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# Locus of Control Vis-à-vis Self-Efficacy

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**Abstract**

*Locus of control is a theory that refers to the extent to which individuals believe that they can control events that affect them. It is conceptualized as either internal or external. Individuals with a high internal locus of control believe that events in life are derived primarily from their own actions. This paper explores the students' perception of locus of control and belief on their ability to perform well in a variety of situations. The researcher used the descriptive method of research with questionnaire as the main instrument for gathering data. Questionnaires were administered to 161 sophomore education students of the Bulacan State University school year 2012-2013. To identify significant relationship between locus of control and self-efficacy, the researcher used the Spearman rho correlation. Research data were treated using the SPSS version 19. Findings were summarized; conclusions were drawn and strategies that guide future researchers were offered.*

**Keywords:** Locus of control, Self-efficacy

## Introduction

Interests in personal qualities of individuals who excel or who may seem to have a strong sense of wellbeing is no longer new. In fact, in various areas of psychology, much has been said and researched about ways of studying human qualities. Hence, from social psychology and personality theory emerge a lot of studies and have found significant explanatory value: locus of control and self-efficacy.

The concept of Locus of control (LOC) is brought to light in the 1950s by Julian Rotter, a personality psychologist. It has become the framework of Rotter's social-learning theory of personality. Locus of Control refers to the extent to which people believe they have the power over various events in their lives. It also refers to the belief that people hold about their life which is controlled by either internal or external factors. Internal factors are those choices or decisions they make by taking the initiative and seek something to positively change their lives. On the other hand, external factors are those things such as luck or fate where their lives are controlled by circumstances. People with high internal locus of control believe that events in

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their life are derived primarily from their own actions. For example, if students with internal locus of control do not perform as well as they wanted to on a test, they would blame it on lack of preparedness on their part. However, if students performed well on a test, they would attribute it to their ability to study. Using the same line of thinking, if students with high external locus of control did poorly on a test, they might put the blame on the difficulty of test items. If they performed well on the same test, they might think the teacher was so lenient or that they were very lucky. In hindsight, people with an internal locus of control believe that their own behavior determines the good and bad things that happen to them, whereas those with an external locus believe otherwise. The outside forces determine what happen to them.

Underlying the concept of locus of control is the concept of "self-agent" (http://www.ncrel.org/sdrs/areas/issues/students/learning/lr2locus.htm) retrieved on December 23, 2012). It means that people's thoughts control their actions and that when they realize this executive function of thinking they can positively affect their beliefs, motivation, and academic performance. As corollary, the self as agent can consciously or unconsciously direct, select, and regulate the use of all knowledge structures and intellectual processes in support of personal goals, intentions, and choices.

As corollary to self-agent phenomenon is the concept popularized of self-efficacy by Psychologist Albert Bandura. He has defined self-efficacy as one's perception to act competently and effectively based on multiple influences from both the internal and external worlds. Bandura offered, "An efficacy expectation is the conviction that one can successfully execute the behavior required to produce the outcomes" (Bandura, 1977, p.193).

Self-efficacy (SE) is defined as people's judgment of their capabilities to perform a task successfully (Bandura, 19977). It is their beliefs about their ability to do something. In a classroom set-up, it means that students with high self-efficacy often take on more challenging tasks, exert more effort, persist in the face of difficulty, and use different strategies to make learning meaningful. When students believe in themselves, it is possible to develop enabling goals that can be carried out and can facilitate the accomplishment of said goals, while students with sabotaging beliefs about their potentials for development may avoid the learning task and prospect to ask for help. Hence, understanding students' beliefs about their potentials can assist educators to understand better how goals are adopted and retained, where students' motivation comes from, and how to assist students to keep on the motivation that they progressively develop. A lot of researchers have proposed that students' self-efficacy is a good predictor of academic achievement and motivation (Graham & Weiner, 1996; Pajares, 2003; Pintrich & DeGroot, 1990). According to Bandura (1997), SE stems from four main sources: Mastery Experience, Vicarious Experience, Social Persuasion and Physiological and Affective States.

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*Performance accomplishments* are demonstrated to be the most powerful source of efficacy information because they are grounded on one's own mastery experience (Bandura, 1997). A person's mastery experiences affect SE beliefs through thoughtful cognitive processing of such information. Anybody who continuously views his experiences to be successful, his SE will increase; but if these experiences were viewed as failures, SE beliefs will decrease.

In an article on the Positive Side of Video Games: Part I (Ruthledge, 2012), the author mentioned that Video games and interactive media can have a tremendous impact on self-efficacy which may improve resilience, optimism, and motivation. A woman the author met in a conference told her that her son who played Wizard 101, has made a surprising performance of advancing through all game levels, mastered a big number of spells, and was very confident in guiding her about the game. The boy has also figured out how to interact with real world friends out there.

*Social comparison* process is another source of efficacy information. The process involves looking into other people's performance, evaluating the outcome, and then using this information to form judgments about their own performance (Maddux, 1995). Vicarious experience or social modeling enhances self-beliefs on efficacy Bandura, 1997). It refers to the experiences of others and even one's own experience used as a model and as a level of comparing their skill as to what skills are deemed important in completing a task (Bandura, 1997). This can be done by observing other individuals like them who are competent in performing a certain task. Another mode of modeling that has been suggested to improve one's sense of efficacy and performance in sport is self-modeling (Dowrick, 1991; Franks and Maile, 1991). Self-modeling involves the individuals consistently observing the proper or best parts of his/her own past performance, and making it as his/her point of reference in his/her future performance (Dowrick and Dove, 1980).

*Emotional state* is also accounted for as a source of information in forming efficacy perceptions. Being happy, invigorated, serene which are considered to be positive affect can improve judgments rather than negative affects', such as sadness, depression, and anxiety. (Maddux & Meier, 1995). According to Schunk (1995) he opined that emotional symptoms that might trigger anxiety can be interpreted by an individual that could mean that he or she lacks the ability to perform a certain skill, which in turn influences efficacy judgments.

The fourth source of self-efficacy is by means of verbal persuasion. *Verbal persuasion* involves convincing a person that he or she has the ability to carry out a particular task. The best way that a lead person can do in using a verbal persuasion is through the *Pygmalion effect*. The Pygmalion effect (or Rosenthal effect) is a form of a self-fulfilling prophesy in which believing into something that can be true can make it happen. Persuasive techniques are generally used by parents, managers, coaches, and peers in attempting to influence an athlete's self-perception of

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efficacy. These strategies may be in the form of verbal persuasion, evaluative feedback, expectations by others, positive imagery, and other cognitive strategies (Feltz and Lirgg, 2001).

Locus of control and self-efficacy are two useful concepts in looking at the underlying factors of students' ability to perform and be successful and excel in school. Leftcourt (1982) reported that individuals' actions are determined by their internal LOC and those with an external LOC feel that they had no control over life situations.

It is therefore the major concern of this study to explore the interaction of locus of control and self-efficacy among the Bachelor of Elementary Education (BEEd) sophomore students who were enrolled during the first semester in the College of Education, Bulacan State University, School Year 2012 – 2013. Figure 1 shows the paradigm of this study.

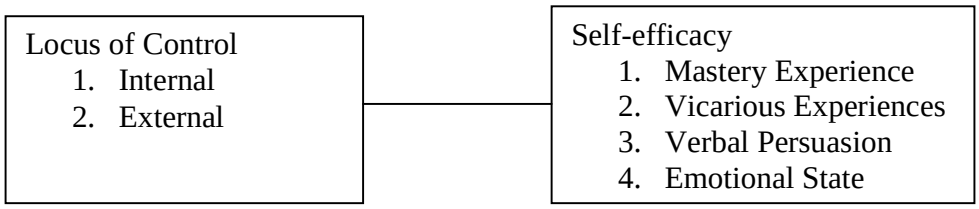


*Figure 1 The Relationship between Locus of Control and Self-efficacy*

**Ho** = There is no significant relationship between the participants' locus of control and self-efficacy.

**Statement of the Problem**

Specifically, the study attempted to delve into the following questions:

1. How may the participants' locus of control be described in terms of:
    1.1 internal; and
    1.3 external control?
2. How may the participants' level of self-efficacy be accounted as to:
    2.1 mastery experience;
    2.2 vicarious experience;
    2.3 verbal persuasion; and
    2.4 emotional state?
3. Is there a significant relationship between the participants' locus of control vis-a-vis self-efficacy?

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## Method

### Methods and Techniques of the Study

The study used the descriptive correlational method of research with questionnaire as the main instrument for gathering data. The researcher used the SPSS version 19; Spearman rho was utilized in computing whether the participants' locus of control and self-efficacy are significantly correlated with each other.

**Participants of the Study.** The subjects of this research were the 161 sophomore BEED students of the College of Education of the Bulacan State University, SY 2012-2013. The researcher employed a 100 percent enumeration of the BEED sophomores majoring Generalist and Pre-school education. For greater reliability in the problem analysis, all the students were involved in the study.

**Research Instrument.** The instrument used was adapted from the Locus of Control Scale by Nowicki Jr. and Strickland published in the internet and the Self-efficacy Scale from the research by Aquino (2012). The LOC Scale is composed of 40-item questions answerable by Yes or NO and the SE questionnaire is composed of 20-item questions using Likert Five-Point Scale where:

**Likert Scale**

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 4.50-5.00 | - | Strongly Agree |
| 3.50-4.49 | - | Agree |
| 2.50-3.49 | - | Undecided |
| 1.50-2.49 | - | Disagree |
| 1.00-1.49 | - | Strongly Disagree |

**Administration of the Instrument.** The researcher personally administered the questionnaire to the 161 sophomore BEED students. When necessary, the researcher resorted to an oral procedure in filling out the items required in the questionnaire and clarified some items which came to be vague for the participants to answer. The researcher personally retrieved the questionnaire.

**Data Processing and Statistical Treatment.** The data gathered, were tallied, tabulated, and organized. In reporting the responses of the respondents, the following tests were utilized using the SPSS version 19.

1. Frequency and Mean were used in analyzing the data of the respondents.

2. The Spearman rho correlation in studying the relationship between the LOC and SE of the respondents.

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## Results and Discussions

### Participants' Locus of Control

Out of 161 participants, 152 or 94.41 percent were found to be with external locus of control. Based on the results, it could be said that a great majority of the participants were with external locus of control. It means that a great majority of the participants believe that their behaviors are guided by fate, luck or other external circumstances. They also believe that forces (such as chance or luck) outside themselves influence their ability to succeed. Just because they believe they have very little personal stake in their future, those with an external locus of control tend to put less effort forward on most projects. Studies show that they are generally less successful in college and career than those with an internal locus of control. These attributions refer not only to chance, fate, and powerful people out of one's control, but also to the results of their own attitudes (Basım & Sesen, 2006). In other words, students with an external locus of control are often seen as humble and agreeable. As they see studying as a game of chance than as one where their skills make a difference, they may often share praise with those around them who really did very little to help out with a given project. This type of individual, while taking little credit for successes or failures, can be laid-back and enjoy a happy, relaxed life. Therefore, they tend to take less initiative, and exhibit less drive to participate in school activities inside and outside the classroom. On the other hand, only 9 out of 161 participants were found to be with internal locus of control. It showed that these 9 participants with internal locus of control are careful, alert, dominant, focused on success, self-confident, and ingenious. On the other hand, the individuals with external locus of control are less careful, affected by the group members, easily influenced by external forces, less self-confident, and they display unsteady performances (Rotter, 1975).

### Participants' Level of Self-efficacy

For Self-efficacy, an analysis of the data showed that among the four components of self-efficacy, Vicarious Experiences got the highest mean score of 3.96 and is interpreted as "Agree." Next is Emotional State with a mean score of 3.86 and is interpreted as "Agree." While Mastery Experiences registered a mean score of 3.66 which is interpreted as "Agree," Verbal Persuasion got a mean score of 3.36 and is interpreted as "Undecided." From these, it is construed that students can develop high or low self-efficacy vicariously through other people's performances (Aquino, 2012). As classroom interactions happen, they watch the students' performance and compare their competence with one another. When students attribute failure to lack of ability, the impact on future performance is devastating. Negative feelings of self-efficacy develop and students see little value in making any effort because they believe that they are not likely to be successful (Levin & Nolan, 2010). It means that the more similarity one feels to a person he observed, the stronger its effect to the belief of their own ability to succeed.

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The emotional state is the next component to boost the sense of efficacy belief. (Bandura, 1997). A percentage of 3.86 clearly showed that students' emotions are not dampened by failures but rather their personal self-efficacy are intact. Students are stimulated by their inner desire to touch the lives of the new generation where they could see that it is worth pursuing despite the fact that it is not financially rewarding.

The verbal or social persuasion has been found to strengthen people's self-efficacy belief (Bandura, 1997). Obtaining the lowest percentage of 3.3 percent, students' parents may not be of great influence in hoisting the self-efficacy of students. They need to hear reliable feedback to initiate a behavior in developing their skills and improve their self-confidence.

| | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Spearman's Rho | Mastery experience<br>Correlation Coefficient<br>Sig. (2-tailed) | 1.000 | .569<br>.000 | .536<br>.000 | .257<br>.001 | .075<br>.348 |
| | Vicarious experience<br>Correlation Coefficient<br>Sig. (2-tailed) | .569<br>.000 | 1.000 | .635<br>.000 | .382<br>.000 | .031<br>.699 |
| | Emotional state<br>Correlation Coefficient<br>Sig. (2-tailed) | .536<br>.000 | .635<br>.000 | 1.000 | .430<br>.000 | .074<br>.354 |
| | Verbal persuasion<br>Correlation Coefficient<br>Sig. (2-tailed) | .257<br>.001 | .382<br>.000 | .430<br>.000 | 1.000 | .019<br>.812 |
| | Locus of Control<br>Correlation Coefficient<br>Sig. (2-tailed) | .075<br>.348 | .031<br>.699 | .074<br>.354 | .019<br>.812 | 1.000 |

**Significant Relationship between the Participants' Locus of Control and Self-efficacy**

The data yielded a value of 0.75 for mastery experience; .031 for vicarious experience; .074 for emotional state; and .019 for verbal persuasion compared to the computed correlation coefficient of the Locus of Control of 1.000 level (2-tailed). This implies that the Locus of Control and the four sources of Self-efficacy worked independently and did not affect the participants' belief that internal/external forces affect their perceptions about their capabilities to perform a certain task. In fact, Ajzen (2006) discussed that there is no necessary analogy between self-efficacy and internal control factors, or between controllability and external control factors. Instead, there were suggestions that self-efficacy and controllability may both reflect beliefs about the presence of internal and so with external factors. Additionally, Carter (2003) found out that self-efficacy and locus of control were not significant predictors of academic achievement and attendance. Therefore, the null hypothesis is accepted.

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**Conclusions and Recommendations**

In the light of the findings of this study, the following conclusions were drawn: 1) External locus of control is more dominant than internal locus. Participants believe more on the external forces such as fate, luck or other people around them in the performance of a certain task; 2) Vicarious Experiences are more powerful than any other components of self-efficacy; and 3) There is no significant relationship between the participants' locus of control and self-efficacy. Based on the conclusions drawn, the following recommendations were offered: 1) Appropriate models with high level of self-efficacy be provided since students have the tendency to rely mostly on their external control; 2) Vicarious experiences are found outside of the person; therefore proper modeling techniques may be provided for students. Teachers are supposed to be the immediate models of student. Hence, these can be achieved by providing professional development activities designed to assist them in order to understand the importance of self-efficacy and locus of control in guiding their students to better learn; and 3) Other researchers conduct the same studies with focus on related constructs such as motivation, attribution, grade point average (GPA), temperament, and so on.

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