

Locus of Control as a Predictor of Students' Academic Achievement in Public Secondary Schools in Anambra State

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Abstract

The study sought to examine locus of control as a predictor of students' academic achievement in public secondary schools in Anambra State. The study was guided by two research questions. Correlational research design was used for the study. Taro Yamane Formula was used to select a sample size of 400 students from a population of 20,922 senior secondary two students in Anambra State public secondary schools. Locus of Control Behaviour Scale (LCBS) was used for data collection. The internal consistency of the instrument yielded coefficient alpha 0.74. The instrument was administered through direct delivery approach. Research questions were answered using simple linear regression. Findings of the study revealed among others that internal and external locus of control positively and significantly predict the academic achievement of students in English language and Mathematics. Based on the findings, the study recommended that teachers should encourage students to work hard in order to achieve success and disabuse them of the notion that fate, chance, luck or powerful others are the predictors of their scholastic accomplishment.

Keywords: locus of control, academic achievement, public secondary schools

Introduction

Academic achievement is a vital aspect of attending educational institutions. It serves as a measure of success and progress in acquiring knowledge, skills, and competencies necessary to obtain educational certificates. It acts as a yardstick to evaluate the extent to which students

have met the learning objectives and requirements of their educational programme. As Mary (2021) stated, academic achievement is an essential factor that determines a student's social life, status and future career. Scholars agree that academic achievement of students is a net result of their cognitive and non-cognitive attributes, including the socio-cultural context in which the learning process takes place (Arief, 2019; Zheng & Mustapha, 2022). Academic achievement is a key feature in education which is considered to be the centre around which the whole education system twirls (Anthony, 2018). The scholar further opined that students' academic achievement determines the success or failure of any academic institution. In common terminology, academic achievement is referred to as an individual's performance in subjects taught and assessed within educational institutions. For the purpose of this study, academic achievement is described as the degree to which a student or an educational institution has attained educational objectives, typically measured through the students' grade point average.

Academic achievement has ignited a wave of concern from scholars who observed a sharp drop in the WAEC results of students across the nation (Galindo et al, 2022). It is indisputable to note that the results of Nigerian students in most external examinations in recent time are usually sub-optimal. Reports of students' performance in West African Examination Council (WAEC) and National Examination Commission (NECO) examinations within the last one decade have indicated a downward trend; this is evident in mass failure recorded in the two core subjects, English Language and Mathematics, which form the foundation for good academic achievement in tertiary institutions (Iyabo, 2018). According to recent statistics, 65 percent of private candidates who sat for the second series of 2019 West African Senior School Certificate Examination failed to score five credits in English Language and Mathematics (WASSCE 2019 result released/guardian.ng). According to the report of the council's chief examiner, only 33,304 candidates, representing 35.10%, obtained credits and above in five subjects including English Language and Mathematics out of the entire 94,884 candidates that sat for the examinations in the second series of 2019 November/December West African Senior School Certificate Examination (WASSCE). This is quite unimpressive.

In addition, it is regrettable to note that in the bid to ensure students' academic achievement, some education stakeholders such as parents, teachers, and school management, among others, introduce or support unprincipled practices. Hence, the ugly phenomena of examination malpractice and miracle centres have become regular features of WAEC and NECO examinations across the nation. Leadership Newspaper (2023)

reported that certificates obtained from writing Senior Secondary Certificate Examinations (SSCEs) are priority documents in Nigeria and the pressure to obtain these certificates have given rise to endemic examination malpractice. Now, instead of students to work hard to achieve success, some resort to externalities such as absconding from their schools and travelling to remote villages to register as external candidates and bribing examination officials in order to excel academically. This has resulted in the emergence of rogue schools, popularly known as miracle examination centres (MECs), which are positioned to make profit by 'helping' candidates to cheat. This trend has persisted, and even until 2022, after the West Africa Examination Council (WAEC) results were released, Premium Newspaper (2022) reported that the results of 365,564 candidates, which accounted for 22.83 percent of the total number of candidates who took the examination, were withheld due to various cases of examination malpractice. It is believed that all these are occasioned by students' intent to attain academic accomplishment. Leadership Newspaper (2023) reported that the prevalence of examination malpractice and mass failure in examinations is negatively affecting the quality of education in the country. This is as a result of students' inability to take responsibility for a successful learning outcome through hard work, instead of through dependence on external factors, as a means of achieving success.

As a matter of fact, academic achievement is a construct that is associated with socio-psychological variables which include locus of control, self-concept, interest in schooling, study-habits, and so on. Based on the foregoing, the current study investigated locus of control as a predictor of academic achievement of students.

Locus of control, simply put, is an individual's perception regarding the outcome of events in their life. American Psychological Association (2022) stated that locus of control is a construct that is used to classify individuals' underlying motivational orientations and perceptions of how much control they have over the circumstances of their lives. Locus of control refers to internal or external responsibility over reinforcement emanating from operating response upon the environment (Sagone & De-Caroli, 2014). It is the development of a generalised expectancy within a person as to how he or she receives reinforcement. Locus of control is a psychological concept that refers to how individuals strongly believe that they have control over the circumstances and experiences that affect their lives (Churchhill et al, 2020). In education, locus of control refers to how learners perceive the causes of their academic success or failure in school (Lopez-Garrido, 2020). The place of locus of control in learning is very

important because, all things being equal, people will either see themselves as masters of their destiny or victims of circumstances. Learners who have internal locus of control orientation believe that their aptitudes are guided by their personal decisions and efforts whereas learners with external locus of control orientation believe that their aptitudes are guided by fate, luck or external circumstances. In the current study, locus of control is defined as an individual's belief system that their success or failure in any event or task is dependent upon their efforts, esteem, and hard work or upon external forces such as luck, fate and other powerful exterior factors.

Locus of control can be generalized into the basic dichotomy: internal and external locus of control. Individuals with internal locus of control feel responsible for their successes and failures while people with external locus of control attribute life outcomes to external forces such as fate, destiny, or powerful others (Neill, 2021). Individuals who possess an internal locus of control assume that they possess a degree of control over circumstances and events that happen to them. People with an internal locus of control believe that their own behaviours directly influence the results they experience. Students with an "internal locus of control" generally believe that their success or failure is a result of the efforts and hard work they invest in their education. Harry and Kaur (2021) posited that students with internal locus of control apportion blame on themselves as a result of their poor performance. They reason thus, "The teacher has tried, he is not to blame; I need to work harder; I am the architect of my destiny; I can make it" (Harry & Kaur, 2021). The formation of locus of control is shaped by an individual's interactions with their environment and an internal locus of control develops when a person's efforts consistently lead to positive and desirable outcomes over time (Abid et al, 2016). Sa'adiya et al. (2018) held that internal orientation needs to be accomplished by competence, self-efficacy and opportunity in learning context. Samayalangi and Yodida (2017) argued that possession of internal locus of control is fundamental for students to have a thorough learning insight. Individuals with internal locus of control are believed to have more pessimistic expectations and are more resilient (Latha et al, 2020). When an individual has an internal locus of control, they believe they have personal control over their own life and actions. If the person succeeds, they believe they did the right thing and put in the expected amount of efforts, but if the person experiences failure, they will blame themselves. An internally controlled person is likely to be driven toward success. This is because those that are internally controlled take responsibility and accountability for their actions. Such individuals have greater expectations for themselves because they do not attribute their success to luck. In the current study, internal locus of control is referred to

as an individual's belief system that their actions and decisions shape the outcomes of their life's events.

On the other hand, individuals who possess an external locus of control believe that they have no control of what happens to them, which lead them to place responsibility and appropriate blame on external variables such as luck and gods. Later researchers expanded upon Rotter's concepts of locus of control and categorized individuals with an external locus of control into two subgroups: (1) those who attribute life's outcomes to fate, luck, or chance, and (2) those who see their lack of control stemming from the decisions and actions of more influential individuals (Wallston et al., 1976). Students with an "external locus of control" generally believe that their successes or failures result from external factors beyond their control, such as luck, fate, circumstances, injustice, bias, or teachers who are unfair, prejudiced, or unskilled. Individuals with external locus of control believe that reinforcement is not in their control. Hence, they cannot influence the outcome of events. Whatever happens is believed to be luck and coincidence. Harry and Kaur (2021) observed that students with external locus of control may blame an unfair teacher or test as a result of their poor performance. They reason thus, "I didn't perform well in the exam, because my teacher doesn't know how to teach" or "that the teacher was prejudiced or unfair" or "even that the teacher didn't cover the scheme" (Harry & Kaur, 2021).

Externally controlled are more likely to believe that hard work is "pointless" because someone or something else is holding them back or treating them unfairly (Drago et al. 2018). Externally controlled students think that their efforts will not yield to success and their accomplishments will not be acknowledged. The mastery orientation of individuals with external locus of control drives them to sheer antisocial features such as deception, the use of manipulation, or ingratiation or ingratiation medium to reflect the cause of their low achievement or failures. It seems that the external belief in fate, luck and powerful others undermines people's beliefs in their environmental mastery and self-efficacy. In the current study, external locus of control is defined as an individual's belief system that the outcome of the events of their life is dependent upon external forces which could be fate, luck, god or powerful others.

Statement of the Problem

There is a lot of pressure on students across the nation to do well in studies and the struggle is immense because the society places students who attain academic success on a pedestal as they gain adulation from family, friends and peers. The government, parents and teachers expect students to attain

academic excellence. But, unfortunately, such expectations are rarely met. Rather, in recent times, the reverse seems to be the case. Students' consistent failure in WAEC and NECO examinations and their resort to unethical practices as means of achieving success is worrisome. The situation has raised doubts concerning the integrity of the education system; stakeholders are expressing concern about the increasing rate of students involved in examination malpractice and the decreasing rate of students who perform well whenever the annual results of the West African Senior School Certificate Examination are released. The public tends to blame teachers for it and, on the other hand, teachers blame the students because of their refusal to work hard and their inclination to resort to external measures in their unethical effort to excel academically. All parties involved are concerned about the factors that contribute to this trend; locus of control, an aspect linked to individual characteristics, is one of such factors, hence the need for this study. Whether locus of control can predict the academic achievement of students in public secondary schools in Anambra State is yet to be empirically established. It was, therefore, against this backdrop that the current study sought to examine locus of control as predictor of students' academic achievement in public secondary schools in Anambra State.

Purpose of the Study

The central purpose of the study was to ascertain locus of control as predictor of academic achievement of secondary school students in Anambra State. Specifically, the study was aimed at

1. Investigating the predictive value of internal locus of control on academic achievement in English and Mathematics of senior secondary two (SS2) students in public secondary schools in Anambra State.
2. Examining the predictive value of external locus of control on academic achievement in English and Mathematics of senior secondary two (SS2) students in public secondary schools in Anambra State.

Research Questions

1. What is the predictive value of internal locus of control on academic achievement in English and Mathematics of senior secondary two (SS2) students in public secondary schools in Anambra State?
2. What is the predictive value of external locus of control on academic

achievement in English and Mathematics of senior secondary two (SS2) students in public secondary schools in Anambra State?

Methods

The study adopted a correlational research design. It was carried out in Anambra State. The population of the study consisted of 20,922 senior secondary two students (SS2) 2021/2022 session of public secondary schools in Anambra State. The sample of the study comprised of 400 students drawn from the population using Taro Yamane's Formula. The instrument for data collection was Locus of Control Behaviour Scale developed by Craig et al, 1984. The instrument had two sections, A and B. Section A was designed to elicit demographic information about each respondent while section 'B' consisted of the Locus of Control Behaviour 17-Item scale that contains both internal and external locus of control, arranged in clusters. Cluster 'A' elicited information on the internal locus of control with 8-item statement while Cluster 'B' elicited information on the external locus with 9-item statement. The instrument has a four-point rating scale of Strongly Agree (SA) (4 points), Agree (A) (3 points), Disagree (D) (2 points) and Strongly Disagree (SD) (1 point). The reliability was ascertained using Cronchbach Alpha which yielded a consistency index of 0.74. The researcher employed direct delivery and immediate retrieval approach upon completion to ensure a very high percentage of return with the aid of two briefed research assistants in administering the instrument. Simple linear regression was employed to analyse data obtained from the research questions.

Results

Research Question 1: What is the predictive value of internal locus of control on academic achievement in English language and Mathematics of senior secondary two (SS2) students in public secondary schools in Anambra State?

Table 1: Summary of the simple linear regression on the predictive value of internal locus of control on academic achievement in English language and Mathematics of senior secondary two (SS2) students in public secondary schools in Anambra State.

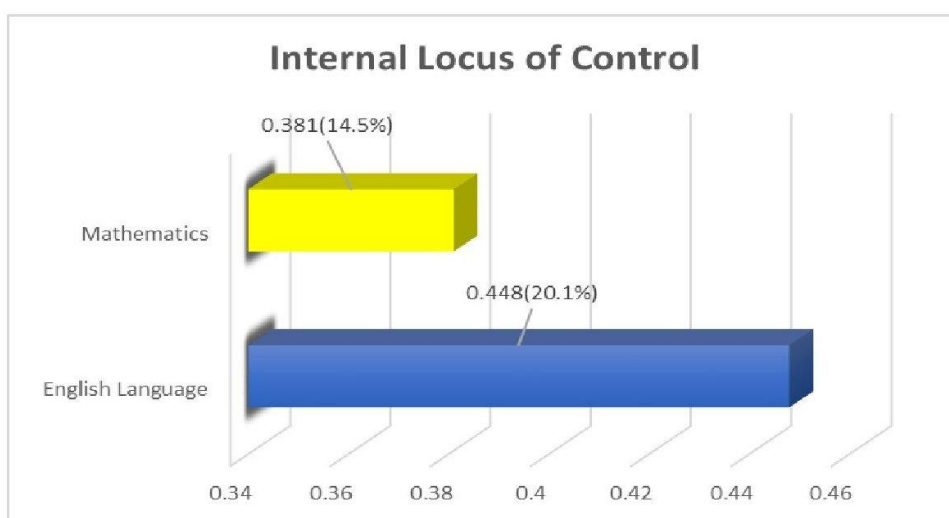
Model Summary of the Predictive Value of Internal Locus of Control on Students' Academic Achievement in English Language and Mathematics

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
English Language	0.448 ^a	0.201	0.198	18.62024
Mathematics	0.381 ^a	0.145	0.143	19.60116

a. Predictor: (Constant), Internal Locus of Control

Table 1 presented the summary of the simple linear regression on the predictive value of internal locus of control on academic achievement in English language and Mathematics of senior secondary two (SS2) students in public secondary schools in Anambra State. The results revealed that the predictive values of internal locus of control for the R-value of English language and Mathematics were 0.448 and 0.381 while the R Square predictive value for English language and Mathematics were 0.201 and 0.145. These signify that internal locus of control moderately and positively predict the academic achievement in English Language and low positive prediction in Mathematics of senior secondary two (SS2) students in public secondary schools in Anambra State.

Figure 1: Summary of the Predictive Value of Internal Locus of Control on the Academic Achievement on English Language and Mathematics.



The results in figure 1 showed the predictive value of internal locus of control on the academic achievement on English Language and

Mathematics. The results indicated that the predictive value of internal locus of control on students' achievement in English Language is 0.448 (20.1%) and Mathematics is 0.381 (14.5%).

Research Question 2: What is the predictive value of external locus of control on academic achievement in English language and Mathematics of senior secondary two (SS2) students in public secondary schools in Anambra State?

Table 2: Summary of the simple linear regression on the predictive value of external locus of control on academic achievement in English language and Mathematics of senior secondary two (SS2) students in public secondary schools in Anambra State

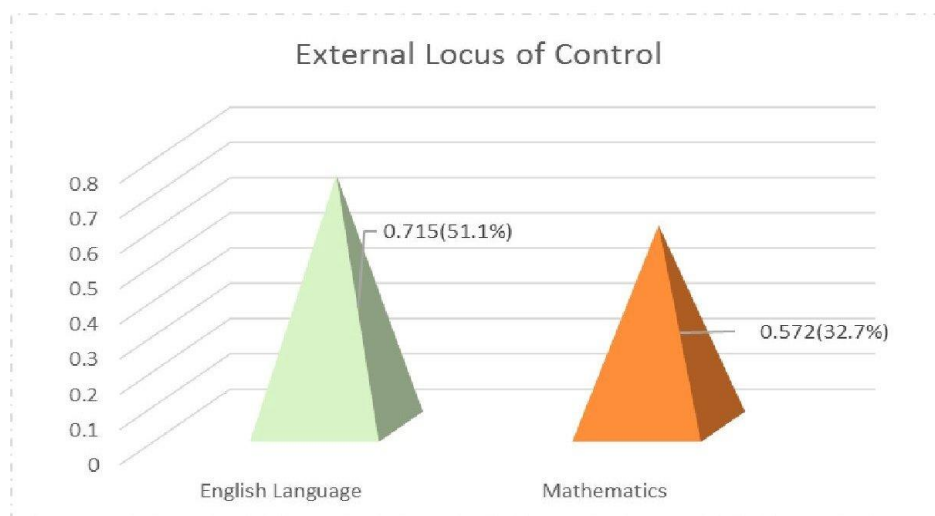
Model Summary of the Predictive Value of External Locus of Control on Students' Academic Achievement in English Language and Mathematics

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
English Language	0.715 ^a	0.511	0.510	14.69823
Mathematics	0.572 ^a	0.327	0.326	17.58858

a. Predictor: (Constant), External Locus of Control

Table 2 showed the predictive value of external locus of control on academic achievement in English language and Mathematics of senior secondary two (SS2) students in public secondary schools in Anambra State. The results revealed that the R-values of English language and Mathematics were 0.715 and 0.572 and also, the R Square values for English language and Mathematics were 0.511 and 0.327. These imply that external locus of control has a high and positive predictive value on academic achievement in English Language and has a moderate and positive predictive value in Mathematics. The results also showed that external locus of control predicts 51.1% of academic achievement on English Language and 32.7% on Mathematics.

Figure 2: Summary of the Predictive Value of External Locus of Control on the Academic Achievement on English Language and Mathematics.



The results in figure 2 revealed the predictive value of external locus of control on the academic achievement of students in English Language and Mathematics. The results showed that the predictive value of internal locus of control on the academic achievement of students in English Language is 0.715 (51.1%) and Mathematics is 0.572 (32.70%).

Discussion of Findings

The study examined locus of control as a predictor of students' academic achievement in public secondary schools in Anambra State. The findings of this study revealed that there exists a moderate positive predictive value of internal locus of control on students' achievement in English language and low positive prediction in Mathematics. The result coincides with the report of Sa'adiyaet al. (2018) who found a positive and moderate prediction of internal locus of control on academic achievement of students in English language. Fabella and Aler (2023) postulated that English is a sine qua non for educational progress and gaining admission into the university which would have been probably responsible for the internally controlled to intensify reading for the purpose of excelling. The finding of the study also revealed a low predictive value of students' internal locus of control in their Mathematics achievement. This finding agrees with the result of Ahono et al. (2018) who indicated that students with low level of internal locus of control in Mathematics lack hard work and self-drive, and so they perform poorly in Mathematics. However, the finding does not agree with Macmull and Ashkenazi (2019) who reported that internal locus of control was associated with high and positive achievement in mathematics.

The finding of the study revealed a high and positive predictability of external locus of control on students' academic achievement in English

language. This finding is somewhat consistent with the result of Sa'adiya et al. (2018) who observed a positive but low impact of external locus of control on students' academic achievement in English language. Similarly, Ozuome et al. (2020) found that locus of control was effective in determining the academic achievement of students. The positive and high predictive value of external locus of control on students' achievement in English language as revealed in this study is in contrast with the result of David (2011) who noted a negative and low effect of external locus of control on academic achievement of students in English language.

The findings also showed a moderate and positive predictive strength of external locus of control on students' academic achievement in Mathematics. The result aligns with the findings of Akunne and Anyamene (2021), who reported that there exists a moderate positive correlation between external locus of control and academic achievement of students. The finding also corresponds with the result of Enwere and Mbakwe (2021) who found locus of control as a moderate predictor of academic achievement. However, the finding is in disagreement with the recent study of Villa and Sebastine (2021) who reported that external locus of control does not predict academic achievement in Mathematics. The scholars added that achievement in Mathematics can never be attributed to chance nor luck but rather something beyond having an external locus. The variations in the findings may be due to differences in the participants and location of the current and reviewed studies. The participants of the present study are students from public schools in Nigeria situated in rural areas who are majorly externals that do not believe in hard work but rather attribute their successes and grades to luck, the teacher's disposition, or other elements which include endemic examination malpractices unlike the Western setting where internal orientation prevails.

Conclusion

From the findings, it was concluded that locus of control is a significant predictor of academic achievement of students in English language and Mathematics. Therefore, students should acknowledge that their actions play a crucial role in attaining success or experiencing failure. Therefore, an insight has been provided for our children to display increased persistence, dedication and engagement with academic tasks so as to excel academically.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations were made:

- Students should be made to understand that they are the architect of their academic success.
- Teachers during teaching/learning process, should encourage students to work hard and focus on personal efforts as means of achieving success and disabuse them of the attitude of external locus of control and the notion that fate, chance, luck or powerful others are the determinants of their scholastic accomplishment.
- The teacher is a major index and stakeholder in the teaching-learning process and primary implementer of any curriculum; therefore, responsibility is placed on the teacher to ensure that his or her students take responsibility of the outcome of their academics, thereby developing their internal locus of control.
- School administrators should charge students with leadership roles to enable them take responsibilities for their actions in school environment. By so doing, they will develop their internal control and then work hard to achieve scholastic excellence.
- Policy makers should formulate policies that will address the menace of unethical approaches to examination success so that students will no longer depend on externalities but rather develop their personal control and make personal efforts to succeed in learning.

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APA

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MLA

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