

## University of Nairobi Students Gender Differences in Locus of Control

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### Abstract

In a recent definition, “Locus of control is an individual’s belief system regarding the causes of his/her experiences and factors to which the person attributes success or failure”. As a person with internal locus attributes his/her success to his/her own effort and ability. Whereas a person with external locus of control is of the view that success or failure is due to good luck or fate. The aim of this study was to explore the University of Nairobi Students Performance in the Context of Locus of Control. The sample size comprised 127 females and 97 males, giving a total of 224 university students. Their age ranged from 20 to 55 years. A questionnaire comprising 25 pairs of statements was used. Based on Rotter’s Locus of Control Scale and performance in Psychology academic performance a chi-square statistical analysis was employed. Calculation of:  $\chi^2$  test [2df, N224]= 0.61, which was short of reaching level of significance.; thus confirming that, there was no mean significant difference between male and female participants on their academic performance based on their locus of control. In conclusion, In general, locus of control is closely related to achievement and success in life. Moreover, people who feel in control of a situation may experience a sense of empowerment. Furthermore, individuals with a high sense of mastery in academic work believe that they can control most aspects of their lives. On the other hand, those who are unable to gain mastery in academic performance or to exert influence over their circumstances may feel a sense of helplessness.

**Keywords:** Rotter, locus of control, internal, external, control, fate students, university, Kenya, Africa

### Introduction

By locus of control in Social Psychology is meant the source of control in one’s given in every person’s pattern of behaviour falling into external and internal (Reber, 1985; Rotter, 1966). With external control locus, a person who attributes the control locus of behaviour, as originating from outside self. In other words, one’s failure or success is controlled by outside forces and therefore, there is not much that can be done to exercise control of such behaviour. In contrast, a person who has internal locus of control holds the view that she or he is responsible for his/her behaviour, as it does not occur on the basis of luck or chance (Joeison, 2017; Kendra, 2017).

In a recent definition, Joeison (2017) expresses as follows: “Locus of control is an individual’s belief system regarding the causes of his/her experiences and factors to which the person attributes success or failure”. As a person with internal locus attributes his/her success to his/her own effort and ability. Such a person is more motivated and likely to successfully acquire new knowledge. Whereas a person with external locus of control is of the view that success or failure is due to good luck or fate. As such, the person is less motivated to learn or engage in a given set of behaviour. According to Kendra (2017):

**Locus of control refers to the extent to which people feel that they have Control over the events that influence their lives. When you are dealing with a challenge in your life, do you feel that you have control over the outcome? Ordo you believe that you are simply at the hands of outside forces? If you believe that you have control over what happens, then you have what Psychologists refer to as internal locus of control. If you believe that you have**

**No control over what happened and that external variables are to blame, then  
You have what is known as an external control.**

Moreover, Kendra (2017) characterises both personalities as follows:

**Internal Locus of Control**

- 1 They take responsibility for their actions.
- 2 They are less influenced by others views/opinions
- 3 They do better in engaging in tasks done at their pace.
- 4 They command strong sense of self-efficiency.
- 5 They work hard to achieve what they want.
- 6 When faced with challenge, they are confident.
- 7 They are happier and more independent.
- 8 In their work place, they are more successful.
- 9 They are physically more healthy.

**External Locus of Control**

- 1 Blame outside forces for their circumstance.
- 2 In success, they attribute it outside forces.
- 3 Often they are helpless or powerless, when they encounter problems.
- 4 They do not believe they can change their situation by use of their own effort.

Extensive research studies have been carried out to determine whether there are gender differences in in locus of control. Indeed numerous studies have rendered support to gender differences in locus control, as this will be demonstrated in the investigations that follow. Similarly, the present investigation aims at assessing gender differences among University of Nairobi students' locus of control. Starting with Akhtar and Saxena (2014), who aimed at exploring gender differences in locus control of adolescents from favourable and unfavourable home environment. The sample consisted of 600 students (300 girls and 300 boys) whose age ranged from 14-18 years. These were administered Locus of Control Scale.

The results observed showed that there were statistically significant gender differences with boys falling under internal locus of control compared to girls who were under external locus of control. Such results held true under both home favourable environment and unfavourable home background. Similarly, Choudhury and Borooah (2017) examined a relationship between locus of control and academic achievement of female and male students in India. The study was motivated by review of literature, which indicated that there is a relationship between academic performance and internal locus of control. The sample comprised 240 participants drawn from males and females in Arts and Science in equal proportions of 60 each. Rotter's Indian-based locus of control was used for measuring the locus of control. The overall results did not reflect a statistically significant differences on the basis of gender or the nature of studies pursued.

In the effects of locus of control on academic performance of students on tertiary level, Abid, Kanwal, Nasir, Iqbal and Noorul-Huda (2016) sought out to assess the bearing of locus of control has on students' learning on performance. The measuring instrument comprised Rotter's Locus of Control Questionnaire and Learning Scale developed by Gunpor. The sample comprised 100 participants (50 females and 50 males) randomly selected from a population of 1,500 students. Descriptive statistics and multiple regression were used for analysis of data. The results observed were that students with internal locus of control were high, more proactive and effective during the learning process. Those with external locus of control were passive and reactive during the learning process.

Moreover, females' scores were correlated with external locus of control; whereas those of males were internal locus of control. In addition, those of males were associated with corresponding with scores on learning scale. In India, Kumar and Asha (2017) aimed at confirming a relationship between locus of control and academic performance of senior secondary school students of Haryana. By a stratified sample of 404 participants were selected. For

academic achievement, final examinations of Grade 10 were used. The results reflected by the use of Pearson Product Moment Correlation, which emerged to be statistically significant between locus of control and academic achievement for both male and female participants. There was also a significant correlation between internal locus of control and academic achievement. However, there was no such correlation between external locus of control and academic performance.

In Egypt El-Hosamy and Sleen (2017) aimed at exploring a relationship between locus of control and learning performance of university Nursing students. Participants were selected from two institution 222 plus 186 respectively; thus making a sum of 408 subjects. Two measuring instruments were used for the collection of data, namely locus of control scale and learning performance scale perceived academic support scale.

The results observed were as follows: More than half of the students had an internal locus of control. Similarly, participants had high learning performance as well as high perceived academic support. However, there was no correlation between locus of control and other variables – learning performance or perceived academic support. Kader (2014) investigated locus of control, students' motivation and achievement in Principles of Microeconomics at University level. Both a Rotter's locus of Control Questionnaire and others were administered to 48 participants at an American University. Participants were divided into two groups, namely internal and external based on their performance. The results were as follows: internals achieved better in their performance; experienced less anxiety in test writing, scored higher on a master approach; spent more hours working; tended to be more Whites in ethnicity than externals. Hassan and Khalid (2014) made a study of academic locus control of high and low achieving students at undergraduate level. One of the major focus was to identify gender differences among participants. The sample comprised a sum of 187 students (126 high and 61 low achieving BSc final year students).

The results showed significant main effect of achiever and gender. High achieving students scored low on academic locus control compared to their counterparts the external locus control, whose scores were rather high. Women scored better on internal locus of control than did the men. It was clearly shown that locus of control was a good predictor of students' GPA.

At High School level, Vandja and Geetha (2017) assessed locus control and self-confidence from a cross-cultural perspective. It was further intended to examine a relationship between psychological variables with academic achievement and with each other in addition to exploring gender differences, as an independent variable. The sample comprised 300 participants with the results showing no significant differences in students' locus of control and self-confidence. There was further no significant difference in terms of either gender or the School attended. With the purpose of determining gender differences in locus of control on the basis of internal and external individuals as regards the use of alcohol; Both McPherson and Martin (2016) undertook the investigation. The sample was 180 participants (47 males and 53 females) who were sent questionnaires on Multidimensional National Health Locus of Control Form C. For data analysis, independent t-tests were used to assess gender differences in alcohol dependence severity and internal and external aspects of locus of control.

The results observed were that, the females were more internal in their locus of control than their counterparts. While this was so, the gender difference and alcohol dependence fell short of being statistically significant.

In Mexico, Garcia, Delgado, Llanes, Fernandez and Pando (2017) undertook an investigation to compare the profiles of locus of control among University students. The total sample was 1537 (820 females and 717 males) with a mean age of 20.38 (SD=1.8) and 20.78 yrs (SD=1.94) respectively. Multivariate and univariate analysis of variance were used for the analysis of data; on variables such as: luck, political power, destiny and interpersonal relationships and locus of control. The results were as follows: MANOVA results showed global differences statistically significant, according to the gender variable in self-concept scores. Thereafter, the use of ANOVA showed that male students had higher scores in internal locus of control than the female participants in luck and lower in destiny and in interpersonal relationships. It was further noted that in the scale of political power, there was no significant gender differences. Moreover, women showed higher level of scores in external locus of control in destiny and interpersonal relationship. Men were observed to have higher scores of external locus of control in luck. Both aspects have been confirmed by similar research investigation (Garcia et al. 2017).

### Method

Participants in this study were randomly drawn from two undergraduate classes of second year students in the Department of Psychology, University of Nairobi. One class of students attended their lessons during the day while the others took their lessons in the evening. Each of the classes had approximately 150 students.

### Sample

The sample size comprised 127 females and 97 males, giving a total of 224 university students. Their age ranged from 20 to 55 years. The participants were all taking psychology as a major subject.

### Test Instrument

A questionnaire comprising 25 pairs of statements was used. Each statement had two options for participants to respond to as normally provided for in the Rotter's Locus of Control Scale. Participants were asked to circle whichever option they agreed with the most. They were also asked to indicate their age, gender and year of study at the university. Twenty minutes were allocated for the completion of the questionnaire, following which it was collected and counted for accuracy in the analysis.

### Procedure

Two research assistants knowledgeable in the discipline of Psychology administered the Rotter's Locus of Control Scale to the participants. This was preceded by a briefing to the students by the principal researcher, on what the questionnaire/scale was all about and that responding to it was voluntary. No potential participants refrained from responding to the questionnaire.

### Analysis of data

Based on Rotter's Locus of Control Scale and performance in Psychology academic performance a chi-square statistical analysis was employed as displayed in Table 1. Calculation of:  $\chi^2$  test [2df, N224]= 0.61, which was short of reaching level of significance.; thus confirming that, there was no mean significant difference between male and female participants on their academic performance based on their locus of control.

### University of Nairobi Students Gender Differences in Locus of Control

Category	Scores	X <sup>2</sup>	P
Males	E69 I32 182		0.001
Females	E93		

### Discussion

The current study was motivated by the need to establish whether gender differences in locus of control are related to academic performance among University of Nairobi students. Similar studies have reported that locus of control is closely related to achievement or success in life. Some of the reviewed studies indicated gender differences in locus of control and in relation to academic performance but made distinctions as to whether the focus was on internal or external locus of control.

Khan and Iqbal (2014) sought to determine the presence of gender differences in locus of control and academic performance among science students at the secondary school level. The sample of 270 boys and girls responded to a questionnaire on internal and external locus of control. The findings showed that boys were more internally oriented than the girls. Furthermore, the boys performed academically better than the girls.

Kader (2014) administered the Rotter's locus of control Questionnaire among 48 American University Students to examine their motivation and achievement in Microeconomics. The results indicated that participants who were internally driven achieved better in their performance and scored higher in other academic areas than those who were externally oriented.

In a similar study, Callagan and Papageogiou (2015) tested the prediction of gender differences in locus of control and examined the relationship between locus of control and university students' performance in Accountancy. The results showed that female students were significant in their performance in locus of control and academic performance. It was also observed that female students dominated in Accountancy, higher education as well as in the context of employment in this field.

A study by Choudhury and Borooah (2017) examined the relationship between locus of control and academic achievement among female and male students in India. Using a sample of 240 participants drawn from males and females in Arts and Sciences and a Rotter's Indian-based locus of control as the measuring instrument, the results did not show significant gender differences or differences in the nature of pursued studies.

Kumar and Asha (2017) explored the relationship between locus of control and academic performance of senior secondary school students in India. From a sample of 404 participants and using final examinations of Grade 10 for academic achievement, the results emerged to be significant between locus of control and academic achievement for both males and females. A significant correlation between internal locus of control and academic achievement was also observed. But there was no such correlation between external locus of control and academic performance. This appears to stress the predictability of internal locus of control in relation to academic performance.

In the current study and based on the Rotter's Locus of Control Questionnaire, it was observed that both internal and external locus of control participants emerged but in uneven proportions. The employed chi square analysis was found to be statistically significant. On specific examination, internally-oriented participants exceeded those who were externally-oriented. Since locus of control is the extent to which people perceive outcomes as internally controllable by their own efforts and actions or as externally controlled by chance or outside forces, we might assume that participants in this study may have perceived that their academic performance was the result of their own efforts and actions.

### Conclusion

The objective of the present investigation was to find out whether gender differences existed among University of Nairobi students in their locus of control. The results indicated that internally-driven participants, most of whom were females, exceeded externally-oriented male participants. As indicated by the reviewed studies, the implication of this finding is that those with internal locus of control are better at tackling a wide range of challenges such as university examinations compared to those with an external locus of control.

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