



EFFECT OF LOCUS OF CONTROL ON JOB SATISFACTION AMONG WORKING UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

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Abstract

This research examined how Locus of Control (LOC) relates to Job Satisfaction in university students who hold jobs while completing their studies. A correlational design was used with a sample of 200 working young adults between 18 and 28 years of age, recruited through convenience sampling at universities. Participants completed Rotter's Internal-External Locus of Control Scale, the short form of the Minnesota Satisfaction Questionnaire, and a demographic sheet that also captured weekly work hours and screen time. Descriptive results pointed to a mix of internal and external control orientations across the sample. Correlation and regression procedures revealed that an internal orientation is significantly linked with greater job satisfaction, while a stronger external orientation is associated with lower satisfaction, reflecting a perceived lack of control over one's work environment. The study also explored possible gender differences and the broader challenge of adjusting to employment demands while enrolled in school. Overall, the findings suggest that an individual's belief about personal control is an important determinant of satisfaction at work, and that universities and career-support services should prioritize building internal accountability and offering structural support to help young people transition successfully into the workforce.

Keywords: *Internal Orientation, Job Satisfaction, Locus of Control, Orientation, University Students, Young Adults.*

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1. Introduction

The passage from late adolescence into early adulthood is among the most psychologically demanding periods of human development. During this phase, individuals encounter a convergence of academic pressures, shifting social roles, and growing economic responsibilities that collectively shape their long-term well-being and career trajectories. For university students in particular, this developmental window is further complicated by the expectation, and often financial necessity, of holding employment alongside academic commitments. Whether motivated by the need for income, practical experience, or professional network-building, a substantial proportion of enrolled students now hold part-time or full-time positions while pursuing their degrees. This dual role introduces a complex web of stressors that demands both cognitive and emotional resources, making it important to understand which psychological characteristics allow some students to thrive in these demanding circumstances while others fall short.

Locus of control, a concept developed by Rotter (1966) within the framework of social learning theory, describes the degree to which individuals believe that their life outcomes are shaped by their own actions rather than external forces. Those with an internal orientation credit their own effort, skill, and decision-making for the outcomes they experience, whereas those with an external orientation attribute outcomes to luck, fate, chance, or the decisions of powerful others (Rotter, 1966). This distinction carries substantial consequences for how individuals approach challenges, regulate their emotional responses, and evaluate their own capabilities in structured environments such as the workplace. Prior research confirms that locus of control shapes how young people navigate stressful transitions, approach problem-solving, and judge their own professional competence (Akin, 2011).

Job satisfaction, broadly defined as the positive evaluative and affective response a person holds toward their work, has been repeatedly identified as a critical predictor of organizational productivity, employee retention, and overall quality of life (Weiss et al., 1967). High levels of job satisfaction are associated with lower absenteeism, reduced intention to leave a position, and better physical and mental health outcomes, while low satisfaction is linked to burnout, emotional exhaustion, and disengagement. A well-established line of empirical work has demonstrated that belief in personal control is among the most reliable individual-level predictors of vocational satisfaction (Bowling et al., 2010). Employees with stronger internal orientations tend to actively modify their work environments, draw on constructive coping strategies, and interpret workplace difficulties as growth opportunities rather than fixed obstacles (Dailey, 1980). By contrast, those with external orientations are more likely to adopt passive, reactive approaches to work, depend on external validation for a sense of worth, and experience higher levels of occupational anxiety and dissatisfaction (Bowling et al., 2010; Jacob, 2023). Spector (1982)

documented that external control beliefs are associated with lower work motivation, higher stress, and less favorable evaluations of organizational conditions across diverse occupational settings.

Despite growing scholarly interest in this area, important contextual gaps remain. Most existing organizational research on locus of control has concentrated on full-time professionals in established corporate settings, leaving the early career experiences of working university students comparatively underexplored. This population occupies a unique position: they are simultaneously enrolled students and employees, navigating two demanding environments with limited resources, experience, and institutional leverage. The cognitive orientations they bring to these environments, including their beliefs about personal control, may exercise a particularly strong influence on their early occupational experiences in ways that have lasting implications for career development (Jacob, 2023). Simmers and McMurray (2022) similarly noted that the LOC–satisfaction relationship is shaped by work values and the fit between personal beliefs and occupational roles, suggesting that early work experiences are a formative context in which control orientations become either reinforced or challenged. Understanding how these dynamics operate specifically among working students is therefore both theoretically meaningful and practically important for institutions seeking to support students' transition into the workforce.

1.1. Rationale of the Study

Most prior research on locus of control has centered on its connection to performance outcomes and turnover intention in established corporate environments. Comparatively little is understood about how these cognitive orientations shape the subjective experience of job satisfaction among students who are simultaneously managing full academic workloads and entering the labor force for the very first time. Understanding this relationship more precisely can help institutions develop targeted support mechanisms that address the psychological needs of this transitional population and improve their early career satisfaction, engagement, and long-term retention in the workforce.

1.2. Objectives of the Study

1. To examine the relationship between Locus of Control and Job Satisfaction among working university students.
2. To assess the extent to which Locus of Control predicts Job Satisfaction outcomes in this population.
3. To explore whether gender differences exist in Locus of Control and Job Satisfaction within the university student sample.

1.3. Hypotheses

H1: Locus of Control (internal versus external) is significantly associated with Job Satisfaction among working university students.

H2: Locus of Control significantly predicts Job Satisfaction outcomes among young adult university students.

H3: There are significant gender differences in Locus of Control and Job Satisfaction among university students.

1.4. Conceptualized Model

The framework below illustrates the directional relationship proposed in this study. Locus of Control functions as the independent predictor variable, Job Satisfaction is the primary outcome, and Gender is examined as a potential moderating variable influencing the direction or strength of this relationship.

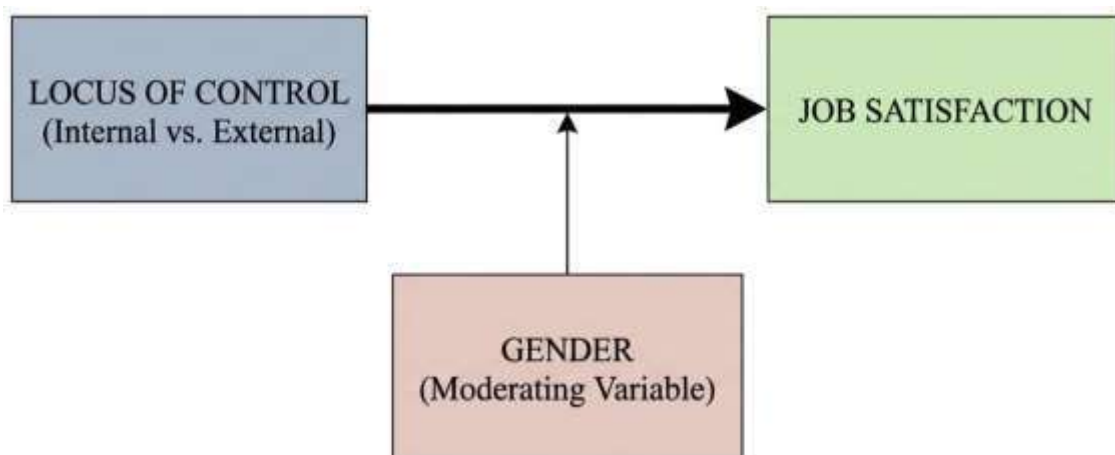


Figure 1. Conceptualized model showing Locus of Control predicting Job Satisfaction, with Gender as a moderating variable.

2. Methodology

2.1. Research Design

A quantitative, cross-sectional correlational design was used to examine how Locus of Control relates to Job Satisfaction among university students. This design is appropriate for identifying associations and predictive patterns between psychosocial variables within naturalistic settings, without any experimental manipulation of the environment.

2.2. Sample

A total of 200 young adults were recruited through convenience sampling from university settings and surrounding communities. Eligible participants were between 18 and 28 years of age, currently enrolled at a university while also engaged in part-time or full-time employment, able to respond in English, and willing to provide informed consent.

Individuals with a diagnosed severe psychiatric or neurological condition were excluded from the final sample to avoid confounding the psychological measures.

2.3. Instruments

2.3.1. Demographic Information Sheet

A researcher-developed questionnaire gathered information on age, gender, educational level (BS or MS), socio-economic background, weekly hours worked, and primary employment sector.

2.3.2. Rotter's Internal-External Locus of Control Scale

This standardized measure (Rotter, 1966) uses a forced-choice format to assess control orientation, distinguishing between participants who attribute outcomes to personal effort versus those who attribute them to external factors. Internal consistency in prior student samples ranges from $\alpha = .75$ to $.84$.

2.3.3. Minnesota Satisfaction Questionnaire – Short Form

This 20-item, 5-point Likert scale (Weiss et al., 1967) assesses intrinsic satisfaction (e.g., sense of accomplishment) and extrinsic satisfaction (e.g., pay, supervision, company policies). Established reliability ranges from $\alpha = .85$ to $.92$.

3. Procedure and Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval and informed consent were obtained prior to data collection. Participants completed the demographic questionnaire first, followed by the two standardized instruments. Anonymity was maintained through numerical coding and no incentives were provided. Data were analyzed using SPSS Version 26 with descriptive statistics, Cronbach's alpha, Pearson correlation, linear regression, and independent samples t-tests for gender comparisons.

4. Results

Table 1: *Frequency and Percentage of Participants (N = 200)*

Demographic Variable	<i>f</i>	Percentage
Age		
18–20	162	81.0
21–25	21	10.5
26–28	17	8.5
Gender		
Male	53	26.5
Female	116	58.0
Prefer not to say	31	15.5
Qualification		
BS (Undergraduate)	169	84.5
MS / MPhil	31	15.5
Weekly Work Hours		
Less than 20 hours	40	20.0

21–35 hours	119	59.5
More than 35 hours	41	20.5

Note. Subheadings indicate demographic categories. Percentages are calculated relative to the total sample.

Table 2: *Descriptive Statistics and Reliability of Study Variables (N = 200)*

Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Cronbach's α
Locus of Control (LOC)	12.45	4.12	.79
Job Satisfaction (MSQ)	68.32	11.20	.86

Note. Both scales demonstrated acceptable to good internal consistency. Mean scores indicate a moderate sense of personal control alongside moderately high job satisfaction in this working student sample.

Table 3: *Pearson Correlation Matrix Among Study Variables (N = 200)*

Variable	1	2
1. Locus of Control (LOC)	—	.38**
2. Job Satisfaction (MSQ)	.38**	—

Note. ** $p < .01$. A significant positive correlation emerged between an internal locus of control and job satisfaction ($r = .38, p < .01$).

Table 4: *Linear Regression Analysis Predicting Job Satisfaction (N = 200)*

Predictor	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	β	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Locus of Control	1.03	.18	.38	5.82	.000

Note. $R^2 = .144, F(1, 198) = 33.87, p < .001$. Locus of Control was a significant positive predictor of job satisfaction ($\beta = .38, p < .001$).

5. Discussion

The central objective of this study was to investigate how Locus of Control relates to Job Satisfaction among university students who are simultaneously managing academic responsibilities and employment. The results offer strong empirical support for the proposed conceptual framework, indicating that students' beliefs about personal control meaningfully shape how satisfied they feel in their work. Each hypothesis is discussed in turn below, with reference to supporting evidence and relevant theoretical perspectives from the organizational and developmental psychology literature.

Consistent with the first hypothesis, an internal locus of control was positively and significantly associated with job satisfaction ($r = .38, p < .01$). Students who reported a stronger sense of agency over their outcomes were considerably more likely to express satisfaction with their employment. This aligns with a well-established body of organizational research demonstrating that internal control beliefs foster greater work engagement, more constructive responses to occupational challenges, and more positive evaluations of one's work environment (Rotter, 1966; Bowling et al., 2010). In the specific context of university students, this effect is particularly meaningful because early work

experiences are formative: the beliefs young adults carry into their first employment roles can influence how they approach skill development, professional relationships, and career decision-making for years to come.

The regression analysis confirmed the second hypothesis by establishing Locus of Control as a statistically significant predictor of job satisfaction ($\beta = .38, p < .001$), with the model accounting for 14.4% of the variance in satisfaction scores. While this indicates that additional variables, such as workplace autonomy, supervisor quality, task variety, and organizational climate, also contribute to the outcome, the predictive weight of a single personality variable in a complex real-world context is practically meaningful and consistent with prior meta-analytic estimates (Bowling et al., 2010). From an applied standpoint, these findings suggest that fostering more internal control beliefs among students is a viable and worthwhile target for institutional intervention.

This pattern of findings becomes especially significant when considered against the backdrop of the dual pressures facing working students. Unlike established employees whose primary identity is occupational, working students must simultaneously manage coursework, examinations, social demands, and employment obligations, often with limited time and limited organizational experience. In this demanding context, an internal locus of control appears to function as a psychological buffer, allowing students to perceive themselves as active agents of their own situation rather than passive recipients of circumstances beyond their reach. Students with this orientation are more inclined to use proactive coping strategies such as deliberate time management, open communication with supervisors, and targeted skill-building, all of which increase the probability of positive work experiences (Dailey, 1980). Students leaning toward external orientations, by contrast, tend to interpret workplace difficulties as fixed and beyond their influence, reducing their motivation to engage constructively and increasing vulnerability to disengagement and dissatisfaction over time (Bowling et al., 2010).

These findings also connect meaningfully with Spector's (1982) foundational analysis of control beliefs in organizational behavior, which documented that externally oriented employees report lower motivation, heightened work-related anxiety, and less favorable appraisals of their working conditions. Vijayashree (2011) similarly found significant positive associations between internal control and vocational satisfaction among public sector employees, reinforcing the cross-contextual reliability of this relationship. Abdel Hadi et al. (2023) further highlighted that the LOC–satisfaction link is influenced by educational level, suggesting that higher educational attainment may strengthen the internal orientation needed to navigate professional environments effectively, a finding especially relevant to the university student population examined in the present study.

The uneven gender distribution of the sample constrained the power and interpretability of the gender comparison analysis required to test the third hypothesis. Some prior work has suggested that cultural socialization patterns may encourage female employees to place comparatively greater emphasis on contextual factors when explaining career outcomes, though these tendencies vary substantially across cultural contexts, educational backgrounds, and occupational fields (Hanif & Sultan, 2011). The current findings cannot resolve this question definitively, and it represents a meaningful avenue for future investigation.

6. Limitations of the Study

1. Cross-Sectional Design. The correlational design prevents causal conclusions. It cannot be determined from these results whether an internal control orientation leads to greater job satisfaction, whether positive work experiences reinforce internal beliefs, or whether a third variable accounts for the observed association. Longitudinal studies are needed to address this gap.
2. Convenience Sampling. Participants were drawn from specific university environments, which may introduce selection bias and limit generalizability to wider youth populations or other cultural settings.
3. Gender Imbalance. The overrepresentation of female participants limits the statistical power of gender comparison analyses. Stratified sampling should be used in future research to ensure balanced representation.
4. Self-Report Bias. Both primary instruments rely entirely on participant self-report and are therefore susceptible to social desirability effects and common method variance.

7. Recommendations

The findings carry several practical implications for universities, career counselors, and employers of student workers. At the institutional level, career development programs should move beyond resume preparation to offer structured workshops grounded in cognitive-behavioral principles, focused on strengthening students' sense of internal accountability, professional self-efficacy, and proactive problem-solving in workplace contexts. Teaching students to identify and act on the elements of their work environment they can realistically control can help foster a more internal orientation and reduce the risk of early-career burnout and disengagement. Such workshops could be embedded within first-year orientation programs, academic advising sessions, or standalone career readiness modules to reach the widest possible student audience before they accumulate negative early work experiences that are harder to reverse.

Employers who regularly hire university students should train supervisors to provide clear, attributionally informative feedback that helps students understand the link between their effort and their outcomes, reinforcing rather than undermining internal

control beliefs. Transparent communication about advancement pathways, recognition of student contributions, and meaningful task assignments can further support the development of positive work attitudes. Future research should incorporate mediating variables such as psychological resilience, role clarity, and perceived organizational support to build a more complete picture of the mechanisms through which control beliefs shape early occupational well-being.

8. Conclusion

This study has provided clear empirical evidence that Locus of Control is a significant predictor of Job Satisfaction among working university students. Students who believe that their own effort, skill, and decisions shape their outcomes tend to report meaningfully greater satisfaction with their work than those who attribute outcomes to external factors such as luck or the authority of others. These findings extend prior research on the LOC–satisfaction relationship into the specific and underexplored context of students balancing employment with academic study, confirming that the core dynamic holds in this transitional population and that its practical relevance is not limited to established adult professionals in stable organizational roles.

The results point to a broader truth about psychological resources in early career development: the beliefs young adults carry into their first employment experiences matter. A sense of personal agency does not merely predict how people feel about their jobs in the moment, it shapes the coping strategies they adopt, the professional investments they make, and the trajectories they follow across their working lives. Students who enter the workforce with stronger internal control beliefs are better positioned to advocate for themselves, seek out developmental opportunities, and persevere through the inevitable setbacks of entry-level employment. Institutions that invest in cultivating this orientation through intentional, well-designed programming are likely to see meaningful benefits not only in student well-being and vocational satisfaction, but also in broader indices of career readiness, workforce retention, and long-term professional success. The present study offers an empirically grounded foundation for these efforts and a clear direction for the practical and scholarly work that should follow.

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