Abstract

College students completed Rotter’s (1966) Locus of Control (LOC) Scale and Pettijohn’s (1990) LOC scale. Pettijohn’s LOC scale was originally developed as a classroom teaching demonstration. Although students scored similarly on both measures, the potential limitations of using Pettijohn’s LOC scale in research settings outside the classroom are discussed.

Background on Pettijohn LOC

- Pettijohn (1990) developed a 20 question true/false teaching demonstration test based on Rotter’s original concept to provide psychology college students with a general idea of where they stand on the LOC personality dimension. The measure can be found online <http://www.dushkin.com/connectext/psy/ch11/survey11.mhtml>
- Over the years, many researchers have inquired about the reliability and validity of Pettijohn’s LOC scale. These requests led the current researchers to consider the usefulness of this classroom demonstration as a LOC measurement tool.

Hypothesis

The Pettijohn LOC was originally constructed as a teaching tool, not a formal research instrument. Therefore, we hypothesized that the Pettijohn LOC measure would be moderately valid and reliable with regard to the original LOC measure developed by Rotter.

Introduction

Locus of control is the general term that refers to the expectancy that an individual’s reinforcements are controlled by either internal or external factors. People with an internal locus of control believe that they control their own destiny and that their actions affect their outcomes. Those individuals with an external locus of control perceive themselves as being controlled by fate or luck and believe their outcomes happen by chance. This concept was developed by the social learning theorist Julian Rotter (1966), who constructed the Locus of Control (LOC) Scale to assess the extent to which an individual possesses internal or external reinforcement beliefs. Research has shown that those with an internal locus of control tend to be more hardworking, have better coping skills, and practice more preventative health measures than those with an external locus of control.

Validating a Locus of Control Teaching Demonstration Measure

Terry F. Pettijohn, The Ohio State University-Marian

Terry F. Pettijohn II & Donald F. Sacco, Jr., Mercyhurst College

Presented at the 11th Annual American Psychological Society Teaching Institute, Chicago, Illinois, May 27, 2004

E-mail: pettijohn.1@osu.edu or tpettijohn@mercyhurst.edu
Methods

- **Participants**
  - One-hundred and fifty-five students (31% men, 65.8% women, Mean age=20.4 years, 89.7% Caucasian) from a small private college in the Northeastern United States and a large Midwestern University.

- **Materials and Procedures**
  - Participants completed Rotter’s LOC scale, Pettijohn’s LOC scale, and questions about age, year in school, and ethnicity for demographic purposes.

Results

- Scores for both measures of LOC were correlated and a statistically significant relationship was found \[ r (153)=0.366, p < .001 \]
- Further analysis of the Pettijohn LOC scale revealed low internal consistency \[ \alpha=0.397 \]
- Additional scale and item analyses are provided in the table.

Discussion

- Although the correspondence between the Rotter and Pettijohn LOC measures is moderate, the internal consistency of the Pettijohn measure was low. This information suggests that the measure, as it was created, provides a useful demonstration of LOC in the classroom, but investigators should be cautioned about using the scale in other research pursuits.
- Changing the response scale for the Pettijohn LOC scale to a more sensitive Likert scale where participants can more accurately indicate their level of agreement with each statement may yield stronger correspondence with the Rotter measure and greater internal consistency. This variation may be considered in future research.