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# The Relationship among Locus of Control, Self-Directed Learning Readiness and the Choice of Vocabulary Learning Strategies of Iranian EFL Learners

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### ABSTRACT

This study aims at analyzing the relations between EFL learners' locus of control, self-directed learning readiness and the choice of vocabulary learning strategies. The participants were 137 undergraduate students from Islamic Azad university- Rasht branch. Oxford Placement Test (2004) was administered to them in order to specify the homogeneity of the participants in terms of language proficiency. In order to measure the variables of the study self-report questionnaires of locus of control, self-directed learning readiness and vocabulary learning strategies were used. To achieve the purpose of the study spearman rank-ordered correlations, independent sample t-tests, two Man-Whitney tests, two-way factorial MANOVA, simple linear regressions and one-way ANOVA analyses were conducted. The results revealed that self-directed learning readiness positively correlated with both discovery and consolidation vocabulary learning strategies and that self-directed learning readiness's levels predict the use of two types of vocabulary learning strategies.

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### Introduction

There are many studies in the field of personality factors and their relationship with learning that Larsen and Buss (2010) believe that most of them argue although there is a disagreement among theorists over definitions of personality, but most of them agree that in order to explore personality's relation to other variables, a definite set of personality factors needs to be specified. From point of view of personality theory everyone is different and that individuals are characterized by a unique and relatively static pattern of traits. Personality or individual differences refer to the characteristic ways in which we exist, also it refers to the ways in which we behave and use our experiences in our behaviors, (Schultz & Schultz, 2005). The study of individual differences has been an important research area in language learning studies because the way in which individuals learn a language is different therefore the outcome they achieve through this process also is different (Williams & Burden, 1997).

One of these individual differences, which is a central concept in psychology, is locus of control. In fact, this aspect of personality which has two extremes of internal versus external control of reinforcement shifts under different conditions.

Locus of control is a broad construct to study behavior in a variety of situations such as job, health and academic areas.

Today, successful learning is the important goal of pedagogy however learners are different and learn in different ways. Thus, learner training is seen as a necessary step in the teaching-learning process. Brookfield (1985) believes that one factor which contributes to the successful learning process of adult learners is self-directed learning and it has a very important role in various learning contexts.

Guglielmino (1977) asserts certain learning situations are effective in learner's self-direction; however, learner's personal characteristics, including his or her thought and behavior (personality) as well as acquired skills and abilities, ultimately determine whether self-directed learning will take place in a

given learning situation. In this regard, Hengstler (2001, as cited in Duman & Sen, 2012) believes that locus of control is an important personality character which influences self-directed learning. According to Oxford (1990) self-directed learners are independent learners; they assume themselves responsible of their own learning therefore, step by step, they can gain confidence, involvement and proficiency. According to Knowles (1975) to be self-directed, learners need to be trained in learning strategies.

Vocabulary is central to language and has great significance in language learning. In fact lexical knowledge is a foundation of language learning and communication. Learning vocabulary is one of the achievement areas that some learners are more successful in achieving it because of using different kinds of vocabulary learning strategies. Thus, to be successful language learners, learners need to be equipped with vocabulary learning strategies they need most. According to Nation (2001) vocabulary learning strategies are one part of language learning strategies and acquiring these strategies help learners' self-directed learning.

However, using learning strategies depends on different variables such as age, gender, beliefs, previous language learning experience, etc (Chamot, 2004). Therefore, the present study attempts to investigate the relationship among locus of control, self-directed learning readiness and vocabulary learning strategies.

### Literature Review

Regarding the past studies, learning a foreign language involves both social interactions and psychological processes such as learner variables. Locus of control as one of the learner variables has important role in learning areas. Rotter (1966) defines locus of control as "an individual expectancy of personal control over his or her behavior and its consequences" (p. 1). He believes that locus of control is a matter of degree from internal to external control and describes that locus of control, whether

internal or external, is an important part of who you are, a part of your personality. It is one of the most significant factors to determine how people act in various ways and how they control what is happening. Walker (2001) believes that locus of control reflects three dimensions: internal, external (powerful others) and external (chance). Lefcourt (1982) believes that internal locus of control is relevant to the belief that events and outputs are due to behavior, efforts or sustainable characteristics like ability and external locus of control is relevant to the belief that events or outputs result from some factors that are out of individual's control like difficulty of tasks or behavior of other people.

A great deal of research has been carried out in examining locus of control and its relationship with academic achievement. They show that locus of control plays an interesting role in education. Understanding its effects can lead to more schooling for students and to better teaching for teachers. As mentioned in Nunn and Nunn (1993) understanding a student's locus of control helps teachers to understand how students perceive learning settings, and how this can mediate progress. Researches about locus of control and its relationship with academic achievement reveal different results. Most of them show that, internalizers are more likely to succeed in school than externalizers, (Rotter, 1966; Uguak, Elias, Uli, & Suandi, 2002; Williams & Burden, 1997). However, Sanger and Alker (1972, as cited in Ajzen, 1988) found different results, it was that externals show greater involvement in learning than internals.

The goal of most educational institutions and academia is to train learners who take responsibility for their own learning and their active participation in learning. In other words, it is emphasized those learners who select their own actions in the learning environment and who encourage themselves to have more control (internal locus of control) over and responsibility for their learning (Linares, 1999, as cited in Duman & Sen, 2012), this process has been known as self-directed learning. Self-directed learning is a term which has been studied most widely within field of adult education. According to Garrison (1997) there is considerable amount of criticism and confusion surrounding it. Some of scholars believe that self-directed learning takes place in total isolation but the others don't think like that; For them self-directed learning can take place within educational institutions. From point of view of Guglielmino (1977), self-directed learning can occur in different situations: teacher-directed classroom, self-planned and self-conducted learning projects; self-directed learning is, therefore, a highly adaptable approach to many learning contexts.

Many researches have been done to correlate self-directed learning with many variables including personality characteristics, cognitive processing, and learning style as well as success in particular environments. In addition many studies have shown the importance of self-directed learning in educational settings and work place, (Boden, 2005; Muller, 2008; Oliviera and Simoes, 2006; Reio, 2004).

General consensus is that education is still largely teacher-centered. Thus, it is crucial that educational settings provide an environment to help learners become independent and promote student-centered learning. Acquiring strategies are more important especially in EFL environments, where exposure to English out of class is limited. According to Knowles (1975) to be self-directed, learners need to be trained in learning strategies; so learning strategies (language and vocabulary) are known as strong tool for enhancing learning and being self-directed. Schmitt (1997) asserts vocabulary learning strategies, which are part of language learning strategies, have attracted the

attention of many researchers because mastering vocabulary is one of the most challenging tasks that any learner faces while acquiring another language. Afterward, to reach the ends of the study, the following research questions stand out:

1. Is there any statistically significant Relationship between Iranian EFL learners' type of Locus of Control (i.e. internal vs. external) and their choice of Vocabulary Learning Strategies?
2. Is there any statistically significant Relationship between Iranian EFL learners' Self-Directed Learning Readiness and their choice of Vocabulary Learning Strategies?
3. Is there any statistically significant Relationship between Iranian EFL learners' Self-Directed Learning Readiness and type of Locus of Control (i.e. internal vs. external).
4. Is there any significant interaction between the Relationship of Locus of Control and the Relationship of Self-Directed Learning Readiness with the choice of Vocabulary Learning Strategies?
5. Does EFL learners' Locus of Control significantly predict their use of Vocabulary Learning Strategies?
6. Does EFL learners' Self-Directed Learning Readiness significantly predict their use of Vocabulary Learning Strategies?

#### **Statement of the Hypothesis**

**In order to investigate the research questions, the following Null hypotheses were formulated**

1. There is no significant Relationship between Iranian EFL learners' type of Locus of Control (i.e. internal vs. external) and their choice of Vocabulary Learning Strategies.
2. There is no significant Relationship between Iranian EFL learners' Self-Directed Learning Readiness and their choice of Vocabulary Learning Strategies.
3. There is no significant Relationship between Iranian EFL learners' Self-Directed Learning Readiness and type of Locus of Control (i.e. internal vs. external).
4. There is no significant interaction between the Relationship of Locus of Control and the Relationship of Self-Directed Learning Readiness with the choice of vocabulary learning strategies.
5. EFL learners' Locus of Control does not predict their use of Vocabulary Learning Strategies.
6. EFL learners' Self-Directed Learning Readiness does not predict their use of Vocabulary Learning Strategies.

#### **Methodology**

##### **Participants**

To accomplish the purpose of the research, a group of 137 students were selected; then based on Oxford Placement Test results 106 of them were selected. The participants were freshman undergraduate students majoring English language Teaching and English Language Translation from Gilan Azad University. All of them were female students whose age ranged from 18 to 24 years old.

##### **Instrumentation**

The following data collection instruments were utilized:

1. Oxford Placement Test (2004): This test is divided into two sections, listening and grammar. The listening part contains listening skills, reading and vocabulary size, and consists of 100 items. The grammar part contains grammar, vocabulary and reading skill; it also consists of 100 questions in multiple-choice format.
2. Academic Locus of Control Questionnaire: it was originally developed by Trice (1985). ALCQ includes 28 items in true-false format in which each item comprises two response choices.
3. Self-Directed Learning Readiness Questionnaire: it was developed by Guglielmino (1977). It is a self-report

questionnaire with 5-point Likert-type items and contains 58 items.

4. Vocabulary Learning Strategy Questionnaire: this questionnaire was based on Schmitt's taxonomy (1997) of vocabulary learning strategies. It contains 60 items in Likert scale format which classified into two general groups of strategies as discovery and consolidation.

**Procedure**

For the first phase of the study the questionnaire of locus of control was translated into Persian by researcher and scrutinized by two experts in the field of English language teaching. Then the Persian version was piloted to a group of 30 intermediate English language learners who studied at Tafakor Language Institute of Tehran branch. Finally, regarding expert judgment of university professors and received feedback from pilot group the questionnaire was finalized and used in this study. At the same time Persian versions the two other questionnaires \_self-directed learning readiness and vocabulary learning strategies\_ were also piloted to the same group of learners in order to estimate their reliability index. In the second stage the reliability indices were measured by using SPSS software and the Cronbach's Alpha was calculated as 0.61, 0.86, 0.68 and 0.94, respectively. In the third stage, participants were selected by oxford placement test in terms of their language proficiency and vocabulary knowledge. And in final stage, Persian versions of locus of control, self-directed learning readiness and vocabulary learning strategy questionnaires were administered to the selected participants.

**Results and data analysis**

In order to answer the research questions a series of calculations and statistical methods were carried out: descriptive statistics, Spearman rank-ordered correlations, sample t-tests, two Man-Whitney tests, two-way factorial MANOVA, simple linear regression analyses and one-way ANOVAs. To test the null hypotheses, the scores of the participants on three main variables of the study, were normally distributed. So, the normality tests of Kolmogorov-Smirnov and Shapiro-Wilk were used. Most of the results indicate that data are not normally distributed. Therefore in testing first, second and third null hypotheses, spearman-rank ordered correlations were used. The results showed that just self-directed learning readiness has a positive link with types of vocabulary learning strategies. An independent sample t-test also confirmed the correlations' results.

**Table 1. Correlation between Self-Directed Learning Readiness and Type of Vocabulary Learning Strategies**

		Dis.	Con.	SDLR	
Spearman's rho	Dis.	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.688**	.295**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000	.002
		N	106	106	106
	Con.	Correlation Coefficient	.688**	1.000	.424**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.	.000
		N	106	106	106
	SDLR	Correlation Coefficient	.295**	.424**	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.002	.000	.
		N	106	106	106

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The results of two-way factorial MANOVA, verified that the interaction between self-directed learning readiness and locus of control with vocabulary learning strategies is not significant ( $p > .05$ ). The results of simple linear regression analyses of fifth question revealed that type of locus of control cannot predict consolidation and discovery vocabulary learning strategies; also, employed two one-way ANOVAs showed that

the results are no significant. Finally the results of simple linear regression analyses of sixth question showed that the EFL learners' self-directed learning readiness significantly predict their discovery and consolidation vocabulary learning strategy use; also, employed two one-way ANOVAs confirmed that the results are significant.

**Table 2. Model Summary of Self-Directed Learning Readiness Levels and Discovery and Consolidation Vocabulary Learning Strategies Use**

	Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
Discovery	1	.306 <sup>a</sup>	.093	.085	6.43210
consolidation	1	.444 <sup>a</sup>	.197	.189	25.68563

a. Predictors: (Constant), SDLR

As Table 2 shows, the adjusted R squares are .08 and .18 which indicates that 8% and 18% of the variability in the dependent variables is explained by the independent variable (self-directed learning readiness).

**Table 3. ANOVA of Regression Model of Self-Directed Learning Readiness Levels and Discovery and consolidation Vocabulary Learning Strategies Use**

	Model		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Discovery	1	Regression	443.353	1	443.353	10.716	.001 <sup>b</sup>
		Residual	4302.685	104	41.372		
		Total	4746.038	105			
Consolidation	1	Regression	16815.210	1	16815.210	25.487	.000 <sup>b</sup>
		Residual	68614.186	104	659.752		
		Total	85429.396	105			

Predictors: (Constant), SDLR

As table 3 indicates the ANOVA results are significant ( $p < .05$ ); therefore, the EFL learners' different levels of self-directed learning readiness can significantly predict their discovery and consolidation vocabulary learning strategy use.

**Discussions and Pedagogical Implications**

Regarding the statistical analyses different results were obtained. As the results of the first research question showed there is no significant relationship between internal type of locus of control and type of vocabulary learning strategies. Furthermore, external type of locus of control negatively correlates with vocabulary learning strategies. According to Yield's research (1989, as cited in Duman & Sen, 2012) which found that in a religious study, religious background is a reason of the non-significant relationship between academic performance and students' locus of control, one might conclude that results of first research question may be attributed to religious background of students. The results of second research question showed that the higher the learners are in self-directed learning readiness, the more they tend to use discovery and consolidation vocabulary learning strategies; these results are in line with literature (Knowles, 1975; Nation, 2001). The finding of third research question revealed a non significant relationship between locus of control and self-directed learning readiness. Since regarding literature, locus of control is more stronger for adolescents than for adults and since according to O'Shea (2003) self-directed learning skills of upper year students develop better than skills of first year students and finally regarding the

participants of the study which were freshman adult students with more low and average level of readiness for self-directed learning, so the reason may be attributed to age and education's level of participants. The results of fifth question contradict with the work of Uguak, Elias, Uli, and Suandi, (2002) which suggested that locus of control predicts academic achievement among the students in general. However, the results are in line with the findings of Rasekh, Rezaei, and Davoudi, (2012) in general; who reported that locus of control scores can NOT predict students' language achievement. In the case of sixth research question the study has been done by Reio (2004) confirms that self-directed learning readiness, in general, is a powerful predictor in the field of language learning.

As it was demonstrated in this study, the locus of control construct is a powerful and useful concept in educational settings. This psychological construct might facilitate academic success. Research in this area provides useful information for teachers to recognize type of locus of control of students and help students know themselves and their needs better in the process of learning and also know what the source of difficulty is. Another fact which is implied in the present study refers to the level of readiness of students for self-directed learning. As the findings of this study shows the most students had low and average level of readiness for self-directed learning. Thus, paying attention to the students' personality, environmental factors and teaching techniques should also be taken into consideration. Institutions and academia should help students who do not show a high degree of readiness for self-directed learning by providing them an environment which will foster greater self-directed learning readiness. This study highlighted the positive relationship between self-directed learning readiness and both consolidation and vocabulary learning strategies. As the results showed, students with higher readiness for self-directed learning tended to use vocabulary learning strategies more than students with lower readiness for self-directed learning. Therefore it is advisable that students should become aware of all the vocabulary learning strategies in order to enable to choose the most effective ones. In fact, teachers should imbed into regular course activities explicit vocabulary learning strategies instruction and introduce strategies to students in order to help them become independent.

### Conclusions

In the present study the researcher investigated the relationship among locus of control, self-directed learning readiness and the choice of vocabulary learning strategies. In fact the purpose of this study was to see the relationship between Iranian EFL learners' type of locus of control (i.e. internal vs. external) and self-directed learning readiness as independent variables with their choice of vocabulary learning strategies as dependent variable; investigating interaction among these three variables is the other purpose of the study. As a final purpose the study seeks to predict the use of vocabulary learning strategies by locus of control and self-directed learning readiness.

According to the results of the spearman rank-ordered correlation: a) the more external students were, the less they use both consolidation and discovery vocabulary learning strategies, b) students with higher readiness for self-directed learning tended to use both consolidation and discovery vocabulary learning strategies more than students with lower readiness for self-directed learning, c) there is no significant relationship between self-directed learning readiness and type of locus of control (i.e. internal vs. external); two Man-Whitney tests also indicated that there is no significant difference between the means of high and low groups of self-directed learning readiness

in terms of the two types of locus of control. The results of simple linear regression analyses revealed that type of locus of control aren't a good predictor of vocabulary learning strategies however self-directed learning readiness significantly is a good predictor of vocabulary learning strategies.

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