



**The Relationship between
Locus of Control, EFL Reading and Writing
Achievement, and Use of Language Learning
Strategies**

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- The relationship between locus of control, L2 reading achievement, L2 writing achievement and use of language learning strategies

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- Sir Isaac Newton, letter to Robert Hooke

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List of Abbreviations

LOC = Locus of Control

LLS = Language Learning Strategies

RA = Reading Achievement

WA = Writing Achievement

Abstract

The effect of Locus of Control (LOC) on EFL learners' achievement has scarcely been examined within the context of Iran. This study is concerned with examining the relationship between EFL learners' LOC and their EFL reading and EFL writing achievement. It also explores the relationship of LOC with use of language learning strategies among EFL learners. To do so, the researcher first validated the Persian version of Internal Control Index (Duttweiler, 1984) to measure the participants' LOC. The Persian version of Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (Tahmasebi, 1999) was also used to measure the participants' language learning strategies. The results of the study indicated that 1. There is a significantly positive relationship between EFL learners' LOC and both their EFL reading and EFL writing achievements. 2. There is a significant and positive relationship between LOC and use of language learning strategies. 3. The interaction of LOC and gender has no significant effect on use of language learning strategies. The results of the interviews clearly corroborated those of the questionnaires. The findings of this study indicate that EFL teachers inculcate a sense of responsibility in their learners to find effective ways to improve their LOC so as to reach higher achievements in EFL reading and EFL writing.

Chapter One:

Introduction

1.1. Overview

Two objectives have been at the heart of the field of psychology from the earliest days of its introduction: First, to decipher the human mind's general principles and second, to explore the unique features of the human mind (Dörnyei, 2005). The second objective has given birth to a separate discipline known as Differential Psychology or recently titled Individual Difference Research. Individual Differences (IDs) are the characteristics which differ from one individual to another (Dörnyei, 2005). IDs concern anything that contributes to the uniqueness of human beings. De Raad (2000) stated that individual characteristics are emphasized in Differential Psychology but only as far as they are consistent over time.

Eysenck (1994, p .1) summarized:

Although human beings differ from each other in numerous ways, some of these ways are clearly of more significance to psychology than others. Foot size or eye color is presumably of little or no relevance determinants of behavior, whereas personality appears to play a major role in influencing our behavior. Therefore, IDs include the enduring personal characteristics applied to everyone. These characteristics maybe different among individuals by degree.

1.1.1. IDs in Second Language Studies

Research conducted in the subfeld of IDs highlighted the differences among individuals to be "consistent predictors of EFL success" (Dörnyei, 2005, p.6). Early studies of IDs tried to classify learners as good and bad, intelligent and dull, motivated and unmotivated (Horwitz, 2000). Such research aimed to identify those with the potential of receiving EFL instruction by designing some tests like Modern Language Aptitude Battery (Carroll & Sapon, 1959) and predicting which learners would be successful. For example, Language aptitude and language

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learning motivation have been emphasized by many researchers as two important concepts influencing EFL learners' success since the 1960s (Breen, 2001; Cohen & Dörnyei, 2002; Cornwell & Robinson, 2000; Dörnyei & Skehan, 2003; Ehrman,1996; Ellis, 2004; Oxford & Ehrman,1993; Robinson, 2002).

Recently more research has focused on explaining why some learners are more successful than others through the eye of IDs (Dörnyei & Skehan, 2003, Robinson, 2002; Dörnyei, 2005). Correlations of aptitude or motivation with language achievement range between 0.20 and 0.60 with a median value of a little above 0.40 (Dörnyei & Skehan, 2003). Altman (1980, cited in Ellis, 2008, p. 641) presented a long list of ID factors influencing learners' success. Robinson (2002) and Dörnyei (2005) in line with the previous research done by Skehan (1989) both included language aptitude, motivation, personality and anxiety in their list as the main factors of individual learners' differences.

Table 1.1. Factors listed as influencing learner differences in language learning in three surveys (Ellis 2008, p. 644)

Skehan (1989)	Robinson(2002)	Dörnyei(2005)
1. Language aptitude 2. Motivation 3. LL strategies 4. Cognitive and affective factors: a) Extroversion/Introversion b) Risk-taking c) Intelligence d) Field-independence e) Anxiety	1. Intelligence 2. Motivation 3. Anxiety 4. Language aptitude 5. Working memory 6. Age	1. Personality 2. Language aptitude 3. Motivation 4. Learning and cognitive styles 5. LL strategies 6. Other learners' characteristics a) Anxiety b) Creativity c) Willingness to communicate d) Self-esteem e) Learner beliefs

Despite this fact, IDs studies have been marginalized in second language acquisition, mainly due to the concern with the universalistic aspects of acquisition (Ellis, 2008). Ellis (2004) explains that what is obvious is the lack of a unifying framework with regard to IDs. So, he decided to "impose some order on

this field of enquiry" (Ellis 2004). He distinguished IDs according to whether they include 1. Abilities (cognitive abilities necessary for language learning) 2. Propensities (preparedness or orientation to language learning) 3. Learner cognition about EFL learning (beliefs or concepts about EFL learning) and finally learner activities (learner strategies) (see the following table).

Table 1.2. Factors responsible for individual differences in EFL learning (Ellis 2008, p. 645)

Category	Factors
A) Abilities	1. Intelligence 2. Working memory 3. Language aptitude
B) Propensities	1. Learning styles 2. Motivations 3. Anxiety 4. Personality 5. Willingness to communicate
C) Learner cognition about EFL learning	1. Learner beliefs
D) Learner actions	1. Learning strategies

Besides, most ID research studies have relied on quantitative methods of data collection and analysis. A number of well-established questionnaires with high reliability and validity have been developed so far (Ellis, 2008).

1.2. Statement of the Problem

Oxford and Ehrman (1993) mentioned that teachers should identify IDs among their learners and take them into consideration in order to create the most effective instructions. However, Williams and Burden (1997) despite the broad research conducted in the sub-discipline of IDs, observed some problems with regard to the research implications and methodology. Instead of indicating some useful ways to help teachers explain how learners differ, how to assist them to take control of their own learning, and how to mediate their learning, the research has mainly covered the selection of particular learners' characteristics and measurement of such characteristics (Williams & Burden, 1997).

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Furthermore, these constructs are mainly associated with their tests. Strengthening the validity of such tests may lead to a belief that such constructs are fixed (Williams & Burden, 1997). However, some of these constructs such as motivation, anxiety, and aptitude are amenable to change. Learners' high degree of motivation depends on a set of interacting variables. Anxiety is also highly situation-based and is affected by a set of different factors (Horwitz & Yung, 1991). Moreover, the findings of research on aptitude, the ease with which learners learn a foreign language, may excuse teachers' unsuccessful way of teaching some learners by referring to their lack of ability or aptitude for language learning (Dörnyei, 2005).

In general, major points regarding IDs research can be summarized as in the following:

1. Research in the IDs area is based on a theory of learning which considers individuals' behaviors as being affected by a set of traits or attributes which are fixed.
2. The practical value of the findings have been limited because they do not give us information on how teachers can help learners to become effective learners. (Williams & Burden, 1997, p.95)

Therefore, as Williams and Burden (1997, p.95) mentioned, a new approach including the individuals' main contributions to the learning situation within the constructive approach is needed because:

1. Such a theory enables EFL teachers to highlight the uniqueness of individuals and help teachers to see what they have in common.
2. It helps EFL teachers to see how individuals change rather than how they stay the same.
3. It enables teachers to help learners take control of their own learning.
4. It concerns EFL learners' perceptions of themselves as learners.

In such a constructivist approach, an individuals' understanding of the world is gradually reshaped as they adapt their knowledge to new information. The way in which EFL learners perceive the world and themselves play an important role in their learning. Thus, rather than focusing on how EFL learners are different from each other or measuring their differences, it would be really useful to

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concentrate on how EFL learners perceive themselves as language learners, what influences their personal views have on their learning processes, and how EFL teachers can assist them in making sense of their learning that is personal to them. One important area which is related to how EFL learners perceive themselves is Locus of Control (LOC).

Arising from Rotters' Social Learning Theory (1954), the concept of LOC was articulated in his 1966 paper which has proved to be the most cited article in the psychological and social science literature of the previous decades, with 4,700 citations by the end of the 1980's (Rotter, 1990).

LOC refers to a person's belief about control over life events (Findley & Cooper, 1983). Some people feel personally responsible for the things that happen to them. These people are labeled internalizers. Others feel that their outcomes in life are determined by forces beyond their control. These people are labeled externalizers (Findley & Cooper, 1983). LOC is certainly modifiable through experience (Findley & Cooper, 1983). In other words, LOC concerns the extent to which people believe that what happens to them is dependent upon their own behaviors and therefore controllable, or, alternatively, whether events are the product of non-controllable factors such as luck or fate (Elliot, 1997).

Findley and Cooper (1983) asserted that an individual's belief about LOC has been frequently studied as an antecedent to important social behaviors and psychological states. One set of behaviors that received extensive study concerned achievement related activities (Findley & Cooper, 1983). However, the extent to which LOC may impinge on EFL learners' success has not received due attention in Iran. The purpose of this particular study is to investigate the relationship between LOC and EFL reading and EFL writing achievement among EFL Iranian learners. The reason why achievement was chosen as a variable to be studied with relation to LOC can be explained in the way Macaro (2009) discusses the concept of success, proficiency, and achievement, and expertise with regard to good language learners. First, his definitions of such terms are presented in the following table:

Table 1.3. Macaro's definition of proficiency, achievement, success, and expertise.

Proficiency	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. A measurement of a level of ability in one or more of the four language skills regardless of all EFL related factors.2. It is blind to such factors such as<ol style="list-style-type: none">a) The time learners started learning EFLb) The setting in which they have learned or studied EFLc) The quality of the instructiond) Learners' motivation
Achievement	A measure of the four skills of language which very often takes into consideration what proficiency does not.
Success	Doing well at a specific task at a certain moment in time.
Expertise	A tendency to repeatedly show an ability to learn a language

Now the question is "which one of these categories does the good language learner belong to?" Macaro (2009) maintains that

1. Expert learners are not in the majority and since all learners do not have their opportunities, it is not worth modeling teaching approaches on them.
2. Due to the nature of proficiency, it is not reasonable to compare proficient learners' characteristics with their classmates'.
3. There is not a standard definition for the "successful learner". This indicator seems to be the most obscure indicator of language learners.
4. Good language learners seem to be high achievers due to the evidence before teachers and researchers. They do better than other EFL learners despite the fact that they receive the same language experience.

Macaro (2009) concludes that

It appears that the most fruitful avenue of research in terms of identifying the good language learner is to look for the high and low achievers as compared to their immediate peers. However, in so doing, it is essential to control carefully for many linguistic and educational variables (p.25)

1.3 Significance of the Study

Achievement in a foreign language may depend on so many factors. Exploring the effect of LOC which has a dynamic nature on EFL learners' achievement can provide EFL teachers with useful information concerning how their learners' perceptions of control over their learning may affect their achievements in such skills like reading and writing.

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LOC is closely related to the concept of motivation through some theories such as attribution theory (Jarvis, 2005; Dörnyei, 2005). The term attribution refers to the learners' explanations for their progress in learning a second or foreign language (Ellis, 2008). Dörnyei (2005, 79) maintained that "the subjective reasons to which we attribute our past successes and failures considerably shape our motivational disposition, underlying future action". Attribution theory (Weiner, 1979), which is a cognitive approach to motivation, focuses on what individuals attribute their success or failure in their life. Internalizers attribute their success and failure to internal forces like effort and ability, while externalizers attribute them to external factors like their fate or luck. Therefore, examining the relationship of EFL learners' LOC with their achievements in EFL language skills such as reading and writing can help EFL teachers to contemplate on the ways their learner' attributions can motivate or demotivate them to take control of their own learning.

There are also several reasons highlighting the importance of language learning strategies while examining the relationship between LOC and EFL learners' achievement in EFL reading and EFL writing. First, since EFL learners with different levels of LOC orientations have to process a high amount of information in the classroom, they may use different strategies in processing new input and performing different tasks. Therefore, language learning strategies show how EFL learners approach tasks and problems they face in the course of learning with regard to the factors they attribute their previous success or failure.

The second reason lies in the fact that the language learners who are capable of controlling their own learning may improve their language learning skills through using proper strategies. Metacognitive strategies help improve organization of time, self monitoring, and self evaluation. Using previous knowledge to help solve new problems is part of cognitive strategies. Asking a native speaker to correct their pronunciation or asking a classmate to work together on a certain problem is part of socio-affective strategies. Acquiring skills in the three areas of metacognitive, cognitive, and socio-affective can help the learners develop independence and autonomy and gain control of his learning (Fedderholdt, 1997, cited in Noormohammadi, 2000, p. 27).

As for the third reason, language learning strategies contribute to the development of the communicative competence of the students (Lessard-Clouston, 1997). Language learning strategies broadly refer to all the strategies in learning a foreign language including communicative strategies. Therefore, EFL teachers who want to improve their students' communicative competence and language learning have to become familiar with language learning strategies. As Oxford (1990) maintains language learning strategies are especially important for language learning because they are tools for active, self-directed movement, which is essential for developing communicative competence. Therefore, the relationship of use of such strategies by EFL learners with their LOC orientation and EFL skills achievement can help EFL teachers to model the strategies, in case there are significant relationship among the three variables, used by those with higher LOC orientations for those with lower LOC orientations to take control of their learning.

Nevertheless, it is always possible that a poor language learner using positive language learning strategies becomes unsuccessful in learning the target language due to some other reason. Therefore, it should be noted that only using good language learning strategies cannot help poor language learners become successful learners because there are a number of other factors involved in the process of language learning.

1.4. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to investigate the relationship between Iranian undergraduate EFL university students' LOC and their EFL reading and EFL writing achievement. The researcher will also examine the relationship between LOC and use of language learning strategies among such students.

1.5. Research Questions

The study was designed to address the following research questions:

1. Is there any significant relationship between EFL learners' LOC and their reading achievement?

2. Are there any significant differences in EFL reading achievement between internalizers and externalizers?
3. Is there any significant relationship between EFL learners' LOC and their writing achievement?
4. Are there any significant differences in EFL writing achievement between internalizers and externalizers?
5. Is there any significant relationship between EFL learners' LOC and their use of language learning strategies?
6. Are there any significant differences in use of language learning strategies between internalizers and externalizers?
7. Does the interaction of LOC and gender have any significant effect on language learning strategies among EFL learners?

1.6. Null hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were examined in this study:

H01: There is no significant relationship between EFL learners' LOC and their reading achievement.

H02: There are no significant differences in EFL reading achievement between internalizers and externalizers.

H03: There is no significant relationship between EFL learners' LOC and their writing achievement.

H04: There are no significant differences in EFL writing between internalizers and externalizers.

H05: There is no significant relationship between EFL learners' LOC and their use of language learning strategies.

H06: There are no significant differences in use of language learning strategies between internalizers and externalizers.

H07: The interaction of LOC and gender has no significant effect on use of language learning strategies among EFL learners.