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Malaysia-Nigeria Comparative Study on Locus of Control and Subjective Well Being Among Public Sector Organizations

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Abstract

The success of any organization is dependent on the personality of human resources it possesses. Besides other constructs of the personality, Locus of Control and the resultant Subjective Well Being among the employees determine their personal and organizational accomplishment. The two said concepts are comparatively studied in the Malaysian and Nigerian context among 117 government employees drawn from these two countries in the present paper. Variables were tested through statistical tools like Cronbach's Alpha, Split Half Method, Pearson Correlations (bivariate), One Way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA), simple means, standard deviation and percentages. Many similarities and differences were observed in the findings like internality of locus of control among Nigerians as compared to Malaysians, or on basis of age or other demographic factors. In today's globalized business environment, the study can be a beacon of light of human resource managers or organizational behaviour practitioners.

Keywords: Malaysia; Nigeria; Locus of Control; Subjective Well Being; Employees.

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1. Introduction and Review of Literature

The concept of Locus of control (LOC) was conceived by author in [17], who put it as that if an individual believes that he himself control his life he has internal locus and if he feels that decisions and life is controlled by environmental factors which they do not have power over it is termed as external. In other word LOC means the level to which a person perceives uncertainties, fate, luck or chance to affect results. LOC is a psychological, social learning theory that refers to the extent to which individuals perceive control over their lives, and environment [5]. High internal LOC is the hall mark of leaders who are successful, while external LOC characterizes the leaders on lesser side of organizational/personal achievement [22,4,29].

Powerful others, luck or chance, fate, and a belief that the world is too complex to be predicted are the four types of beliefs in externals in the view of Rotter. Externals are reluctant to modify their conduct, actions and performance as according to author in [25] they do not view it as a principal basis for altering reinforcements. People having internal LOC consider hard work key to positive outcomes [27]. According to authors in [21] individuals possessing internal LOC have self appointed objectives, trust their capabilities and feel that they have not done justice to the job if something goes wrong, rather than blaming outside forces for the same.

Studies like those of authors in [14] and [31] conclude that internal LOC employees display superior interpersonal relationships with their colleagues as well as seniors in contrast to those having external LOC. As put by author in [6] people with internal LOC have control over their thoughts, have positive belief, are motivated for positive job performance the last construct along with career success is also supported by authors in [13] who further stated that internals set exigent standards for themselves not even bothering for hardships it may bring to them in their career. These benchmarks and subsequent work lead to professional accomplishments for internals [18].

Authors in [5] have found that internal LOC is associated with scholastic success along with lesser stress [20] bigger levels of self-motivation and social maturity [10] and longer life span [19]. However, people with an external LOC believe that their own actions are dependent on factors outside their personal control [12,32] blaming outside forces for the consequences of behaviour [34]. Studies have suggested that perceptual processes have an affect on LOC, work environment is positively identified by people with internal LOC while externals view it negatively [37].

Another facet of the research at hand is Subjective Well-Being (SWB), which is how an individual assesses his/her life according to author in [8] who further states that positive, cognitive and spiritual elements are part of one's existence mutually with the non-existence of negative factors. Authors in [11] additionally put it that SWB encompasses on understanding the complete range of well-being from absolute gloom to elation and total life satisfaction. It does not evaluate temporary feelings of euphoria, pleasure, ecstasy or exhilaration, but long-term positive feelings of joy or happiness of individuals. According to author in [26] an individual's life satisfaction is dependent on pleasant/positive emotions being superior to unpleasant ones (both the emotions being the constituents of SWB). As stated by author in [33] the two fundamentals of SWB are emotional or affective component and the judgmental or cognitive component, and as put by authors of [3] the second being life

satisfaction.

Researches have concluded that more negative affect and lower levels of positive affect on lives were registered by people having higher levels of external LOC whereas opposite was true for those having internal LOC [36], [23]. In a comparative study done by authors of [2] between China and South Africa examining the divergence in locus of control and subjective well-being found that both the constructs were differently correlated to one another. Data from China presented significant negative correlation between subjective well-being and locus of control but none was there for South Africa. Gender for China unlike Southern Africa did not have significant relationship with LOC, but had a strong link between SWB.

Authors of [7] have pointed out that the three areas of SWB viz. positive affect, negative affect and global life satisfaction were related to LOC. Moreover it was found that an external LOC expectancy has a positive correlation with higher levels of psychological distress [9]. According to authors in [38], high internal LOC is also linked to positive effect on well being, further reiterated by author in [20] that high internal LOC leads to greater psychological well-being of the individual reporting less stress and depression. Conversely, external LOC is associate with stress and a feeling of powerlessness for people [1: 319-339], further as pointed earlier [20] external LOC is linked with higher levels of stress, having a harmful effect on SWB.

Thus it can be safely stated that a number of studies propose that psychological well-being has a characteristic association with internal and external LOC. At the same time many researches have found that there is negative relationship between LOC and SWB [39]. As suggested by authors in [24] and [28] the relationship between LOC and employee well being spells out the difference between workers working in the same work setting having different work behavior. Therefore significance of the present study discussed next is based on the evaluation of literature building the foundation for the research.

2. Significance of the Study

The present study compares two different countries, having totally different culture and it is important to know whether they display any similarities or differences in how it affects their attitude towards work. It was an added advantage that the authors of the study were on ground to collect data to have a meaningful conclusion. The study would add to the existing literature not only in these two countries but at the global level. Since workers and managers in contemporary business environment may work in a different country, the study would serve as a reference point for them to understand the organizational culture of their host countries, making them adjust to a new vocational milieu easily.

3. Objectives

Studying and analyzing locus of control and subjective well being on a comparative basis for the Malaysian and Nigerian employees was the underlying objective of the present study. The research was conducted among the government employees of the two countries, which seeks to comprehend the correlation of different variables and relationship between LOC and SWB of the studied population. To reach at a meaningful conclusion vis-à-vis LOC and SWB for the two studied countries which happen to be in two different continents and separated by

various cultures was the intent of present research.

4. Conceptual Model and Statement of Hypotheses

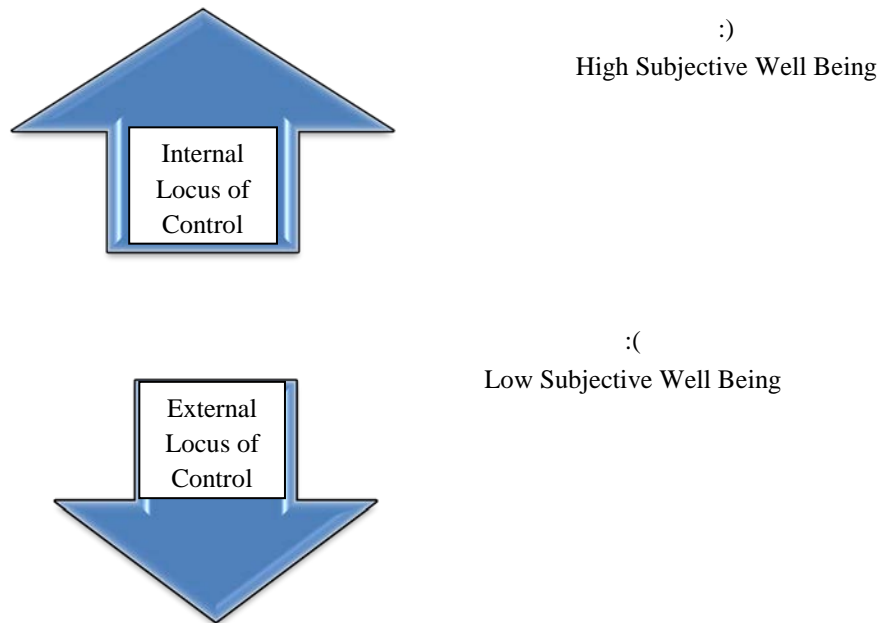


Figure1: Conceptual Model of the Study

The theoretical model is based on the concept that internal LOC would lead to high SWB while the connotation external LOC is low SWB for the respondents of the present study. SWB being an estimate of a person's –who is also a worker- holistic judgement about his or her contentment with life, it is assumed that LOC would affect SWB which in turn determine an individual's performance at workplace. Thus the concepts of LOC, SWB and performance (not the main construct of the present study), were abstracted to have a relationship. Therefore following null hypotheses based on the literature available and the conceptual model devised were tested in the course of research:

H₀. There is a significant correlation between LOC and SWB among employees of Malaysia and Nigeria.

H₀. There is no significant relationship between age and LOC among the employees of Malaysia and Nigeria.

H₀. There is no significant correlation between income of the employees surveyed and the LOC score among the employees Malaysia and Nigeria.

H₀. There is no significant relationship between education and the LOC among the employees of Malaysia and Nigeria.

H₀. There is no significant difference among various age groups in employees of Malaysia and Nigeria for SWB.

H₀. There is no significant difference between Gender, Marital Status, Income, Work Experience, Education and SWB among Malaysian and Nigerian employees.

5. Methodology

5.1 Design

The present study was conducted with non-experimental, descriptive and quantitative research design. Data was drawn from Kuala Lumpur and Putra areas of Malaysia and Damaturu and Potiskum Local Government Areas (LGAs) which are in North Eastern part of Nigeria. The data for Nigeria was already collected earlier for a related study by the researchers. The Malaysian data was added and compared with the Nigerian one to draw findings and conclusions. The Nigerian area selected has been researched earlier also by the authors, in an unrelated study, while Malaysia was totally new; please refer to [35].

5.2 Sampling and Participant Profile

Government employees from administrative and education sectors, with total sample size of 117 was drawn-48 employees were from Malaysia while 69 from Nigeria-adopting convenience sampling technique. Malaysian sample was older than the Nigerian one as majority (43.8% as compared to 52.2%) were in age group 30-35 years, Nigerian being 25-30 years. The respondents in best part were males, consisting of 60.9% for Nigerians and 52.1% for Malaysians, 60.9% and 60.4% being married in that order. In a sharp contrast 85.4% of the Malaysian sample was having master degree for education while Nigerians at 78.3% had bachelors one. The average professional work experience for the surveyed population was 7.54 (Malaysian) and 4.54 (Nigerians). The Malaysians were in majority (45.8%) having monthly income of Ringgit 3000-6000 and Naira 50000-100000 (43.5%) was for Nigerians, roughly the equivalent amounts in the same income bracket.

5.3 Statistical Tools

Cronbach's Alpha, Split Half Method, Pearson Correlations (bivariate), One Way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA), simple means, standard deviation and percentages were used for the analysis of data for the research. Microsoft excel sheet and Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 16 was employed for analyses purpose.

5.4 Research Instrument and Reliability

LOC was measured by the instrument having 26 items, including 6 filler questions which were not scored, developed by author in [16] called Rotter Internal-External Scale of Locus of Control, having sufficient validity and which is widely used in researches. It being a forced choice questionnaire, the respondents had to chose one of the options which was either representing the internal or the external LOC, latter scored and respondents

having higher tally were meant to have more of external LOC and vice versa. The computed split half reliability was .67, being on a higher side. The second aspect of research, SWB was assessed through Subjective Well Being Scale by authors of [7:71-76], the Cronbach's alpha value of .615 showed strong internal reliability of the five item scale. By adding the scores, total life satisfaction and happiness was arrived at by this 7 point Likert Type item scale of the employees surveyed.

6. Hypotheses Testing and Results

6.1 Country wise LOC and SWB Status

The Malaysian employees held themselves responsible for any failing in their personal or professional life as compared to the Nigerians. Nigerians as compared to Malaysian were happier and having better SWB status. The analysis established that Nigerian employees surveyed were having more external LOC with mean 13.33 std. deviation 2.587 as compared to their Malaysian counterparts (mean 11 std. deviation 2.743). Nigerians on the other hand were having a better SWB mean 4.71 std. deviation .944 as compared to Malaysian employees with mean 4.68 std. deviation .947.

6.2 Country wise Gender based LOC

Female employees from both the countries were having more external LOC as compare to their male counterparts (mean 12.40, std. dev.2.579). Male employees in Malaysia were found to have highest external LOC with mean 13.48, std. dev. 3.043, followed by females from the same country (13.17, std. dev. 2.037), than Nigerian female employees and their male counterparts with mean 11.74, std. dev. 2.836 and mean 10.67, std. dev. 2.629 respectively.

6.3 LOC and SWB

The correlation in Malaysian data for LOC and SWB was positive, meaning with increase in LOC score, SWB also increased and for Nigerians same was negative which implies that external LOC employees were lower on the SWB count. However the analysis cannot be held substantial as in both the countries the correlation was not significant ($p > .05$). Therefore null hypothesis that there is a significant correlation between LOC and SWB among employees of Malaysia and Nigeria is accepted.

6.4 LOC and Age

The Pearson bivariate correlation analysis of Malaysian record revealed that with $r = -.259$, 2 tailed significance .031 ($p < .05$) there was a negative correlation involving variables age and LOC. Therefore with increasing age the employees in this country tend to be having internal LOC, thereby rejecting the null hypothesis there is no significant relationship between age and LOC for the Malaysian data. Comparing the investigation with the Nigerian employees ($r = -.141$, 2 tailed significance .339 ($p > .05$), no such association was established between the variables, thereby accepting the null hypothesis for this set of data.

6.5 LOC and Income of Employees

The Malaysian and Nigerian data showed negative correlation between income of the employees surveyed and the LOC score, meaning as the income of the surveyed people increased, they had more internal LOC. The analyses however was non significant statistically ($p > .05$). Thus null hypothesis is accepted that there is no significant correlation between income of the employees surveyed and the LOC score among the employees Malaysia and Nigeria.

6.6 Education and LOC

The Malaysian employees showed no significant relationship between education and the LOC score. Nonetheless, in Nigeria as the education increases employees displayed more internal LOC, which was significant at $.025$ ($p < .05$) and $r = -.324$. As a result the null hypothesis that there is no significant relationship between education and the LOC among the employees is accepted for Malaysian employees and rejected for Nigerian ones.

6.7 Age and SWB

One way analysis of variances (ANOVA) found that there is no significant difference amid different age groups of employees in Malaysia vis-à-vis SWB they experience ($p > .05$). In contrast the Nigerian data showed that statistically significant difference was there among various age groups studied for SWB with $F(4,43) = 5.370$, $p < .05$ (significance $.001$). The null hypothesis that there is no significant difference among various age groups in employees for SWB is accepted for Malaysians and rejected for Nigerian.

6.8 Gender, Marital Status and SWB

The Pearson chi square test revealed that among the employees of Malaysia and Nigeria there is no significant difference between the members of opposite sex in there SWB status. Nonetheless for marital status among the Malaysian data with chi square value of 12.356 , $df 4$ and asymptotic significance $.015$ ($p < .05$) there was a significant difference between married and single employees for their SWB. Married employees in Malaysia with mean 4.71 , std. deviation $.970$ as compared to singles with mean 4.63 , std. deviation $.926$ were having better well being. However, Nigerian data showed non significant relationship for marital status of the employees.

6.9 Income and SWB

With $r = -.341$, significance $.004$ ($p < .01$), Malaysian employees showed that with increase in income their SWB score decreased and vice versa. Nigerians though comparatively had a positive correlation between income earned and SWB, but the results were non significant statistically.

6.10 Work Experience, Education and SWB

Work experience and education had no significant effect on SWB among the employees of both the countries as analyzed through Pearson correlation as 2-tailed significance was less than .05. The null hypothesis that there is no significant difference for Marital Status and Income among Malaysian employees was rejected for SWB while for Gender, Work Experience, Education among Malaysian and Nigerian employees was accepted.

7. Findings, Discussion and Conclusion

Malaysia and Nigeria are far off places geographically, but share some similarities at the same time. The former is one of the Asian economic giant, whereas the latter is the biggest economy in Africa. The regions chosen for the present study were observed to have same ethical base. Therefore the comparative research was relevant and interesting to understand the concepts of LOC and SWB among the government employees of the region. At the outset, although in Malaysia employees having external LOC seemed to be happier, opposite was true for the Nigerians. Comparing the association between LOC and SWB it was found that among both the Malaysian and the Nigerian employees however there was no statistically significant relationship.

The study revealed that Nigerian males were the most internal ones, while in sharp contrast their male counterparts in Malaysia believed in luck or chance in their affairs. Nigerian females though had more external LOC than their male compatriot but as compared to Malaysian female workers they believed less in fortune or external forces for something happening in their work or personal life or dealings.

It was found that though the older Malaysian employees had more internal LOC as compared to their younger counterparts, but statistically age had no relationship with internality or externality of LOC for the Nigerians, though like Malaysians they did have a negative correlation. Another finding was that richer employees in terms of income in both the countries did not blame luck or external forces for their misfortune or lacking, they having internal LOC. Nonetheless the findings were not supported statistically. Another interesting discovery on a comparative basis and also statistically supported was that although for the Malaysian employees education and LOC had no association, the more educated Nigerians become, they had more internal LOC.

SWB being experienced by the various age groups of the Malaysian employees displayed no relationship statistically, whereas Nigerian had significant difference for SWB for employees having different ages. In both the countries it was revealed that males and females had no noteworthy variation in statistical relationship for SWB. On the other hand in Malaysia, married and single employees showed significant difference in their SWB status, former being happier than the single counterparts. Nigerians displayed no such relationship. Lastly work experience and education of the employees in both the countries had no statistical relationship with SWB.

8. Constraints/Limitations

One of the limitations of the present study has been the limited resources through which the research was conducted. There was no institutional funding which resulted in the desire of having taken up a larger sample size. Besides, Malaysia and Nigeria are countries far apart and having a frequent interaction and conversation with the researcher in Malaysia was a constant problem, ease of sitting together and interacting was somewhat limited. Arriving at an equivalent figure for the income earned by the employees on whom the research was

done was another constraint, the countries having different economic, spending, social and earning conditions. The research being restricted only with the concepts of LOC and SWB was another limitation.

9. Recommendations

Future researches can be done on a much wider scale bringing in the related constructs like self esteem and perfectionism along with LOC and SWB. It was felt that organizations especially the public sector or governmental are not well aware of these two concepts, which may have a wide bearing on the way they function. The research endeavors for the practicing human resource managers to themselves put into place a system whereby they make practical application of the researches done in this field so that relationship and implication of these two concepts in the workplace can be put to use in a positive manner. Managers can make their employees understand the virtue of internal LOC and vices of the external one in the organizational conducts. A positive employee conditioning can be initiated by the managers so that even employees having a tilt on the external LOC can be made aware of this shortcoming of theirs and they can work on them to have a meaningful subjective well being in their professional life, which may also filter down to their personal lives.

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