational psychology research. This review synthesizes existing literature to provide a comprehensive understanding of how locus of control can be a significant determinant of academic success and mental health, shedding light on the implications for educational psychology practices and interventions. Internal locus of control is consistently associated with improved academic performance, suggesting the importance of fostering a sense of personal agency and control within educational contexts. Moreover, the impact of locus of control on mental health underscores the need to integrate psychological factors into educational strategies, promoting resilience and adaptive coping mechanisms among students. Educational psychology, as a multidimensional field, should incorporate and address the role of locus of control to enhance pedagogical approaches and interventions, ultimately nurturing a conducive environment for academic excellence and psychological well-being. Future research and educational practices should continue to explore and utilize this knowledge to create a more empowering and supportive educational landscape.*

***Keywords:*** *Adolescent Psychology, Locus of Control, Academic Performance, Mental Health, Educational Psychology.*

## Introduction

Adolescence is the age of transitions be it physical or psychological. The crucial developmental stage when many self-concepts are redefined, built, and established for life. Goals and motivations start to direct behaviour. The age develops the cognitive and metacognitive skills necessary for abstract thought, identity search, and identity formation within a society (Nakkula & Toshalis, 2006). Young individuals experience many highs and lows in their academic journey as well, especially female students.

In India, there exists a notable gender imbalance in STEM fields and vocational education, particularly affecting women. As per OECD data from 2018, 71% of male science graduates pursue careers as professionals in physics, mathematics, and engineering, whereas only 43% of female graduates opt for similar professional paths. This educational gender gap plays a role in shaping an individual's character and subsequently influences their academic preferences and achievements.

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Efforts to elucidate how personality impacts educational environments have experienced fluctuating levels of success over the years. Educational psychologists have shown intermittent bursts of interest in this area, as noted by De Raad and Schouwenburg in 1996. A student's academic inclinations, motivation to excel, and self-confidence largely hinge on their perceived control of a situation. This perception, in turn, plays a crucial role in determining a student's academic performance and overall mental well-being, shaped by the academic experiences they undergo.

**Problem Statement**

This review delves into the intricate interplay among locus of control, academic performance, mental health, and educational psychology, aiming to elucidate how an individual's perceived control over life events impacts their academic success and psychological well-being within the realm of educational psychology.

**Locus of Control**

Locus of control, a concept stemming from Rotter's Social Learning Theory (1954), refers to individuals' beliefs about their ability to achieve specific outcomes or influence a situation's course. It encompasses the perception of control one holds over their circumstances. Rotter, in 1954, defined it as a personality trait reflecting how individuals perceive their capacity to shape life events or their environment. He identified two subcomponents: internal and external locus of control. An internal locus of control pertains to individuals attributing their successes and failures to their efforts and controllable variables (Rotter, 1966). Conversely, an external locus of control involves attributing accomplishments and failures to uncontrollable external factors like luck, chance, or powerful external entities. According to the locus of control hypothesis, individuals with an internal locus of control take personal responsibility for their experiences and believe outcomes are linked to their actions (Pannells & Claxton, 2008; Lloyd & Hastings, 2009). This belief can be seen as a continuum, with internal and external locus of control representing opposite ends.

**Academic Performance**

Academic performance refers to the ability to learn effectively within a formal educational environment. It represents the culmination of a student's intellectual capacity and practical knowledge in a classroom context (Gottfredson, 1997). Academic success comprises numerous factors, and among them, a student's academic performance is significantly impacted by various variables such as socioeconomic background, intellectual capabilities, personality, drive, competencies, preferences, study routines, disposition, self-confidence, teacher-student dynamics, peer influence, and parental encouragement. Essentially, it embodies the knowledge and skills students acquire throughout their educational journey (Hattie, 2009).

Performance, as defined alongside learning, encompasses the process through which a student's knowledge and abilities expand through education and experience within a classroom environment (Ambrose et al., 2010). Moreover, it involves a student's capacity to apply acquired knowledge and skills in diverse contexts, both within and beyond the classroom (Wiggins, 1993). Academic performance serves as a tangible manifestation of what has been learned and how it can be communicated to others. Effective learning involves internalizing knowledge and incorporating it into one's being, enabling the ability to articulate the understanding to others. This concept assesses how effectively a student, teacher, or institution has achieved short- and long-term learning goals (Black & Wiliam, 1998).

**Mental Health**

Mental health is the state of being cognitive, emotional, and behaviorally sound and healthy. It all comes down to how people act, feel, and think. "Mental health is a condition of mental well-being that helps people to cope with the demands of life, realise their strengths, study well and work well, and contribute to their community," the World Health Organization (WHO) states. According to Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi (2000), high mental health score individuals are capable of experiencing life to a greater degree. They are more likely to be in the moment (Keyes, 2002), be conscious of their bodies, know their strengths and weaknesses, and respond logically to unforeseen circumstances.

Mental health profoundly shapes our lives; lacking a stable mental state can render life purposeless and unclear. In earlier times, mental health was viewed merely as the absence of mental illness, but contemporary understanding perceives it as a state of overall well-being (WHO, 1948). According to Jain and Singh (2015), mental health is now defined as the skill to harmonize personal goals, cope with life's pressures, and make effective psychosocial adaptations. Considering the

substantial influence of mental health on all aspects of life, it is vital to employ effective strategies to safeguard and improve psychological well-being. Emphasizing the importance of mental health for overall quality of life cannot be overstated, regardless of one's age.Personalities also play a significant role in determining an individual's mental health. The belief that one governs a situation and can control the outcomes generates a sense of positive mental helath. Students struggling with mental health issues often face difficulties academically (Al-Osaimi, Al-Aswad & Al-Binali, 2018).

**Locus of Control and Academic Performance**

The transition from school life to college life is marked by intricate challenges encompassing academic, personal-emotional, and social adjustments. Adolescents need to cultivate coping strategies and adjustments to effectively navigate the rapid changes in social dynamics, various pressures, allurements, and perceived obstacles. Concurrently, they must preserve their identity with clear boundaries, striving to establish a strong sense of presence and concentration in a rapidly evolving world (Jain & Singh, 2015).

The concept of locus of control (LOC) is a multi-dimensional framework that gauges the extent to which young individuals believe that the outcomes in their lives are a result of their personal choices ("internal" LOC) or fate ("external" LOC) (Bandura, 1986; Rotter, 1966). Academic high achievers usually credit their success to their hard work and innate abilities, whereas those with poor academic performance tend to attribute it to challenging exams and unfavorable luck (Kovenklioglu & Greenhaus, 1978). Individuals with an internal locus of control can effectively recognize significant cues and make the most of their learning environment due to their enhanced incidental knowledge of their surroundings (Wolk & DuCette, 1974). Consequently, having an internal locus of control typically predicts better academic performance, even when other factors might moderate or constrain its influence (McGhee & Crandall, 1968).

The favourable association between academic performance and students' Locus of Control discovered by earlier researchers was replicated by Dollinger (2000), who then created useful classroom interventions to aid students in learning. After asking students to complete a brief Locus of Control assessment, Dollinger quizzed them on "trivia" questions about the course that were important to their success, such as where their instructor's office was, when exams were being held, and other information. The end results stated internals receiving higher final course grades. 1,734 incoming university freshmen were given the Rotter's Internal-External Control Scale, and results were compared to indicators of academic progress. It was assumed that people who believed that reinforcements depended on their own internal efforts (internals) would work harder and achieve higher GPAs than those who believed that reinforcements depended on fate, chance, or the deeds of powerful others (externals). It was discovered that this relationship was exclusively held for men (Warehime, 1972).

Research focusing on sports involvement revealed a positive influence on adolescents' locus of control, reading proficiency, and math performance. Internal locus of control has consistently demonstrated connections with academic advancement and mental health for students (Pires-Yfantouda & Evangeli, 2012). The study's model indicated that an external academic locus of control has a detrimental direct impact on academic achievement. Numerous studies have affirmed a positive correlation between academic success and locus of control (Varnhagen & Wright, 2008).

**Locus of Control and Mental Health**

Numerous research studies have investigated mental health challenges among university students. The transition to university life can be demanding due to various stressors such as adapting to a new environment, being away from the comfort and support of home, managing tight finances, and meeting assignment deadlines, among other factors (Lipson et al., 2022). According to a study by the American College Health Association (2021), college students with an internal locus of control generally displayed better psychological well-being compared to those with an external locus of control. In an Indian study focusing on female college students, a positive correlation was found between poor mental health and students' beliefs in chance and external influence, while an inverse relationship was observed with their internal locus of control (Kaur, 2019). Similarly, a study in South Africa involving both local and international graduate students highlighted a connection between higher levels of external locus of control and lower levels of overall well-being (Khumalo & Plattner, 2019).

The locus of control theory significantly contributes to our understanding of why some students effectively adapt to the demands of university life, while others are more susceptible to mental health challenges (Rotter, 1966). Students who believe they have significant control over their lives are more

likely to take proactive steps when confronted with difficulties (Phares, 1976). Conversely, those who perceive control to be external, influenced by chance or powerful individuals, tend to experience disillusionment and exhibit passive behaviors (Lefcourt, 1982). This perception of limited control over life events can have a similar impact to actual lack of control, fostering feelings of helplessness, indifference, loss of interest, and despair—all of which heighten the risk of developing mental health issues (Peterson, Maier, & Seligman, 1993). Recognizing and addressing locus of control can thus play a pivotal role in enhancing mental well-being among students in an academic setting. Published research suggests that females are more susceptible than males (Khumalo & Plattner, 2019).

**Role of Locus of Control in Educational Psychology**

Educational psychology is a specialized field focused on understanding learning processes, teaching methods, and assessments to enhance education. It explores diverse learning theories and examines cognitive development's impact on learning (Piaget, 1952). Motivation and engagement are crucial aspects, studying intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. Recognizing individual differences in students is essential as is effective assessment (Popham, 2018). Understanding social and emotional factors and integrating technology are modern considerations. Educational psychology also extends to adult education (Merriam & Bierema, 2013), aiming to optimize learning and performance.

The consideration of locus of control in educational psychology research holds immense significance. Locus of control, as a psychological construct, provides crucial insights into an individual's beliefs regarding their control over life events (Rotter, 1966). Understanding a student's locus of control orientation can shed light on their approach to learning, coping mechanisms, and overall academic performance (Perry & Penner, 1990). For instance, individuals with an internal locus of control tend to think that their actions have a direct impact on outcomes, encouraging them to approach their studies with initiative and self-motivation (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Conversely, individuals with an external locus of control may credit success or failure to external elements like luck or influential individuals, possibly resulting in a less active approach to academics (Siemens, 2005).By incorporating locus of control assessments in educational psychology research, educators and psychologists can tailor teaching strategies to align with students' control beliefs, fostering a more conducive and empowering learning environment (Zimmerman, 2000). This personalized approach has the potential to enhance student engagement, motivation, and academic success, underlining the critical role of locus of control in understanding and optimizing the educational experience.

**Conclusion**

The literature review indicates that a student's personality is a crucial factor in shaping their academic success, with accomplishments being a direct result of the student's performance and effort. The academic life of a student is the most deciding phase for their future and it certainly defines their mental health. When a student’s mental health is intact then they perform better and if not it results into poor performance henceforth declined achievements. Locus of control significantly influences performance and, consequently, mental well-being. Research indicates that female students often struggle to maintain good mental health due to their tendency towards an external locus of control. Educational psychology emerged as a critical field, profoundly shaping learning methodologies and performance outcomes. This review elucidated how integrating locus of control into educational psychology research can revolutionize pedagogical approaches, making them more tailored and effective. Understanding students' control beliefs allows educators to optimize strategies, fostering engagement, motivation, and ultimately, academic success.

**Limitations**

One limitation of this study is the predominant focus on academic performance, potentially overlooking the broader impact of locus of control in other life domains. The reliance on self-report measures in the reviewed studies could introduce response biases and limit the depth of understanding. Additionally, the concentration on specific age groups, particularly students, may restrict the generalizability of findings to a wider demographic.

**Implications**

Understanding students' locus of control can guide tailored teaching strategies, promoting proactive learning. Educational institutions should cultivate an empowering environment to enhance students' motivation and engagement. Policymakers should advocate for locus of control assessments in educational frameworks, encouraging a holistic approach to education that addresses academic success and mental well-being.

**Future Research Directions**

Future research should encompass a more diversified demographic and adopt mixed-method approaches. Exploring cultural influences on locus of control beliefs can provide valuable insights. Designing and evaluating interventions to enhance internal locus of control can have practical applications in improving academic performance and mental health.

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