



Exploration of Distance Learners' Nature of Locus of Control: Qualitative Analysis

Naila Naseer*

Shamsa Kanwal†

Zahida Habib‡

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Abstract: Distance education is a dynamic field and students belonging to this mode of education encompass several psychological characteristics, i.e., self-concept, locus of control etc. this study was conducted to analyze the nature of locus of control of distance learners. This study had a population of distance learners from distance learning universities in Pakistan. Sample of 76 students was taken out by a random sampling technique. The self-developed interview guide was developed, and semi-structured interviews were conducted through audio recording. Thematic analysis was done for data analysis. Major themes and codes revealed that distance learners exhibit an internal locus of control. It was recommended that LOC might be considered by teachers, administrators, and educational planners as an alternative variable that can influence the academic achievement of the students.

Key Words: Internal Locus of Control, External Locus of Control, Distance Learners

Introduction

The theory of adult learning/andragogy revolves on learners' autonomy and independence. Adult learners have different psychological aspects. The theory of distance learning also puts emphasis on learners' autonomy to perform learning tasks as they are self-regulated learners (Fazey & Fazey, 2001; Puziffero, 2008). Distance education is defined as institution-based, formal education in which there is a physical distance between learners and educators because learners are in diverse time zones and scattered geographical regions. Here, learning takes place through interactive telecommunication tools to connect the learners with study materials, resources and instructors (Simonson, Smaldino and Zvacek, 2015). Distance learners perceive themselves to have control over their learning conditions and pace as they set self-goals to attain learning tasks in a systematic way (Cornoldi, Beni & Fioritto, 2003). According to Boekaerts and Corno (2005) distance learning revolves around the multi-dimensional concept of self-regulated learning which encompasses several psychological aspects of learners. Zimmerman (2002) says that locus of control and self-efficacy are two important psychological constructs which predict learners' drive towards learning. However, in a study Cogalty (2017) examined the literature on the locus of control and concluded that it has a low relationship with students' academic achievement.

The concept of LOC developed by Julian B. Rotter in 1954 has two types; one is internal locus of control, and the other is external locus of control (Rotter, 1966) when a person attributes his/her success/failure to internal factors he has internal LOC, whereas the attribution to external factors is the evidence of external LOC. A person with an internal locus of control has less influence of others in his/her life decisions, exhibits higher levels of motivation, and participates actively in political activities. Students who exhibit internal LOC are expected to do better learning as compared to those students who have external LOC (Drennan, Kennedy & Pisarski, 2005). Same findings are reported in another study by Kumaravelu (2018) found the positive relationship of LOC with the academic achievement of students. According to Yirka (2019), LOC is the description of the world viewed by individuals, i.e.,

*Lecturer Distance, Non-formal and Continuing Education Department, AIOU, Islamabad, Pakistan.

Email: naila.naseer@aiou.edu.pk

†Field Coordinator, Allama Iqbal Open University, Islamabad, Pakistan.

‡Associate Professor, University of Education, Township, Lahore, Punjab, Pakistan.

persons who regard themselves as mostly 'at the whim of others' exhibit internal locus of control. On the other hand, those who see themselves as being responsible for the consequences are regarded as with internal LOC. This is also elaborated by different researchers ([Din, Haron & Rashid \(2016\)](#); and [Shinde & Joshi 2011](#)) that students with an internal LOC attribute internal factors accountable for their success or failure so, they become more independent in accomplishing their targets.

Distance education gives importance to a person's meaningful learning by enabling him/her to control and manage different circumstances to achieve high academically. Distance education connects with the students through physical distance, so the learners in this educational setting are expected to be self-directed at a certain level. In distance education (DE), there is a focus on individual learning and pupils are expected to participate in learning activities with more autonomy. This helps the students to manage their learning without much focusing on others' help. So, in the context of distance education, students' learning skills help in lifelong learning and involve locus of control ([Zimmerman, 2000](#)).

The present research was conducted to dig out the nature of the LOC of distance learners (DLs). The study of psychological variables, i.e., SE and LOC of DLs' in the context of distance education in Pakistan was not done prior than this research. So, it was necessary to provide useful information to distance teachers regarding the importance of locus of control which may affect the level of achievements of DLs. Moreover, such information was also necessary to help teachers to better understand the psychological needs of DLs and plan their lessons accordingly. Apart from this, it was also thought-provoking to help distance learners to have a closer look regarding LOC, so, this study was aimed "to explore nature of LOC of distance learners through qualitative analysis".

Purpose Statement and Research Question

Distance learning focuses on individuals' own pace of learning, autonomy, self-directedness, and self-motivation with the physical distance between student and tutor. So, the psychological variables of students in learning cannot be neglected as these may play an important role in his/her studies. Students' success or failure may be associated with a variety of internal or external factors which he/she may attribute as an important element in success/failure. Keeping this in mind, the purpose of this study was to explore the nature of locus of control of postgraduate level distance learners.

Following were research question:

1. What is the overall nature of locus of control of DLs?
2. What is the nature of LOC of distance learners in success, failure, study?
3. What are feelings and relationship of DLs with others?
4. How DLs attribute role of others in success/failure?
5. How DLs work for task completion and plan ahead?
6. What are reactions of DLs towards play, chance and luck?

Research Methodology

The present study used qualitative (semi-structured interview) research method. This study was contextualized from a total number of 1513 distance learners {(Spring or Autumn 2015) of teacher education programs; M. A, M.Ed and B.Ed offered by universities of Pakistan through distance learning mode} out of which 76 students (38 males and 38 females) were sampled randomly by using a table of random numbers. An open-ended research tool (interview guide) was developed by the researcher who was comprised of open-ended statements. The interview guide of Locus of Control was based on the parameters of locus of control identified through literature (behavior potential, reinforcement value, expectancy, psychological situation). This research tool had two parts. In the first section, participants were asked their demographic information. In the second part, there were 24 open-ended questions. The interview guide was based on the following four factors given by ([Rotter, 1966](#)), which may help to understand and predict a person's LOC:

Behavior Potential

It is the possibility of a person to involve him/her in a specific behavior in particular circumstances.

There is a behavior potential for every probable behavior. The individual will show the behavior which has the highest potential.

Reinforcement Value

It is the desirability of results. The things for which they are not attracted, and they do not want them to occur have low reinforcement value. The things for which people are attracted, and they wish them to occur, have a high reinforcement value.

Expectancy

It is the particular likelihood that a specific behavior will result in a specific product. Individuals have high and low expectancies. High expectancy is associated with specific behavior accomplishment, and low expectancy is associated with failure in behavior accomplishment.

Psychological Situation

This reflects Rotter's notion that every person has a unique experience of his/her environment. However, the same situation is interpreted in a different manner by different people.

The guide was developed in the English language, and the expert opinion of 5 experts was sought. The final version of the guide was prepared in light of the suggestions of experts. The interview guides were translated into the Urdu language. The Urdu translated version of the interview guide was administered in the study. The "Locus of Control interview guide" comprised of 21 statements and demographic information. The semi-structured interview was done through telephonic conversation after obtaining the consents from the participants. Guidelines and purpose of the semi-structured interview were also shared with the participants. The translated version of interview guides was administered in the actual data collection phase. The respondents were conveyed the interview purpose and objectives of the study after seeking their consent through telephonic conversation. A suitable time for the interview was decided to conduct the interview accordingly. An audio recording of the interview was made. During audio recording, the researcher also took written notes. At the end of each questions' response of the participants, the researcher rephrased his/her opinions to confirm the views. During the course of 76 semi-structured interviews, the participants described their reactions towards their locus of control. All the interviews were audio-recorded.

The interview data were examined by two experts, and themes and codes were formed as independent from each other. "Compatibility percentage" formula suggested by [Miles and Huberman \(1994\)](#) was used to determine the reliability of the codes and themes obtained by the interview forms. The formula was "Compatibility percentage = (Agreement) / (Agreement + Disagreement) X 100". The compatibility percentage was 75%. The codes were refined, and then final thematic map was made. The final thematic map was used for the analysis of interview data.

Results and Data Analysis

The qualitative data were analyzed by using the "Thematic data analysis" technique. The researcher analyzed the qualitative data by using thematic analysis technique. The thematic analysis was done by reading the "Thematic Analysis Model" of [Miles and Huberman \(1994\)](#), Braun and Clarke (2006). This model is comprised of the following three link stages or 'streams':

1. Data Collection
2. Data reduction
3. Data display
4. Data conclusion-drawing/verifying

Following steps were followed in this research:

Familiarizing yourself with your Data

In this phase, the researcher made repeated readings to the interview transcripts to search for the

meanings, patterns, themes and codes. During reading the main themes and ideas were marked for coding. For example, while reading one of the respondent's interview transcripts on LOC, the idea was extracted as follows:

Data extract	Coded for
Recently, I got success in my studies. In fact, I had one great teacher who was too frank with me. In my success, my teacher actually played a role.	The teacher is the reason for success. (external LOC)

Generating Initial Codes

After reading the interview transcripts, a total number of 114 initial codes were generated for LOC interview guide and 61 codes for self-efficacy guide.

Searching for Themes

The themes were generated according to each interview question asked from the respondents and codes generated. Different codes were combined into potential themes regarding the locus of control and self-efficacy of respondents. In this phase, by following the guidelines of [Braune and Clarke \(2006\)](#), two candidate thematic maps were developed; one was regarding the locus of control, and the other was on self-efficacy. The compatibility of codes was checked, and then final thematic maps on the locus of control and the other were on self-efficacy were made.

Defining and Naming Themes

The final themes were defined and named properly for the final analysis of data.

Producing the Report

By following above-mentioned steps, the report was produced.

Demographic profile of the participants

Following is the demographic profile of respondents:

Table 1. General Demographic characteristics of participants (N=76).

Variables	Categories	F (%)
Gender	Male	38 (50)
	Female	38(50)
		N= 76
Age in years	20-25	27(36)
	25-30	23 (30)
	30-35	15 (20)
	35-40	5 (6)
	40 and above	6 (8)
Region	Rural	32 (42)
	Urban	44 (58)

Above table describes the demographic information of the participants from whom the semi-structured interview was taken. Overall, 38 (50%) male and 38 (50%) females were taken. The age of the respondents was divided into different categories (20-25 years, 25-30 years, 30-35 years, 35-40 years & above). There were 27 (36%) respondents in the age category 20-25, in the category 25-30 there were 23 (30%) respondents, in 30-35 years' category there were 15 (20%) respondents, in the category 35-40 years there were 5 (6%) respondents, and in the category 40 & above there were 6 (8%) respondents.

Results and Analysis of Locus of Control Interview

This section describes the results and interpretation of interview data on LOC of distance learners. The level of locus of control of distance learners is presented in the form of frequencies.

Table 2. Nature of Locus of Control of Distance Learners

Theme	Codes		f	
Success	Self-confidence	Internal LOC	3	
	Hard work		43	
	Self-Motivation		2	
	Reactions in Success	Fate	External LOC	5
		Chance		5
		Others' Efforts		6
Luck		12		
Joyful		8		
More hard work		Internal LOC	40	
Failure	Sharing with others	Internal LOC	14	
	Outing with friends		3	
	Emotionally controlled		3	
	Intrapersonal	External LOC	5	
	No sharing		3	
	Self-Deficient		39	
	Reactions in failure	Lack of Hard work	Internal LOC	11
		Lack of Confidence		2
		Fate		10
		Luck	External LOC	5
Blame Others		7		
Chance		2		
Success/Failure in Studies		Calmness	Internal LOC	20
		Accept Fault		9
		Emotionally Controlled		4
		Tensed	External LOC	12
	Quarrel	2		
	Shouting	4		
	Role of others in Success/failure	Feel guilt	Internal LOC	7
		Feel sorrow		18
		Self-mistakes		2
		Hard work	Internal LOC	23
Smart work		2		
Personal Commitments		9		
Personal Efforts in Success/failure		Support of Others	External LOC	14
		Wedding		4
		Kid's illness		3
		Fate	Internal LOC	10
	Family tensions	3		
	Blame others	6		
		Cooperative	External LOC	8
		Encouragement		15
		Support		17
		Guidance	Internal LOC	10
Motivating		3		
Criticism		8		
		Ignoring	External LOC	7
		Favoritism		4
		Discouraging		4
			Hard work	Internal LOC
	Self-managing		5	
	Persistent		9	

Theme	Codes	f
Self-studying and Long Hours Work	Self-motivation	20
	Fate	2
	Chance	4
	Unfavorable circumstances	7
	Excitement	14
	Self-Motivating	4
	Confident	7
	Enjoy	13
	Determined	3
	Persistent	2
	boredom	10
	Fatigued	3
	Laborious	3
	Tensed	2
Confused	5	
Fed up	10	
Opinion towards Play	Good Coaching	7
	Self-Motivation	6
	Personal Efforts	23
	Practice	8
	Physical fitness	5
	Interest	5
	Innate ability	8
	Good environment	8
	Luck	2
	Fate	1
	Chance	3
	Respected	11
	Accepted	18
	Love others	5
Self-managing	6	
Personally Matured	5	
Motivating	6	
Helping	6	
Proffered on siblings	7	
No sharing	2	
Neglected	3	
Lack of Will power	2	
Not trusted	3	
Never ask for choices	2	
Opinion towards Luck	Believe on personal efforts	26
	Hard work than luck	3
	Smart work	2
	Fate than luck	10
	Luck brings Success	35
	Sharing with others	4
Task Completion	Feel proud	4
	Multi-tasking	13
	Enjoy	2
	Stay long with tasks	16
	Work for longer periods	11
	Feel fatigued	9
	Weeping	2
	Seek others' help	6
	Can't do long-term tasks	9
	Relations with Friends	Good
Helping		13
Open-minded		11

Theme	Codes	f
Feelings towards Others	Supportive	11
	Trustworthy	12
	Fake people	8
	Friends are nothing	4
	Jealous	2
	Non-trusting	4
	Decent people	2
	Open-minded	8
	Supportive	9
	Accept their views	8
Opinion on Planning Ahead	Admit mistakes	18
	Ignore their views	12
	My personal qualities	9
	Feel annoyed	4
	Avoid them	6
	Saves time	16
	Cost-effective	13
	Brings Success	9
	Protects from problems	14
	Target achievement	5
	Wastage of Time	5
	Plans don't Work	14

The above table highlights the views of distance learners regarding their locus of control

Theme 1: Success

This theme indicated that the majority of the distance learners exhibited internal LOC. A great majority of respondents preferred that they succeed due to their hard work, self-confidence and self-motivation, i.e., R31 said that: *“It’s due to the hard work that I get success. I believe on the power of hard work. The key to my success is that I am hardworking”*. R56 explained: *“So far, whatever I have achieved in my life is mostly due to my hard work”*.

Theme 2: Reactions in Success

The analysis of the ideas of respondents under the theme reactions in success showed that the majority of the distance learners demonstrated internal LOC. In this regard, R26 explained: *“When I am successful in my targets, I am intended to work hard more. A spell is made around me that push me towards working harder. If I achieved B grade in the previous semester; the sense of achievement now makes me work harder to go for the A grade. Moreover, the response of R48 indicated that: “I am out of joy when I get success”*. On the other hand, the respondents who had internal LOC were very few. In this regard, R66 opined that: *“I usually sit in my room and do not tell the story of success to anybody. Success is for my own self, not for the publicity. My cousins are jealous of me, and I keep my success secret from them”*.

Theme 3: Failure

The detailed review of the ideas gathered under this theme revealed that a great number of distance learners responded that when they are encountered with failure, they think that it was due to lack of hard work, lack of confidence and self-deficiencies. A small number of distance learners blamed others, fate, luck and chance and for failure. R19 responded that it is due to improper work plan: *“If I receive failure in my life, it is due to my own faults that I have improper work plan”*. A similar response was given by R20: *“If I say that when I receive failure, this was absolutely due to my own lack of hardworking attitude”*. Furthermore, R44 attributed failure as a result of personal efforts: *“Lack of my personal efforts and hard work cause failure”*.

Theme 4: Reactions in Failure

This theme indicated that a great majority of the respondents exhibited external LOC. The review of the responses revealed that most of the distance learners were emotionally maladjusted, i.e., quarrel, shouting, feeling of guilt and sorrow feelings, i.e., R72: *"There is a deep sorrow inside me, I can't control my emotions, I mostly involve in fights with others"*. R29 said that guilt feelings don't let to do anything with peace: *"I can't face my family; I feel guilty, and this destroys my peace. I can't sleep peacefully"*. Moreover, R37 explained: *"When I face failure in life, I have guilty feelings, I stop eating, and my heartbeat goes fast"*.

Theme 5: Success/Failure in Studies

This theme revealed that the great majority of distance learners exhibited external LOC. The respondent R51 blamed others: *"people use unfair means and resources to get success in life; I have no such tactics; that's why I get failure in my studies"*. R46 reflected that: *"My parents don't spend money on our education, instead of studying; they always ask me to run the general store. I got fail in two papers due to this reason."*

Theme 6: Role of others in Success/Failure

A great majority of the respondents exhibited internal LOC. This theme investigated the role of others, i.e., parents, teachers, siblings and friends in their success or failure. In this regard, R64 explained that: *"The role of my parents is great. They encourage me to do the best again when I am unsuccessful. Their encouraging attitude helps me not only in my success but also in my failures"*. R35 explained the role of teachers in studies: *"My teachers always supported me in my studies. Whenever I had some issue regarding studies, they did their best to provide all the possible help and support"*. R38 described the role of friends: *"The role of my friends is amazing; we have brotherly relations"*.

Regarding external LOC, distance learners explained that the others criticize, ignore, discourage and do favouritism. R18 elaborated that friends' role is nothing: *"I have selfish friends. They have no role in my success. They are just passing the time with me. They waste my time"*.

Theme 7: Personal Efforts in Success/Failure

The theme "personal efforts in success or failure" revealed that great majority of distance learners had internal LOC. R72 described that success is due to hard work: *"I do work very hard. I am not lazy; I take things seriously and do my level best to get success"*. R73 highlighted self-managing habit that: *"I am always managing things in-time. I am not haphazard. I know how to make a plan for studies. So far, I have managed my job and studies very well"*. Regarding external LOC, R62 was of the opinion that: *"I believe in fate; whatever success or failure comes to us is due to fate. We are all helpless in front of fate"*.

Theme 8: Self-Studying and Long Hours' Work

This theme explored the feelings of distance learners when asked for self-study by teachers and what they feel while working for long hours on a task. R17 described that: *"I am excited when I am asked for self-study; it develops a sense of responsibility in me. I feel pleasure when I have to do work for more hours"*. R35 showed views on a determination that: *"I can study by my own self with my personal wish to learn. I can do long hours work because I am self-determined to do things in my life"*.

Theme 9: Opinion Towards Play

This theme indicated that a great majority of the respondents exhibited internal LOC. Regarding Self-motivation, R51 said that: *"I am a good player. I can play snooker and table tennis. People who perform well in sports is due to their self-motivation"*. Regarding personal efforts, R33 explained that: *"I am successful in volleyball. I put my efforts to perform well. Good performance of players in sports is due to their personal efforts."*

Theme 10: Family Membership

Most of the distance learners opined that they were a successful member in family R34 described that family gives him respect: *"I am successful at home. My relationship is strong at home because I have always given respect to my parents and siblings. I tried my best to do what I can do for my family"*. Regarding involvement in decision making, R34 elaborated that: *"In the decision-making process, what I suggest, my parents accept it and give weightage to my opinions"*. R29 said that: *"My eating choices are accepted, my views in decision making are taken on the priority that other members of the family"*.

Theme 11: Opinion Towards Luck

A great majority of the respondents exhibited external LOC under this theme. R33 expressed opinions regarding personal efforts play more role than luck: *"I don't believe on luck. When a person is putting his/her efforts, then right things happen. I put my efforts to achieve in life"*. R24 was of the opinion that hard work is more important in life than luck: *"I am working hard in my life. It's my personal experience that you can achieve everything if you work hard. The value of hard work is priceless"*.

Theme 12: Task Completion

This theme "task completion" investigated the views of distance learners that whether they were a successful member in the family or not, and how their eating choices were treated and involved in family decisions. The review of distance learners' opinions revealed that great majority of distance learners had internal LOC. R76 described that: *"I can accomplish long term tasks when I accomplish the desired tasks, I share my success with others."* R38 said: *"long term tasks are a challenge for me, whom I accept happily. I share my success and failures with my parents."*

Theme 13: Relations with Friends

Under this theme, the great majority of distance learners had internal LOC. In this regard, R13 described that: *"I have found good friends. They are all good in nature. We have a strong friendship"*. R1 said that relations with friends are very close. Friends are open-minded: *"My friends are very open-minded. We discuss everything without fear. We take the criticism for the improvement and can easily ask each other the things which hurt us. Overall, our group is very open to each other"*.

Theme 14: Feelings Towards others

The theme "feelings towards others" explored the feelings of distance learners when other people like or dislike them. The review of distance learners' opinions revealed that great majority of distance learners had internal LOC. R72 said that opinions of others are accepted: *"I don't mind what they say about me. I accept their views"*. R9 explained that task attainment is done through planning: *"My plans helped me in target achievement. I always make plans so that the long-term tasks may be achieved systematically"*.

Discussion

This study revealed that distance learners had internal LOC. They exhibited internal locus of control in success and failure. DLs also had good planning skills, task management and emotional control in disturbing situations. Similar results are also revealed in the researches of [Cascio, Botta, & Anzaldi, \(2013\)](#). The results of this study through qualitative data analysis indicated nature of LOC and showed the unique characteristics of distance learners that DLs exhibited internal locus of control; had the ability to manage their tasks by themselves and; did not attribute their failures to external events. Previous researches also supported the results. [Sagone and Caroli \(2013\)](#) conducted a study on university on three groups of students (Medicine, Psychology, and Law) and found that the internal LOC was high as compared with external LOC. [Cascio, Botta, and Anzaldi \(2013\)](#) revealed that internal LOC, self-efficacy and external motivation to learn affect the degree of students' online learning. Contrary findings as reported by [Lonky and Reihman \(1980\)](#) who explored that the internally controlled students took much time while performing on learning tasks than externally controlled students who didn't take much time to perform on the same learning tasks. But apart from contradiction, most of the literature support the

findings of the present research ([Kalechstein & Nowicki, 1977](#); [Jacobs-Lawson, Waddell, & Webb, 2011](#); [Satici, Uysal, & Akin, 2013](#); [Iskender & Akin, 2010](#); Sarason et al., 1983; [Trice & Hackburt, 1989](#); [Multu, Balbag, & Cemrek, 2010](#); [Pannells & Claxton, 2008](#); [Ghonsooly & Elahi, 2010](#); [Serin, Serin, & Sahin, 2010](#); [Saracaloglu & Yilmaz, 2011](#); [Lonky & Reihman, 1980](#); Omid, Omid, & Behzad, 2015; [Ghonsooly & Moharer, 2012](#)). The themes on LOC (Success, Reactions in Success, Failure, Reactions in failure, Success/failure in studies, the role of others in success/failure, Personal efforts in success/failure, Self-studying and long hours' work, opinion towards play, Family membership, Opinion towards luck, Task completion, Relations with friends, Feelings towards others, and Opinion on planning ahead revealed that the responses of the respondents were depicting their internal LOC.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This study concluded that:

1. Overall, distance learners exhibited an internal locus of control.
2. Distance learners possess inner potential and control when encountered with success, failure, and do hard work in their study.
3. DLs had positive and healthy relationships and feelings with others, especially with their family, friends and teachers.
4. DLs positively attribute the role of others in their success/failure.
5. DLs work for task completion and plan ahead in their daily lives
6. Reactions of DLs towards play, chance and luck are positive. They attribute their own mistakes and efforts in getting some distinctions or failures.

The study recommended that studying the personality variable of LOC in the present research may provide assistance to educators to reflect some antecedents to achievements and LOC and SE so that they may be able to do possible reforms to their teaching approaches where they might be applicable. So, this research provoked the importance for the authorities of distance education universities to pay attention to the inclusion of psychological factors in the curriculum. These findings may prove to be helpful for the upcoming researchers in the field of distance education to expand the phenomena with varied dimensions, i.e., socio-economic impact, family background, family structure etc.

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