Locus of Control and Self-Efficacy: Impact on Academic Success

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Abstract

There are several opinions about the factors that influence the academic success of college students. However, this literature review will seek to examine the influences of self-efficacy and locus of control in fueling the pedagogical success of college students. It is seen where the researchers believe that the said factors are positively correlated with academic success. As such, it is believed that students who possess a high level of self-efficacy and an internal locus of control will perform better academically as they have the innate willpower to remain motivated and tackle adverse situations. In the studies assessed in this literature review, it is seen where GPA was a primary measure of academic success. As a result, students who think that they are responsible for their performance usually performs better academically.

Keywords: self-efficacy, locus of control
Introduction

In a meritocratic society where much emphasis is placed on academic performance, it is imperative that the constructs said to influence pedagogical success be assessed. A host of research has examined the factors that contribute to academic achievement (Rotter, 1989). There is more literature that seeks to assess the effects of self-efficacy on pedagogical success than there are analyses for the impact of locus of control thereof. Self-efficacy refers to an individual’s perception of their ability to be successful at a particular task, whereas locus of control refers to the individual’s attribution to the causes of outcomes (Rotter, 1989). Although both constructs have been found consistently predictive of academic success (Au, 2015), past research has yet to analyze the unique contributions of the said constructs on the academic achievement in college students. Using Rotter’s (1989) framework of control, the current literature review seeks to evaluate how students’ perception of different types of control affect academic success.

Self-efficacy

This construct of self-efficacy seeks to measure one’s confidence in their ability to achieve an important objective. Existing literature suggests that self-efficacy plays an essential role in performance and mental health of numerous individual across various populations (Corona, Christodulu, & Rinaldi, 2017, Ozer, O’Callaghan, Bokszczanin, Ederer, & Essau, 2014). Self-efficacy has also been associated with higher life satisfaction (Duckworth, White, Matteucci, & Shearer, 2016). Similar findings were also found in studies that examine the role of self-efficacy in academic success. Au (2015) posits that students who perform well tend to report greater levels of self-efficacy and less apprehension to approach desired tasks. A higher level of self-efficacy is often attributed to students who maintain good academic standing.
Taken together, the belief in one’s ability to succeed significantly contributes to performance and motivation (Ozer et al., 2014).

Self-efficacy is examined from an individual perspective—everyone has a unique level of self-efficacy based intrinsic and extrinsic motivators. Being that self-efficacy is a self-regulatory process; findings have suggested that students who are more motivated tend to be more assertive in initiating a task and successfully carrying it out (Corona et al., 2017 and Au, 2015). The act of successfully completing a task acts as a reinforcer in academic-related conduct. Though students’ motivation tends to fluctuate in school, experiencing setbacks is likely to decrease the initial level of motivation, which often leads to subsequent avoidance of such undertakings (Duckworth et al., 2016). The said avoidance of tasks is likely to lead to a reduction in their motivation and further erodes self-efficacy. It has also been noted that students whose academic efforts are rewarded with good grades and merits have higher levels of self-efficacy and are often the ones to maintain a good academic standing in (Au, 2015).

**Locus of Control**

Locus of control is often defined as a variable that differentiates between individuals that perceive their actions to be the cause of an outcome (i.e., internal locus of control), or view external factors as being accountable for an outcome (i.e., external locus of control). To understand this construct from an academic point of view, Au (2015) examined how students’ perceived control affected their self-perception of being solely responsible and therefore capable of controlling an outcome (i.e., exam grades) through their actions (i.e., studying hard). While Au (2015) sought to assess the factors affecting internal versus external locus of control in studying how individuals were motivated to carry out an academic task and how they go about preparing for such a task. In contrast, Rotter’s (1989) model distinguished between the possible
variance of external factors. In this model, two measures were included to analyze what individual believed was the cause of their outcomes (i.e. chance or personal actions).

While Au (2015) examined the antecedents of locus of control, Rotter (1989) assessed the result of having an internal versus external locus of control in an academic setting. In assessing the said impacts, Rotter (1989) found that individuals primed by an internal locus of control often faced the same level of difficulty as it relates to course-level stressors that persons primed by an external locus of control faced. The noted distinction is the view that persons with an internal locus of control better compensate for these challenges with the drive that they will do everything humanly possible to ensure a positive outcome. As such, Richardson et al. (2012) believe that students with an internal locus of control are more likely to achieve academic success. Specifically, as it relates to college-level performance as operationalized by GPA; internal locus of control was found to be positively associated with academic performance. Other findings have supported the belief that an external locus of control is highly associated with lower life satisfaction among college students (Au, 2015).

Conclusion

Although the concepts of self-efficacy and locus of control are theoretically distinct, they are however conceptually related. For example, Ozer et al. (2014) believe that an individual with high levels of self-efficacy is more likely to perceive that they are causally responsible for their academic performance. Similarly, an individual who perceives extrinsic factors to be the cause of course-level outcome often bears a low level of self-efficacy. To further substantiate the notion of the factors affecting academic performance, research has found that perceived outcome control regulates the extent to which an individual will implement strategies to control for good performance (i.e., studying hard). Moreover, several studies have
supported the view that self-efficacy and locus of control are highly responsible for pedagogical success, in that the magnitude of each construct determines how a student will perform academically. Essentially, college students with high levels of self-efficacy and an internal locus of control are thought to perform better academically, as measured by their GPA, than students with low self-efficacy and an external locus of control (Richardson et al., 2012).
References


