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Academic Locus of Control and Self-Handicapping

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Abstract

This study aims to examine the possible links between academic locus of control and self-handicapping. Participants were 382 university students from Sakarya University. The Academic Locus of Control Scale and the Self-handicapping Scale were used as measures. Findings showed that self-handicapping correlated positively with internal academic locus of control. Results from structural equation modeling demonstrated that the model is saturated. According to path analysis results, self-handicapping was predicted positively by internal academic locus of control and external academic locus of control.

Keywords: Academic locus of control, self-handicapping, path analysis.

1. Introduction

Locus of control structure suggested by Rotter (1954) shows a distribution on dimensions of internal-external locus of control in a way it was bound to individual’s perceiving degree of their own responsibilities for events. Internal locus of control is relevant to the belief that events or outputs result from behavior, efforts or a sustainable characteristics like ability. On the contrary, external locus of control is relevant to the belief that events or outputs result from some factors out of individual’s control like luck, difficulty of the task, or behaviors of other people (Battle & Rotter, 1963; Lefcourt, 1966, 1976; Rotter, 1966, 1975; Rotter & Mulry, 1965; Stipek, 1993). Research studying the relationship between academic achievement and locus of control proved that individuals with internal locus of control have a higher academic achievement than the ones with external academic locus of control, and this relationship is much stronger in male students compared to the female ones (Findley & Cooper, 1983). Individuals with internal academic locus of control make much effort than the ones with external locus of control because they think that they can control outputs. Also, individuals with internal academic locus of control are proud of their achievements but at the same time they feel ashamed of their failure (Hans, 2000; Mearns, 2006). Individuals with external academic locus of control experience little emotional change in both situations (Hans, 2000; Mearns, 2006). Research showed that an increased sense of personal control over the learning environment was found to be positively correlated with successful experiences of computer use (Leung, 1989). Also Santa-Rita (1997) found that subjects who used computers and completed the success assignments (a series of interactive programs that allow a substantial opportunity for entering college freshmen to operate a computer in an environment of personal control and autonomy) changed their perception of the importance of luck in the attainment of goals from what it had been prior to the study.

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This shift might represent the subjects’ beliefs that greater personal control was responsible for their success (Chak & Leung, 2004). Santa-Ritas study further suggested that learning with success might facilitate in students a greater awareness of themselves as being the controlling agents of their environment.

It is a reality that, individuals deliberately impede their own performance, if they feel uncertain of their ability to succeed and fear failure. This process of self-handicapping, involves strategies of externalization so that an individual can excuse failure and internalize (accept credit for) success (Pulford, Johnson, & Awaida, 2005). For that purpose at times, people may claim that they are ill, may provide some baseless excuse just before executing a challenging task or may reduce their effort on purpose in a competitive achievement setting to camouflage their possible incompetence (Chen, Wu, Kee, Lin, & Shui, 2009). Although self-handicapping may protect self-worth in the short term, research indicates that it has high long-term costs for the individual. Zuckerman and Tsai’s (2005) longitudinal studies found that self-handicapping led to worse health and wellbeing, lower competence satisfaction, lower intrinsic motivation, more frequent negative moods and symptoms, and higher self-reported use of various substances (Chen et al., 2009). Many other studies have also documented a wide range of negative effects associated with self-handicapping.

1.1. The present study

Despite the availability of considerable literature on academic locus of control and self-handicapping no research has been done to examine how these variables are related to each other. For this reason, the aim of the current study is to investigate the relationships between academic locus of control and self-handicapping. It was hypothesized that self-handicapping would be related positively to both internal and external academic locus of control.

2. Method

2.1. Participants

Participants were 382 university students (252 were female and 130 were male) from Sakarya University. Their ages ranged from 17 to 27 years old and GPA scores ranged from 1.95 to 3.88.

2.2. Measures

2.2.1. Academic Locus of Control Scale (ALOCS, Akin, 2007)

This is a 17-item self-report scale using a 5-point Likert scale (1=strongly disagree to 5=strongly agree). This scale has two sub-scales: External academic locus of control (11 items) and internal academic locus of control (6 items). The Cronbach alpha internal consistency coefficients were .95 for external academic locus of control and .94 for internal academic locus of control. Test-retest reliability was assessed by readministering the scale to 148 undergraduate students in three weeks time. The Pearson correlation coefficients were .93 and .97 for two subscales, respectively.

2.2.2. Self-handicapping Scale

Self-handicapping was measured using the Self-handicapping Scale (Jones & Rhodewalt, 1982). Turkish adaptation of this scale was done by Akin, Abaci, and Akin (2010). The Self-handicapping Scale is a 25-item self-report inventory (e.g., Sometimes I get so depressed that even easy tasks become difficult) and each item was rated on a 6-point scale (1=strongly disagree to 6=strongly agree). This scale is a summative scale, with items 3, 5, 6, 10, 13, 20, 22, and 23 being reversed scored. All answers given will be totaled to indicate the level of self-handicapping, with a high number indicating a greater incidence of self-handicapping. Language validity findings of the Turkish version indicated that correlations between Turkish and English items ranged from .69 to .98. The internal consistency reliability coefficient was .90 and the three-week test-retest reliability coefficient was .84.

2.3. Procedure
Permission for participation of students was obtained from related chief departments and students voluntarily participated in research. Completion of the questionnaires was anonymous and there was a guarantee of confidentiality. The instruments were administered to the students in groups in the classrooms. The measures were counterbalanced in administration. Prior to administration of measures, all participants were told about purposes of the study. In this research, Pearson correlation coefficient and structural equation modeling (SEM) were utilized to determine the relationships between academic locus of control and self-handicapping. These analyses were carried out via LISREL 8.54 (Jöreskog & Sorbom, 1996) and SPSS 13.0.

3. Results

3.1. Descriptive Data and Inter-correlations

Table 1 shows the means, descriptive statistics, inter-correlations, and internal consistency coefficients of the variables used.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>External control</th>
<th>Internal control</th>
<th>Self-handicapping</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>External control</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internal control</td>
<td>-.248**</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-handicapping</td>
<td>.118*</td>
<td>.290**</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>25.99</td>
<td>24.69</td>
<td>89.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SD</td>
<td>5.86</td>
<td>3.81</td>
<td>13.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alpha</td>
<td>.83</td>
<td>.86</td>
<td>.77</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

When Table 1 is examined, it is seen that there are significant correlations between academic locus of control and self-handicapping. Self-handicapping correlated positively with internal academic locus of control (r=.290, p<.01), and external academic locus of control (r=.118, p<.05).

3.2. Structural Equation Modeling

To test the hypothesis model (self-handicapping would be related positively to both internal and external academic locus of control) SEM was used. Using SEM, all the parameters of models can be tested simultaneously in one step. The specifications on the model were for direct paths from academic locus of control to self-handicapping. The results of testing whether academic locus of control has a direct effect on self-handicapping are presented in Figure 1.
Figure 1. Path analysis between academic locus of control and self-handicapping

Figure 1 showed that the model is saturated (i.e., there are no unused degrees of freedom). Consequently, the fit of the model is necessarily perfect. It can be seen that external academic locus of control ($\beta=0.20$) and internal academic locus of control ($\beta=0.34$) had significant and positive effects on self-handicapping. For the equation, predicting self-handicapping with achievement goals $R^2$ is 0.12. In other words, achievement goals explain 12% of the variance in self-handicapping.

4. Discussion

This study investigates the relationships between academic locus of control and self-handicapping. As such, this study marks the first attempt to relate academic locus of control to self-handicapping. Academic locus of control was expected to be an important determinant of self-handicapping and it was supposed that these two academic locus of control would be associated positively with self-handicapping. The results of correlation and SEM confirm these hypotheses and show the importance of academic locus of control as proximal determinant of self-handicapping. Also the goodness of fit indexes indicated that the model was acceptable and that correlations among measures were explained by the model (Hu & Bentler, 1999).

References


