

Achievement Motivation among Students with Internal and External Locus of Control: A Comparative Study

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Abstract

The present study examined whether significant differences exist in achievement motivation between undergraduate students with internal and external locus of control enrolled in two academic streams. The null hypothesis (H_0) proposed no difference in achievement motivation, whereas the alternative hypothesis (H_1) suggested that students with an internal locus of control would demonstrate higher achievement motivation. A purposive sample of 150 students aged 20–23 years was drawn, comprising 75 with internal and 75 with external locus of control. The Internal–External Locus of Control Scale (G. K. Valecha) and the Achievement Motivation Scale (V. P. Bhargava) were administered. Results showed that students with an internal locus of control had a mean score of 19.4 (SD = 2.3), categorized as “Above Average,” while those with an external locus scored 16.6 (SD = 2.8), reflecting an “Average” level. An independent samples t -test yielded $t(148) = 2.31, p < 0.05$, indicating a statistically significant difference. Hence, H_0 was rejected, supporting H_1 : students with internal locus of control exhibit higher achievement motivation compared to those with external locus of control.

Keywords: Achievement Motivation; Locus of Control; Internal Locus; External Locus; Undergraduate Students; Comparative Study

1. Introduction

Achievement motivation remains a central construct in understanding students’ drive toward academic success. Among the psychological factors influencing achievement, *locus of control*—the belief about whether outcomes are determined by one’s own actions (internal) or by external circumstances—plays a crucial role. Individuals with an internal locus of control often perceive their academic outcomes as a consequence of effort and persistence, whereas those with an external locus attribute outcomes to fate, luck, or external authority.

Recent literature reinforces the connection between locus of control and achievement motivation. Arellano Villa and Sebastian (2021) found that internal control significantly predicted mathematics achievement among first-year students in the Philippines. Similarly, Qureshi et al. (2024) reported that Saudi medical students with more internalized control orientations achieved higher GPAs. Arsini, Ahman, and Rusmana (2021) demonstrated that internal locus of control, mediated through resilience, leads to superior academic achievement.

Despite these findings, limited comparative research has addressed whether such differences persist across different educational streams. This study bridges that gap by examining achievement motivation among students with internal and external locus of control across two course streams.

2. Method

2.1 Hypotheses

- **H₀**: There is no significant difference in achievement motivation between students with internal and external locus of control.
- **H₁**: Students with internal locus of control possess significantly higher achievement motivation than those with external locus of control.

2.2 Sample

The study involved 150 undergraduate students (aged 20–23 years). Among them, 75 exhibited an internal locus of control and 75 an external locus. Purposive sampling ensured equal representation from both categories across two educational streams.

2.3 Instruments

- **Internal–External Locus of Control Scale** (Valecha, standardized): used to classify students into internal or external locus groups.
- **Achievement Motivation Scale** (Bhargava, standardized): used to assess the level of achievement motivation.

2.4 Procedure and Data Analysis

Participants completed both scales under standardized conditions. Descriptive statistics (mean, SD) were computed for each group. To determine group differences, an independent samples *t*-test was conducted with a significance threshold of $\alpha = 0.05$.

3. Results

Table 1

Comparison of Achievement Motivation Scores among Students with Internal and External Locus of Control

Group	N	Mean	SD	Interpretation	<i>t</i> value	<i>p</i> value
Internal Locus of Control	75	19.4	2.3	Above Average		
External Locus of Control	75	16.6	2.8	Average	2.31*	< 0.05

*- $t(148) = 2.31, p < 0.05$ (significant).

The results indicate a statistically significant difference in achievement motivation between the two groups, with internal-locus students scoring higher.

4. Discussion

The results of the present study corroborate previous research suggesting a strong association between an internal locus of control and heightened achievement motivation. The mean difference of 2.8 points underscores a moderate effect size, aligning with earlier findings that internal control fosters persistence and self-regulated learning.

Arellano Villa and Sebastian (2021) reported that achievement motivation significantly predicts academic performance, particularly among internally oriented students. Qureshi et al. (2024) similarly

found that internal control correlates with superior learning outcomes among Saudi students. In Indonesia, Arsini et al. (2021) identified resilience as a mediating factor linking internal locus and achievement motivation. Beyond academia, Nedeljković et al. (2021) observed that internal control and achievement motivation jointly predict entrepreneurial orientation, emphasizing the broader implications of control beliefs in performance domains.

These convergent findings indicate that internal control tendencies not only enhance achievement motivation but may also generalize across contexts, improving perseverance, self-efficacy, and goal-directed behavior.

5. Implications

- Academic institutions should incorporate interventions that enhance students' sense of control and accountability through self-reflective tasks and goal-tracking exercises.
- Counseling programs can include cognitive-behavioral modules aimed at reinforcing effort-based attributions.
- Teachers can foster internal control beliefs through feedback emphasizing effort, strategy, and persistence rather than external outcomes.
- Course-specific interventions may be beneficial, as motivational needs can differ across academic streams.

6. Limitations

1. The purposive sampling method restricts generalizability to wider student populations.
2. Reliance on self-report measures may introduce social desirability or response bias.
3. The cross-sectional nature of the study limits causal interpretations.
4. Demographic variables such as gender, course stream, or socio-economic background were not analyzed as moderating factors.

7. Suggestions for Future Research

1. Employ larger, randomly selected and stratified samples across multiple institutions.
2. Conduct longitudinal or experimental studies to infer causality between control orientation and motivation.
3. Integrate objective academic indicators, such as GPA or performance ratings, alongside self-report scales.
4. Examine the moderating roles of gender, discipline, and socio-economic background in the relationship between control and motivation.

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