



THE EFFECTS OF LOCUS OF CONTROL ON ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT AMONG
STUDENTS IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN RIVERS STATE:
THE CASE STUDY OF SCHOOLS IN OGOINI AREA

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ABSTRACT

This study assessed the effect of Locus of control on the academic achievement of senior secondary school students in year three (SS 3) across selected schools in Ogoni of Rivers State, Nigeria. A descriptive survey design was adopted to ascertain the effect of Locus of Control construct and its dichotomous variables – internal and external on achievement. Six hundred (600) final year students about writing their SSCE were drawn from about 2100 regular and consistent students in SS3 first term registers of 2011/2012 session across 43 public schools in the three Local Government Areas. Locus of Control, an independent variable formed the basis of grouping the students in the study to investigate its scale (I – E), consisting 29–item forced–choice questionnaire on the students’ performance of objective test of 20-items on English Language and mathematics, designed and validated as appropriate determinant of academic achievement test. Simple percentage was used on the performance test, while t-test statistical analysis was used on two postulated null hypotheses. The results revealed that the internally controlled male students performed higher than the externally controlled female students. The t-test statistical analysis equally revealed a significant difference in achievement at the 0.05 significant level between the internally controlled male students and female students, indicating that the internally controlled belief in hard work for success. That the males were more internally controlled than the females. Recommendations and implications of the results were also discussed. Provisions for further studies were created for replication.

Keywords: Education, Descriptive Survey, Locus of Control, Nigeria.

1. INTRODUCTION

Academic achievement is a term usually employed to mean an individual’s performance in subjects taught and tested in schools. It also refers to the level of education ultimately attained by an individual. This has always been the concern of educationists as well as potential researchers in educational psychology. According to Nenty (1986), achievement is a function of personal as well as environmental factors, an individual tends to naively attribute his/her behaviour of the level of performance more to one, than the other of these factors. Where there is an internal motivated factor towards an important desire, an individual’s level of performance usually increases. More so, when interest is lost in some desirable goals,

achievement is thwarted. It is because of this that educationists consider motivation as one of the important factors for any achievement vis a vis educational achievement.

To this end, attempts are being made and have also been experimentally made in many circumstances to determine what factors usually affect academic achievement at all levels of education. Some researchers have conducted several experiments to find out these causes and have attributed such factors to poor teaching, (Parent, Forward, Canter, Mohling, 1975 & David, 1982), socio-economic status of students, home location, sex differences (Fergusson & Harwood, 1997) and several others. Others have confirmed that lack of motivational factors as well as poor achievement needs, place some impediment on academic achievement. Many psychological research findings have also revealed that cultural background or ethnic difference might have been responsible for some ethnic groups excelling in academic achievement while others are found at the base of the graph of such achievement. These differences have created some concern in some modern scholars and have therefore kindled some interest in finding out why some part of this country are educationally advantaged while others remain disadvantaged.

Concerning academic achievement in schools globally, several factors such as socioeconomic background, parental care, school locations, students' attitudes, poor adequate educational facilities and infrastructures including motivation have been attributes of this achievement and the effect of locus of control has been considered by many researchers including Tella and Tella (2005), Anderson, Hattie & Hamilton (2005) as another serious factor which can affect academic achievement. This factor "Locus of Control" forms the crux of this study. It is a psychological construct which researchers have largely focused upon the investigation of the relationship between the perception of this factor "Locus of Control" and various behaviours, attitudes and or personality characteristics. Such studies, based on the concept of Locus of control, have been comprehensively reviewed by Lefcourt (1982; Rotter, 1966; Yates, 2009), who conducted research on Locus of Control and its relationship to occupational choice and level of aspiration. Muhammada (1981) also examined the relationship between scores on Rotter's (I-E) scale, age and measures of socio-economic background of some Nigerian adolescent boys to determine whether the three main Nigerian ethnic groups (Hausa, Ibo and Yoruba) differ from one another in their beliefs in personal control.

An individual's belief about locus of control has been frequently stated as an antecedent social behaviour. This is one set of behaviours that has received extensive studies that concern achievement-related activities (Maureen & Cooper, 1983). It is on this similar premise that this study is embarked upon in Ogoni to determine the effect of these variables – internal and external Locus of Control on the students' academic achievement.

The term "Locus of Control" refers to the perceived causality of behavioural outcomes. Rotter (1966) and Phares et al (1968, 1976) explained that it is a psychological construct. They emphasized that Locus of Control constitutes two component parts. At one, "Internal" and the other, "External" and these exert an influence or control which points to differences in social perception of the individual with "Internal" depending more heavily on inner resources as compared to external who tends to conform to social pressures. It is generally the belief of all individuals regarding the causes of his or her experiences and the factors to which that person attributes success or failure (Njus and Brockway, 1999).

Fanelli (1970) explained that this concept has two extremes. At one extreme (internal), the individual thinks of himself as being responsible for his own behaviour. At the other extreme (external), the individual sees others or luck or circumstances beyond his control as responsible for his behaviour. However, Rotter (1966) who first examined and published the concept of Locus of Control, defined it as follows:

When a reinforcement is perceived as not being entirely contingent upon his action, then, in our culture, it is typically perceived as the

result of luck, chance, fate as under the control of powerful others or as unpredictable because of the great complexity of the forces surrounding him. When the event is interpreted in this way by an individual, we have labeled this a belief in external. If the person perceives that the event is contingent upon his own behaviour or his own relatively permanent characteristics, we have terms this “A belief in internal control”

Locus of Control thus refers to the belief that a response will, or will not, influence the attainment of a reinforcement. Therefore, in life and in any academic attainment, Locus of Control is conceived as one determinant of the expectancy of success. However, one would understand that this concept as explained by Rotter is not an expectancy concerning a particular type of reinforcement, rather, it is considered a “problem-solving” generalized expectancy (Rotter, 1975). This addresses the issue of whether behaviours are perceived as instrumental or goal attainment, regardless of the specific nature of the goal or reinforcer. It would be observed that perceived Locus of control is believed to influence the specific goal expectancy in any given situation, with the extent of the influence in part, dependent upon the setting in that situation as well as the degree of reinforcement that individual has directly experienced in that setting. It is thought to be a relatively enduring dispositional characteristic, although certainly modifiable through experience (Findley & Cooper, 1983).

Locus of Control is a psychological variable, which refers to the extent to which a person feels he has control over his own destiny. The feeling of control here can be conceived to be spread out along a continuum. At one end of the continuum, the internal control connotes the attitude that one can manipulate his environment for reinforcement. This is based more on one’s potential effort or skill. That is, if the person has the influence of internal control, he believes that all that can come to him will depend on his personal effort and struggle. Such individual sees himself as instrumental in outcomes of events.

On the other end of the continuum, the external control consists of a self attitude characterized by the feeling that all that happen to the individual is the consequence of chance, luck, fate and several others, all of which are forces and events beyond the individual control. Beliefs in this category had frustrated many individuals in life today. Many have left to strive hard and live a comfortable life, and had attributed their ineffectiveness in attaining their desired goal to things unknown. However, based on the word “Locus“ which is a derived Latin word “Locum”, meaning “place” is in relation to things that happened to man which are believed to have been caused by some forces. This force of control is common in many cultures with things that happen to an individual at a particular place or situation. The individual may see the control of this happening to reside within himself which is internal or outside himself which is external.

Depending on the person’s experience in his environment, the internal person can see himself as being master of his effort and acting as an “origin”. Thus, such individual is capable of understanding his environment and can make possible adjustment and control his successes and failures. He cannot give up when sickness and trouble knock at his door. Again, the internal Locus of control is explained as the belief that outcomes of events are contingents upon one’s own behaviour, whereas external Locus of Control is the generalized expectancy that outcomes are determined by chance, luck or fate or powerful others. Since the concept of locus of control indicates the degree which individual perceive that they have control over their environment, it is logical to expect that the externally oriented person will differ in behaviour and achievement from the internally oriented person in several respects (Findley & Cooper, 1983). It is more so, asserted that the internally controlled person blames himself for his failure and accepts praise as deserve for his triumphs. Students in different situations, based on this concept, perceive differently as a result of their control. A disciplined and self-oriented student sees failure as his

own inadequate preparation and efforts. Such student blames himself for not putting in more efforts to succeed.

The externally controlled person will not think his successes and failures are caused by himself. He does not blame himself for his errors. Similar circumstances in school give the student a condition to curse and blame his teacher for his failure. Occasionally, students are heard saying; "I blame my star for the failure or poor performance on that test" whom did I meet that brought such bad luck to me in this test." Such student tends to shift his failure to an unknown source. But the internally controlled students would always say "I blame myself for the poor performance on the test", or "I did not prepare well enough for this test". It is observed from the above statements that in both cases, the students are affected by their internal and external influences of Locus of control. Consequently, the internal student is bound to change or improve since he attributes his poor performance to his effort and not luck or powerful others – beyond his control, whereas, the externally controlled student is bound to deteriorate and may not change to improve since he attributes failure or poor performance to luck or forces unknown and may not be able to control it and to effect a change. This problem abounds in many fields of human endeavour and not only in academic achievement.

From the above explanation of Locus of control and its meaning, it would be believed that many people are found on either side of the continuum and many cultures of the world experience different beliefs, socially and spiritually. These beliefs differ from individual to individual and from culture to culture.

Ogoni area of the Rivers State of Nigeria comprises four Local Government Areas – Khana, Gokhana, Tai and Eleme Local Government Areas. The people's main occupation is farming, including fishing and some petty trading. Its geographical location includes both land and water which constitutes dual occupational opportunities – farming and fishing. Education, as the pillar of civilization came into Ogoni as far back as about the late 20s when schools were opened by the early missionaries in the area.

Western religion came with the opening of more schools up to the early 50s. Because of ignorance and total involvement in traditional religion and its rites, including cultural beliefs, the people did not embrace this opportunity early. Very few people under serious conviction accepted the white man's religion and school. Many were not prepared to follow this new and foreign religion especially when the fear of being enslaved occupied their minds. These problems were common in many cultures and many traditionalists were indignant of it. This slow acceptance of education continues in the area for a long time even till date. It is therefore believed that some who had the chance of being educated as early as this time were frustrated because of one problem or the other connecting these beliefs. Some individuals, families and villages in this area are backward in most achievements including education because of the fear of being harmed by others and had left anything progress in the hand of the unknown.

To set up a decent house or aspire higher usually attracted fear of the unknown. People here do not freely do things of progress as the motivation to do this is killed by fear. One is motivationally aroused as his freedom is guaranteed. This motivational arousal called psychological reactance moves an individual with interest to work towards his set goal. With strong belief in the internal locus of control many persons who have attained their educational goal today have been able to eliminate what held their freedom which is fear of the unknown.

Every situation requires some serious work to achieve the set goal of that situation. Where there is no hard work failure is bound to occur. It is on this assertion that the researcher has examined the beliefs existing among the people, especially students of this ethnic group – Ogoni, to find out whether attribution of causality to forces unknown or luck or chance and fate are responsible for their poor academic achievement. Whether the effect of Locus of control has any part to play in personal achievement.

1.1 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Many factors have been discovered to have affected learning and performance in institutions including the effect of locus of control on academic achievement. It is therefore the need of this study to examine the concept of internal and the external locus of control; and how these concepts can affect academic achievement among Ogoni students in some selected secondary schools in Ogoni.

From what Rotter (1966) explained about these concept – internal and external locus of control – it appears that most of those beliefs exist in Ogoni Community based on their traditional affiliation and unbending cultures even up to this twenty-first century, many people believe that they can only succeed in life when they are helped by some external forces. There are some who would not like to engage in any work by their own effort but would like to surrender their hope and success to their gods. Some believe that one's success is based on his fate or destiny. That failure depends on forces as well as enemies within the environment. Some also attribute frustration to the handiwork of the evil ones who are militating against their progress. To the students, some believe that when they fail an examination, their teachers might be responsible because of hatred. The female students sometimes attribute any failure to a deliberate attempt by their teachers or people who are witch-hunting their progress. It was because of this problem that this study was organized to examine whether Locus of Control can be attributed to these poor achievement in academic among students in the area.

1.2 HYPOTHESES

The following null hypotheses were postulated and tested.

- H₀₁: There is no significant difference in academic achievement between the internally and externally controlled students.
- H₀₂: There is no significant difference between the male and female students in their locus of control.

2. METHODOLOGY

The research design that was adopted in this study was the descriptive survey design. This was based on the fact that the study looked at the effect of locus of control and the relationship between the internal and external variables involved.

2.1 SAMPLE AND SAMPLING TECHNIQUE

The target population for this study consisted of all the male and female students of Ogoni origin in all the schools in three of the four local government areas except Eleme. Stratified random sampling technique was used to select a sample of 600 students from about 2100 consistent students in SS3 first term registers of 2011/2012 session drawn from 43 public schools (Khana 21, Gokhana 12 and Tai 10). The sample was drawn according to the size of the schools in each local government using the table of random numbers. The instrument used for this study was a twenty-item tests on English Language and mathematics respectively to assess the academic achievement of the students. The reliability was derived from the pre-trial questions of similar pattern administered to an equivalent group using the split-half method with a result of $r = 0.70$ reliability coefficient. The validity was based on the content of the test on the cognitive domain. Locus of control scale consisting of internal and external variables as designed by Julian Rotter (1966) was adopted. This scale consists of 29-items forced choice questionnaire with six filler questions and 23 questions on internal and external belief

statements. The positive statements were scored without the fillers to determine the externally and internally controlled groups. A pilot study was conducted on the scale to its reliability and standardization without using the one done outside Nigeria with different environments and school conditions. The reliability coefficient was $r=0.68$ using Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient. The validity was also ascertained by some psychometricians in some universities within and outside Rivers State. Their comments on the validity was satisfactory. Two null hypotheses were postulated and were tested using the t-test statistical analysis.

2.2 PROCEDURE FOR DATA COLLECTION AND DATA ANALYSIS

Two instruments were administered on the 600 students in senior secondary three (SS3) selected as sample for the study in the different schools by the researcher with the assistance of the class teachers. The students were categorized first by administering the Rotter (1966) (1-E) scale of the Internal and External categories of Locus of Control.

Table 1: Administration of Locus of Control Scale to Categorize Students into Internal and External Levels.

Sex	Internal	External	Total
Male	154	146	300
Female	130	170	300
Total	284	316	600

Table 1 above shows the number of students in each category according to sex and their responses on the 29-items scale of locus of control except the fillers. The male response shows that 154 and 146 students were internally and externally controlled, giving a total of 300 students out of the 600 sampled students. Similarly, the female response on the scale shows that 130 and 170 were internally and externally controlled with a total of 300 female students of the sample.

To determine the academic achievement of the students used in SS3 for the study, twenty (20) objective questions in Mathematics and English Language, designed by the researcher, was ensured that its validity and reliability were of adequate standard using test-retest method of reliability to obtain a coefficient of $r = 0.78$. The scores from both tests – Mathematics and English Language were combined and the mean and standard deviation scores were ascertained. Table two below shows the sex, locus of control and score grades of the performance.

This analysis indicates the general performance on the two test scores combined, based on the locus of control (1-E), male and female with the representative percentage of each score. It is therefore, observed that 45 and 36 of the internally controlled males scored A and B grades as against 30 and 22 internally controlled females. A total of 133 (22.17%) of both the male and female students of the internally and externally controlled fall within the B grades as only 128 (21.3%) students fall in the A grade. A total of 130 (21.7%) of the two categories have pass grade, while 83 (13.8%) of the both categories failed.

Table 3 shows that the internally controlled students, based on their locus of control belief, seem to base their achievement in life on the effort they put in whatever they do. This is so because of the mean score of 20.84 against that of the externally controlled with a mean score of 19.24. The result of the t-test analysis reveals that the calculated t-value is 4.52 which is higher than the critical t-value of 1.96 at 0.05 level of significance and 598 degree of freedom. Therefore, since the t-value is greater than the t-critical value, the null hypotheses which says there is no significant difference is rejected and the alternative accepted as there is

significant difference between the internally and externally controlled students in their academic achievement.

Table 2: Performance of 600 Selected SS 3 Students on Mathematics and English Language Test.

Sex	Locus of Control	Score Grades					
		A 70 – 100	B 60-69	C 50-59	D 40-49	F 0-39	Total
Male	Internal	45 (7.5%)	36 (6.0%)	23 (3.8%)	28 (4.7%)	22 (3.7%)	154 (25.7%)
	External	33 (5.5%)	40 (6.7%)	30 (5.0%)	27 (4.5%)	16 (2.7%)	146 (24.3%)
Female	Internal	30 (5.0%)	22 (3.7%)	33 (5.5%)	25 (4.16%)	20 (3.3%)	130 (21.7%)
	External	20 (3.3%)	35 (5.8%)	40 (6.7%)	50 (8.3%)	25 (4.16%)	170 (28.3%)
Total		128 (12.3%)	133 (22.17%)	126 (21.0%)	130 (21.7%)	83 (13.8%)	600 (100%)

H₀₁: There is no significant difference in academic achievement between the internally and externally controlled students of Ogoni origin in Secondary Schools in Khana, Gokhana and Tai Local Government Areas of Rivers State.

Table 3: t-test Statistical Analysis of Students’ Academic Achievement based on their Locus of Control (I – E)

Variable	Locus of Control	Sample Size (N)	\bar{X}	SD	t-cal.	Df	Critical t-value	Level of Significance
Academic Achievement	Internal	284	20.84	4.45	4.52	598	1.96	0.05
	External	316	19.24	4.25				

H₀₂: There is no significant difference between the male and female students of Ogoni origin in Secondary Schools in Khana, Gokhana and Tai Local Government Areas of Rivers State based on their Locus of Control.

Table 4 shows that the mean differences between the male and female student 12.09 and 11.39 implies a difference. Although, the research was not basically on which sex beliefs in either construct, but these personality constructs pose a difference between the two sexes, indicating that both do not believe that the reactions and interactions from the environment can make them either behave the way they do based on the dominant nature of progress in their achievement. To this, the null hypotheses of differences is rejected and the alternative accepted as there is significant difference in the t-calculated 3.90 greater than the t-critical of 1.96 at 0.05 significant level with 598 degree of freedom.

Table 4: t-test Statistical Analysis of the Male and Female Students and their Locus of Control.

Sex	Locus of Control	Sample Size (N)	\bar{X}	SD	Df	t-cal.	Critical t-value
Male	Internal	300	12.09	2.45		3.9	1.96
	External						
Female	Internal	300	11.38	1.99			
	External						

3. DISCUSSION

This study started with the grouping of the students into two categories using the (I-E) scale by Rotter (1966). The result of this grouping showed that 154 and 146 male students were internally and externally controlled respectively, while 130 and 170 female students were internally and externally controlled respectively. The result of the effect of locus of control on academic achievement among the internally and externally controlled students revealed that, a total of 128 (21.2%) of both the male and female students of the two categories (I-E) show a high achievement with A grade in their academic performance, while a total of 133 (22.17%) students as shown in table 2 shows another high performance with a B grade. From the result on table 2, it is equally observed that 154 (25.7%) internally controlled male students, 45 and 36 of them performed higher with A & B grades as against 146 (24.3%) externally controlled male students. Similarly, 170 (28.3%) externally controlled female students 20.35 performed higher with A & B grade as against 130 (21.7%) internally controlled students.

This result is similar to Rana, Muoammer & Teynap (2011) as they found out that students generally have internal locus of control which makes them work harder. Also, Basin and Sesen (2006) who confirmed that students have internal locus of control which makes them have more tendencies to help and perform high achievement and courteous attitudes when compared with those with external locus of control. Again, it is observed from the performance that, though, difference occurs, some were high internally and externally. This is supported by Anderson, Hattie & Hamilton (2005) as he opined that locus of control is a multidimensional construct – people can be high on both internality and externality. On classroom learning, Mobolaji (1987) said children who were internal learn better than the external students.

On the other hand, Kufanis (2010) & Sargut (2001) confirmed that individuals with external locus of control relate success or failure to the factors not related to them and attribute success to backing and base failure upon environmental factors. From the results on table 2 above, it can be concluded among other reasons that the internally controlled students have sound academic potentiality and stable achievement than the externally controlled students.

To determine what effects locus of control have on students academic achievement, two null hypotheses were postulated. These hypotheses were duly rejected indicating that in hypothesis 1, the internally controlled students are significantly different from the externally controlled in their academic achievement with the t-calculated 4.52 greater than the t-critical of 1.96 at 0.05 level of significance. Again, it is observed that the mean score of the internally controlled is higher 20.84 against 19.24. This result agrees with similar findings by Bartal and Ba-zohar (1977), Nenty (1986), Yates (2009) as they confirmed the difference in achievement between the internally and externally controlled groups.

Nenty (1986) confirmed that the externally controlled students attribute their performance to link or task difficulty hence, the externally performed significantly less than the internal. That those who are internally controlled have the ability and capability to understand things with ease and have self-confidence in whatever they do. The externally controlled attribute their experiences to fate, chance or luck. They attribute their failure to having bad luck or a bad day or unfair grading procedures on the part of their teachers or could ever say no-matter how hard one works or study, failure will come. Since they attribute both their success and failure to luck or chance, they lack determination.

Bar-Tal & Bar-Zoha (1977) confirmed that “the perception of Locus of Control is related to academic achievement. That the more internal the individual’s orientation, the higher the individual achievement. Furthermore, the result on table two as assessed according to their performance out of 300 SS3 female students dichotomously drawn, 170 out of 300 showed that they believed in the external locus of control as against 130 internally controlled. The testing of the hypothesis 2 on table 4 shows a mean difference of 12.00 of the male as against 11.38 of the

female. The statistical analysis of the t-test on the male and female students and their locus of control indicated that there is significant difference between the two sexes as the t-calculated is 3.90 against the t-critical of 1.96 at 0.05 level of significance at 598 degree of freedom. This implies that the no significant difference by the null hypothesis is rejected and the alternative hypothesis of existing significance is accepted.

This result is in agreement with other findings on similar issue. Fenelli (1972) in his study on internal and external influence on gender revealed that the male students are more internally influenced than the female students. That the female were more externally and were not ready in any circumstance to accept responsibilities whereas the males do. Zoe (1981) also confirmed that the male students were more internally oriented than the females. According to Stipex and Weisz (1981) the relationship between locus of control and achievement is stronger for boys than girls.

4. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of this study, locus of control (internal and external) affect every human being in one form or the other. That is, people believe that events, success or failure, are caused by either luck, chance, hard work or any unknown powers. Most findings including this study attribute locus of control as a factor which affects academic achievement of students. The study reveals that significant difference exist between the internally and externally controlled students. That the internally controlled has more determined advantage over the externally controlled in the performance test of achievement administered. In the difference between the male and female students, the male is found to be more internally oriented than the females who are found to be more externally controlled as indicated by the t-test analysis and Rotter's scale, therefore showing an existing significant difference between the two sexes on their locus of control.

Man is a social animal with some distinctive and unique characteristics. This confirms the fact that man is the centre of Locus of control. Since locus of control relates both to uncertainty and reality of life, the findings of this study collaborate the fact that locus of control can significantly affect academic achievement. To this end, therefore, the externally controlled individuals with their belief in fate, chance, luck and powerful others, should be redirected in the following ways through counselling.

- Elevate the impact of socioeconomic and educational standard of such individuals. The rigidity of these beliefs including religious dogma which tend to usurp individual autonomy should be relaxed.
- Those who are slothful and not industrious should be engaged in challenging tasks and emphases should be laid on hard work for success to enhance their determination, instead of conserving the idea of luck, fate or powerful others to success.
- Parents should encourage self-reliance, self-confidence and independence in their children and should accept them whenever they make mistake so as to foster in them an internal belief such that they can control their own affairs.
- Cultural views of causality, attributing events to fate, gods, taboo on the power of the unknown, should be discouraged and their orientation should be changed through teaching, evaluation and counselling.

5. IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY

The results of this study have important implication for determination and personal effort in any desired expectation. The belief in one's effort and determination contribute greatly

to success. The effect of Locus of Control as a personality trait needs to be understood as a determinant variable in man potential and independent endeavour. Whenever an individual lives a dependent life on external forces, there is bound to be failure as expectations may be dwindled and frustrating. This study therefore implies that it is encouraging to belief in internal locus of control and directs one's energy and efforts at challenging, environmental circumstances to create good environment that could foster achievement oriented goals.

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