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EFL learners' locus of control and translation achievement

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Abstract

This study sought to investigate the relationship between Internal Locus of Control and English as a foreign language (EFL) learners' translation achievement and to explore whether there was a significant difference in locus of control among different groups of EFL learners. The participants of the study comprised seventy-two EFL tertiary level students in a translation course at a state university in Turkey. The data were collected by means of Internal Locus of Control Index (ILCI) and achievement tests. Findings revealed that EFL learners' loci of control significantly moderated their translation achievement. They had the potential to use their effort in translation studies when they were required to translate even complicated translation works. The results of the Pearson product-moment correlation and partial correlation tests indicated that the higher EFL learners' internal locus of control was, the more they achieved in the translation course.

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Keywords: Locus of control; EFL learners; translation achievement; internal locus of control; external locus of control

Introduction

Locus of control (LOC) is a kind of psychological construct which significantly affects individuals' motivation and language learning (Weiner, 1992). Individuals with an internal locus of control orientation tend to direct their success and failure to their efforts, while those with an external locus of control orientation believe that superficial values and beliefs such as

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luck and fate have much role. The concept of internal locus of control is related to Attribution Theory which is concerned with how and why individuals explain events as they do (Jarvis, 2005). Developed by Weiner (1992), the Theory of Attribution embraces four attributions, how the individuals see or understand success and failure in their life as effort, ability, success, and the level of difficulty of the tasks they are in. The nature of the attributions related to learners' success or failure was explained in three ways- locus of control, stability, and lastly controllability (Weiner, 1992). Locus of control indicates individuals' beliefs that can be controlled by events affecting them. Stability defines the idea that failure or success may have stable causes or unstable ones, and controllability is the situation that events or elements are within the individuals' control or not.

In various countries of the world, the tertiary level students who have learned English as a foreign language are studying to achieve expertise in translation among the compulsory courses at their universities. As translation studies have a high potential in the agenda of countries speaking English as a foreign language, it is vital to understand how people recognize the world, and each individual has a very decisive responsibility in their own learning process. Thus, it is more efficient not to focus on how learners are different from one another or measuring language learners' differences. In fact, it would be avail to spotlight how learners perceive themselves as foreign language learners, and what influences their individual views have on their learning processes. The purpose of the present paper is to examine the relationship between Internal Locus of Control and English as a foreign language (EFL) students' translation achievement and to apprehend whether or not there is a significant difference in locus of control among different groups of EFL students.

Literature review

A locus of control is a construct depending on whether the results of individuals' actions are outcomes of what they do –internally- or on events outside their personal control –externally- (Zimbardo, 1985). Psychologist Julian Rotter proposed that human behaviors were directed by rewards and punishments, and that there was a potentially serious relationship between the causes and consequences for their actions (1966). This suggests that individuals' beliefs about the causes of their actions, in turn, influence their behaviors and attitudes (Kool, & Agrawal, 2006).

Internal locus of control

Individuals with an internal locus of control perceive that the right decisions and efforts they made result in their winning the award. If they do not achieve, they consider that is because of their very own lack of effort. An internal locus of control has been shown to develop with the development of self-regulatory abilities. Many factors have been associated with an internal locus of control. Males are apt to be more internal than females when it comes to personal successes. This might be due to cultural norms that emphasize aggressive behavior in males and submissive behavior in females. As societal structures change, this distinction may become minimized. As getting older, people also become more internal. This may be due to the fact that as children, individuals do not have much control over their lives. Moreover, people promoting in jobs and organizational structures tend to be more internal. Rotter (1966) theorized that this trait was most closely associated with motivation to succeed.

External locus of control

People having an external locus of control consider that rewards are concluded by either luck or others with more power than them. If they do not succeed, they believe it is due to forces outside of their control. Individuals who grow up in circumstances where they do not observe hard work pay off, as well as individuals who are socially disempowered (for example, people from lower socioeconomic statuses), may develop an external locus of control. An external locus of control can be related to learned helplessness in a responsive environment. Evidence has supported the theory that locus of control is learned and can be modified. However, in a non-responsive environment, where an individual actually does not have much control, an external locus of control is associated with a greater sense of satisfaction (Grantz, 2006).

Locus of control and student achievement

There are some studies corresponding to locus of control and academic achievement. All of these studies encapsulate to the same conclusion that students having an internal locus of control had greater academic achievement than students having an external locus of control (Uget, 2007). People having an internal locus of control admit that working hard and studying brings good grades and academic achievements. For this reason, they study and concentrate on their homework much more (Grantz, 2006). But people with an external locus of control have no control over the grade they get. Since they had bad experiences, they got low grades from school assignments, concluding them to have lower expectations from their academic life

(Grantz, 2006). They believe that any achievement they have will be good fortune or the task was too simple. They strongly believe that low success and the purposes they set are improbable (Uget, 2007). Beside the growing interest in locus of control and student achievement, awareness-raising studies on locus on control and student achievement have been recently pinpointed. In Bedel's (2012) study on the examination of locus of control, epistemological beliefs and metacognitive awareness levels of preservice early childhood education teachers, it was revealed that there were significant correlations between Locus of Control and Epistemological Beliefs Scale. This suggests that both locus of control and metacognitive awareness are interrelated.

Additionally, Griffin's (2014) research on 557 university students in the United States demonstrated that external locus of control predicted unique variance in self-esteem, depression and stress while internal locus of control had no unique association with psychological well-being. This implies that internal and external LOC should be measured as two discrete constructs, and that external LOC is the main factor in predicting well-being, and it might affect students' achievement. Similarly, Grob (2000) stated that stress could be the result of feeling powerless in any given circumstances, which suggested it was linked to having an external locus of control. On the other hand, Klonowicz (2001) measured locus of control as a determinant of subjective well-being and made similar conclusions. He discovered that high internal locus of control induced more positive affect. These studies suggested that internal and external locus of control as separate constructs had a unique association with psychological well-being to measure students' academic achievement.

Changing external locus of control

When a student in any classroom setting seems to have a problem with his/her grades and does not have will for advancement, that student may have an external locus of control. (Grantz, 2006). To increase the motivation of the learners in a classroom setting, more specifically strengthening their internal locus of control, attribution training can be integrated into the learning environment. In the attribution training, students should be encouraged to specify positive things about themselves. For instance, "I can do this" or "This can be done with hard work". Students should train themselves on the regulations and change of the things they are interested in (Grantz, 2006). Students should be stimulated spiritually to combine their academic troubles with the reason of their adversities and they should be supervised to perform the effect of their behaviors (Uget, Habibah, & Jegak, 2007).

Students' locus of control can considerably alter their academic achievement. Their perception on the world around them influences how well they succeed in school. It works if one study and work hard, one succeed well. But students having an external locus of control do not have the same feelings and think that they do not need to try. These thoughts, certainly, will effectuate students' academic achievement. Though there are some alternatives to change their way of thinking, it may not be successful every time. The substantial thing is that we should inspire our children at a very early age and explain them that a constant studying makes a crucial difference.

Purpose of the study

Given that locus of control is an important individual difference construct, the present study set out to study the relationship between internal locus of control and English as a foreign language (EFL) students' translation achievement and to understand whether or not there is a significant difference in locus of control among different groups of EFL students. Thus, the following research questions were formulated to guide the study.

1. What are the most frequent loci of internal control in the translation achievement of EFL students?
2. Are there any significant differences in Locus of Control of EFL learners with high achievement, average achievement, and low achievement?
3. Is there any relationship between EFL students' Locus of Control and their translation achievement?
4. Is the relationship between translation achievement of EFL students and Locus of Control even when midterm attribution is controlled?

Method

Setting and participants

The present research was conducted in the Department of English Language and Literature (ELL) at a state university in Turkey. Similar to all ELL departments in Turkey, the curriculum encapsulates compulsory translation courses for the junior and senior students in both fall and spring terms of the academic year. It is expected that students studying English Language and Literature have gained proficiency in both the target language and their native

languages conceptually and literarily. To increase EFL students' achievement in translation, some psychological factors such as locus of control, causing differences in the performance of the students are needed to be handled (Ellis, 2012). Additionally, understanding whether internalizers attribute success or failure of the EFL students or not, might enlighten instructors in decision making process for the students' translation achievement. The instructors teaching the translation courses in the department have educational background in translation studies and experiences in various national and international translation projects, which is stated in the background questionnaires collected in the very beginning of the research.

The participants of the study comprised a total of 72 university students (female: 45, 62.5%; male: 27, 37.5%) who were enrolled in the Department of English Language and Literature at a state university in Turkey. Their ages ranged from 20 to 26. The participants' proficiency level in English language based on their academic achievement, was determined as the proficient user (C1-Effective Operational Proficiency and C2-Mastery) based on the Common European Framework of References (CEFR). The participants were senior students studying English as a foreign language nearly for 10 years. When the study was conducted, they had already taken translation classes for three semesters at the same university as a compulsory course in the department. The samples were obtained from populations of equal variances, which means that the group was homogeneous. The participants were not grouped as both male and female since the discrimination between male and female students in terms of locus of control was not questioned in this study.

Prior to the data collection, the senior students at the ELL department of a state university were asked whether they would like to participate to a research study on translation studies and locus of control. They voluntarily participated in the research. The students gave consent for the use of their exam scores in the research. During the data collection process, the participants were informed about how to complete the scale, and were required to respond to each item. Additionally, they were expected to identify themselves with their full names in the scale. The participants were assured that the instructors of the translation course would not see the results of the scale. The researcher administered the inventory in the classrooms and the administration of the scale took about 30 minutes.

Data collection instruments

Internal Locus of Control Index

Internal Locus of Control Index (ILCI), a 5-point Likert-scale developed by Duttweiler (1984), was administered to the participants in this study. The scale includes twenty eight items and the participants were expected to respond on the five frequency uses of each item, ranging from 'rarely' to usually 'usually'. The internal consistency of the scale was $\alpha = .85$.

The achievement instrument

Grade-point averages (GPA) of the participants' midterm and final course exams were used to measure the translation achievement. Midterm and final exams comprised literary texts in both first language (Turkish) and the target language (English) or vice versa. Each exam incorporated paragraph translation rather than sentence translation for a contextual translation. Four texts (two texts for both Turkish and English languages) were involved in each translation exam but the participants were required to translate three of them in two hours by using their own bilingual dictionaries. Moreover, a translation exam was given to the participants to understand their translation achievement before taking the translation course in the beginning of the fall term of the 2013-2014 academic year. Translation achievement among the EFL students is classified as high achievement if it is higher than 85; average achievement, 70 to 84; low achievement between 0-69. 70 is a cut off point for the translation course achievement in the ELL department.

Procedures for data collection and analysis

Each participant's translation achievement was scored by GPA of the translation course exams. The mean scores of midterm and final exams in the fall term of 2013-2014 academic years were calculated. After the data collection process, the researcher checked the data to discover whether there were any abnormal data entries in the variables, and whether translation achievement scores were normally distributed. It is assumed that the participants ($n=72$) from which the samples are taken are normally distributed. With large enough sample size, the violation of this assumption do not cause any major problems. The distributions of the scores for each participants were checked using histograms. Parametric tests were applied to analyse the collected data. Then, the statistical techniques to analyse the data were selected and then applied step by step by following each research question. Descriptive statistics, One-way ANOVA, Pearson correlation, and partial correlation were used as data analysis methods in the present study. Descriptive statistics was utilized to define the participants' frequent use of the items.

To determine the impact of locus of control variable on translation achievement levels, One-way ANOVA was used to define the research question two. It lets the researcher know whether the groups' -gp1(0-69), gp2(70-84), gp3(85-100)- translation achievements differed regarding locus of control. Besides, post-hoc comparisons were conducted to identify which groups were significantly different from one another. Pearson correlation, a correlation coefficient suitable for ordinal or ranked data, was employed to see the relation between locus of control and achievement, corresponding to the third research question. For the last research question, partial correlation was used to measure whether the relationship between translation achievement of the students and locus of control was influenced, at least to some extent, by midterm exam. The reason for identifying the midterm exam as a contaminating variable is that midterm exam is one of the scores affecting the total translation achievement and the midterm scores were lower than the final exam as students could not practice till the midterm exam as much as until the final exam. This can artificially serve to the size of the obtained correlation coefficient value.

Results and discussions

The results of descriptive statistics reveal that the most frequently nominated attributions of internal locus of control on translation achievement are as follows: The EFL students consider the different sides of an issue before making any decisions ($M = 4.4444$, $SD = .78523$); They like jobs where they can make decisions and be responsible for their own work ($M = 4.3889$, $SD = .88103$); If they want something they work hard to get it ($M = 4.3056$, $SD = .92901$); When something is going to affect them they learn as much about it as they can ($M = 4.1176$, $SD = .80167$); Whenever something good happens to them they feel it is because they've earned it ($M = 4.1127$, $SD = .94943$); Knowing they have done something well is more important than being praised by some else ($M = 4.0857$, $SD = 1.1130$); and they enjoy being in a position of leadership ($M = 4.0000$, $SD = .99293$).

Table 1. *Descriptive statistics*

Items (ILCI)	N	Mean	SD
IT10- I consider the different sides of an issue before making any decisions.	72	4.4444	.78523

IT3- I like jobs where I can make decisions and be responsible for my own work.	72	4.3889	.88103
IT5- If I want something I work hard to get it.	72	4.3056	.92901
IT16- When something is going to affect me I learn as much about it as I can.	72	4.1176	.80167
IT12- Whenever something good happens to me I feel it is because I've earned it.	72	4.1127	.94943
IT18- For me, knowing I've done something well is more important than being praised by some else.	72	4.0857	1.1130
IT13- I enjoy being in a position of leadership.	72	4.0000	.99293

As it is understood from each item designated above, the participants in this study revealed the feeling and idea that they are responsible for their works and when they are nominated with any kind of positions, they can try to do their best to deal with the problems. They are capable of using their effort in translation studies when they are required to translate even complicated translation works.

A one-way between-groups analysis of variance was conducted to explore the impact of translation achievement on the internal locus of control, as measured by the Internal Locus of Control Index (ILCI). Participants were divided into three groups according to their translation achievement (Group 1: 85 to 100; Group 2: 70 to 84; Group 3: 0 to 60). It was discovered that there was not a statistically significant difference in ILCI scores for the three achievement groups ($F(2, 57) = 2.9, p = .059$, significant at $p < .05$). Despite reaching statistical significance, the mean scores between the groups was quite small. Post-hoc comparisons using the Tukey HSD test indicated that the mean score for Group 1 ($M = 109.42, SD = 8.18$) was significantly different from Group 2 ($M = 99.14, SD = 9.59$) and Group 3 ($M = 99.66, SD = 12.22$).

Table 2. *One Way-ANOVA with Post-hoc test*

Groups	Mean difference	SD	F	P
Group 1 Group2	10.28	4.274	2.98	.050
Group3	9.761	4.598		.094

Group 2	Group 1	-10.28	4.274	2.98	.050
	Group 3	-.523			.983
Group 2	Group 1	9.76	4.598	2.98	.094
	Group 2	.523	2.994		.983

Note: The mean difference is significant at the .05 level.

It can be inferred from the results that there was no significant difference among all three groups except two significant levels. All groups did not demonstrate a variation by locus of control, which may indicate that both high achievement level and average achievement level utilized the same amount of locus of control.

The relationship between EFL students' locus of control and their translation achievement was investigated using Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient. There was a moderate, positive correlation between the two variables, $r = .343$, $n=60$, $p < .007$.

Table 3. *Correlation between LOC and translation achievement*

	N	p	R
LOC	60	.007*	.343
Translation Achievement			

*Note. *significant at $p < .05$*

As can be seen in Table 3, the correlation coefficient for the two variables in question was $r = .343$. This correlation is significantly positive and acceptable. Therefore, it can be concluded that the higher translation students' internal locus of control is, the more they achieve in translation course. By the same token, Majzub et al. (2009) explored the relationship between LOC and academic achievement, and internal locus of control was found to be a positive predictor of academic achievement while external locus of control to be a negative predictor of academic achievement, which supports the present findings.

Partial correlation was employed to explore the relationship between translation achievement of the students and locus of control while controlling for the midterm scores. There was a moderate, positive correlation between translation achievement of the students and locus of control, controlling for the midterm scores, $r = .390$, $n=70$, $p < .002$. An inspection of the zero order correlation ($r = .343$) suggested that controlling for socially desirable responding had a moderate effect on the strength of the relationship between these two variables.

Table 4. *Partial correlation*

	N	p	r

LOC	70	.002*	.343
Translation Achievement (Controlling for)Midterm		.007*	.390

Note. *significant at $p < .05$

As shown in Table 4, the correlation (r) values for both relationships between locus of control and translation achievement are meaningful. However, when the midterm exam scores were controlled, the correlation value between translation achievement and LOC increased from $r = .343$ to $r = .390$. This might be due to the low scores of the participants in the midterm exams and the failure in midterm affects the general translation success.

As stated in the present research within the domain of foreign language education, EFL learners' loci of control significantly affect their translation achievement. They had the potential to use their effort in translation studies when they are required to translate even complicated translation works. To redound EFL students' achievement and to nurture their motivation in this process, EFL teachers should have a lighting flash role on their students to urge them to go beyond the academic achievement and to apprehend how their perceptions of self and their environment may shape their academic performance.

Conclusion

The present research was aimed at investigating the relationship between internal locus of control and EFL learners' translation achievement. The study also sought to explore whether there was a significant difference in locus of control among different groups of EFL learners. Most of the previous studies concerned with both internal and external dichotomy affirmed that internal locus of control compared to the external was more responsive for students' achievement in second language learning context. The present study clarified that the internal locus of control is additionally a challenging psychological construct for EFL learners' achievement in an EFL context. Findings of the present research also detected a relationship between the translation achievement and internal locus of control, as well as how learners were involved in their own success and failure. The internal locus of control is assumed to operate in various domains. Yet, without any conscious knowledge about the internal and external locus of control dichotomy, it would be difficult for EFL learners to have an active role in their own learning environment. Thus, EFL learners are expected to be more aware of internal and external locus of control. Finally, further studies can be conducted on what metacognitive strategies were used by both internally and externally focused EFL learners.

The present research had a few limitations such as the department and the number of the students. Totally 72 students participating to this research were randomly selected from the department of ELL. Future research can reach to richer data collected from the students studying at the department of translation studies. Furthermore, the internal and external locus of control components might be discussed by comparing the group differences in the departments of ELL and Translation Studies. In the light of the results and limitations of this study, several pedagogical implications can be drawn from this study. Senior students' loci of control moderated their translation achievement significantly, which reflects the impact of loci of control in translation achievement in EFL context. Therefore, Turkish foreign language teachers should give instructions on the relation of both internal and external locus of control on translation achievement. It might increase students' level of metacognitive awareness and attention on their translation studies. In addition to this, a crucial implication of this study is that teachers should explore their students from different achievement levels in translation studies and develop their self-regulatory skills in translation. Moreover, the present study has raised the implications for future research on the exploration of locus of control and translation achievement in EFL context with larger samples. The size of the participants can be increased, and freshmen and senior students as sample groups can be compared with their locus of control and achievement in translation.

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