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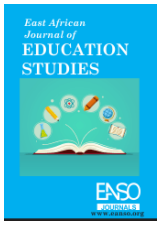

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Original Article

An Exploration of Locus of Control Levels among Young Adults in Ugandan Universities

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Locus of control, Young Adults, Ugandan Universities, Risk Behaviours, Self-efficacy.

ABSTRACT

This study examines locus of control (LOC) orientations among Ugandan university students, investigating how control beliefs influence their behavioural patterns. Employing a concurrent mixed-methods design, we surveyed 527 students (250 males, 277 females) across four institutions and conducted focus group discussions with peer educators and student leaders. The results demonstrated a predominant external LOC orientation (78.2%), with only 21.0% exhibiting combined external-internal LOC. Significant variations emerged across demographic factors: female students and hostel residents showed stronger external LOC tendencies compared to their male and privately accommodated counterparts. Religious affiliation also influenced LOC patterns, though to a lesser degree. These findings substantiate key propositions of the Theory of Planned Behaviour, particularly regarding the relationship between external LOC and increased vulnerability to risky behaviours stemming from diminished perceptions of personal agency. The study reveals how socioeconomic constraints and institutional environments in Uganda's higher education system shape students' control beliefs. Notably, the near-absence of purely internal LOC contrasts with Western studies, suggesting cultural and contextual influences on control orientations. Based on these insights, we propose targeted interventions including university-based empowerment programs, peer mentorship initiatives, and life skills training to cultivate internal LOC attributes. Such measures could enhance students' self-efficacy and promote more adaptive decision-making. The findings contribute to both theoretical understanding of LOC in collectivist educational contexts and practical approaches to student development in resource-constrained settings.

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INTRODUCTION

Locus of control (LOC) is a fundamental psychological construct that refers to individuals' beliefs about the degree to which they can influence life outcomes (Rotter, 1966). This concept exists on a continuum, with internal LOC reflecting a belief in personal agency and self-determination, and external LOC characterised by attributing outcomes to external forces such as luck, fate, or powerful others (Lefcourt, 2014). Among young adults, LOC significantly shapes decision-making processes, particularly in domains such as sexual behaviour, academic performance, and mental health (Afolabi & Obuseh, 2013; Cobb-Clark et al., 2014). Research suggests that individuals with an internal LOC are more likely to engage in proactive health behaviours, exhibit greater academic persistence, and demonstrate resilience in stressful situations (Nowicki & Duke, 2016; Schulz & Schulz, 2011). Conversely, those with an external LOC tend to exhibit higher impulsivity, lower self-regulation, and increased susceptibility to peer pressure (Wang'eri & Awuor, 2013).

Young adulthood (ages 18–25) represents a critical developmental phase marked by identity exploration, increased autonomy, and psychosocial transitions (Arnett, 2000; Schwartz et al., 2005). In Uganda, this period often coincides with university enrolment, where students encounter unique pressures, including financial constraints, academic stress, and shifting social expectations (UBOS, 2024; Kaggwa et al., 2022). Historically, Ugandan youth have been particularly vulnerable to external influences due to socioeconomic disparities, limited access to mentorship, and cultural norms that emphasise collective decision-making over individual agency (Mutinta, 2012; Nalwadda et al., 2022). These factors may predispose young adults to develop an external LOC, which in turn heightens their risk for maladaptive behaviours (Spotser, 2015).

Ugandan universities serve as microcosms of broader societal dynamics, where students must navigate competing demands of academic rigour, peer pressure, and sexual health risks (Choudhry et al., 2022). Empirical studies indicate that approximately 70% of university students in Uganda are sexually active, with a significant proportion engaging in risky sexual behaviours (RSBs) such as unprotected sex, multiple concurrent partnerships, and transactional relationships (Rutherford et al., 2014; Kaggwa et al., 2022). Locus of Control plays a mediating role in these behaviours, as individuals with an external LOC are more likely to exhibit impulsivity, lower condom use self-efficacy, and greater susceptibility to situational pressures (Wang'eri & Awuor, 2013; Slap et al., 2003).

The present study is theoretically anchored in Rotter's (1966) LOC theory and Ajzen's (1991) Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB). Rotter's framework posits that individuals' expectancies

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about control influence their behavioural choices, while TPB extends this by suggesting that behavioural intentions are shaped by attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control (Ajzen, 1991; Francis, 2020). These theoretical perspectives align with the internal/external LOC dimensions, providing a robust foundation for examining how control beliefs influence risk-taking tendencies among Ugandan university students.

Despite extensive HIV/AIDS awareness campaigns and sexual health interventions, Ugandan young adults continue to exhibit high rates of RSBs, with recent reports indicating 15,000 new HIV infections annually among individuals aged 14–25 (Uganda AIDS Review Report, 2023). While previous research has explored sociocultural and economic determinants of RSBs, the role of LOC remains underexplored in the Ugandan context, particularly how an external LOC exacerbates vulnerability to health-risk behaviours (Derese et al., 2014; Matricardi, 2006).

This study aimed to assess the prevalence and distribution of LOC (internal vs. external) among young adults in Ugandan universities, and to examine demographic variations in LOC based on gender, religious affiliation, and living arrangements. By addressing these objectives, the study contributes to the growing body of literature on youth risk behaviours in sub-Saharan Africa and informs targeted interventions to promote internal LOC and adaptive decision-making among university students.

Research Questions

There were two research questions for the study, namely;

- What is the prevalence and distribution of internal and external locus of control among young adults in Ugandan universities?
- How does locus of control vary by gender, religious affiliation and living arrangements among young adults in Ugandan universities?

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

The concept of locus of control (LOC) has been extensively studied since Rotter's (1966) seminal work, which defined it as an individual's generalised expectancy about where control over life events resides. This psychological construct exists along a continuum with two primary dimensions: internal LOC, characterised by the belief that outcomes result from personal effort, skills, and decisions (April et al., 2012), and external LOC, marked by the perception that outcomes are determined by external forces such as luck, fate, or powerful others (Nowicki & Duke, 2016). Contemporary scholarship has expanded this conceptualisation, recognising LOC as a multidimensional construct with domain-specific manifestations in areas such as health, academics, and interpersonal relationships (Levenson, 1981).

The developmental period of young adulthood (ages 18-25) represents a critical phase for the crystallisation of LOC orientations (Arnett, 2000). During this transitional stage, individuals experience increased autonomy in decision-making (Schwartz et al., 2005), greater exposure to novel social environments (Bynner, 2005), and the development of stable self-regulatory patterns (Nurmi, 2004). University settings provide a particularly salient context for examining LOC, as they present young adults with academic challenges, social pressures, and emerging adult responsibilities that test their sense of agency (Tura et al., 2012). The transition to university life often marks the first sustained experience of independence from familial supervision, making this a pivotal period for LOC development (Bücker et al., 2018).

The theoretical foundations of LOC research are anchored in Rotter's (1966) social learning theory, which posits that behaviour potential is determined

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by the interaction between expectancy and reinforcement value. According to this framework, individuals develop generalised expectancies through their reinforcement histories, with those exhibiting internal LOC perceiving stronger contingencies between their behaviour and subsequent outcomes (Rotter, 1990). This theoretical perspective helps explain why individuals with internal LOC typically demonstrate greater persistence in goal-directed behaviour and employ more adaptive coping strategies.

Complementing Rotter's work, Ajzen's (1991) Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) provides additional insights by specifying how control beliefs influence behaviour through three key components: attitudes (positive or negative evaluations of behaviour), subjective norms (perceived social pressures), and perceived behavioural control (similar to internal LOC). The TPB has been successfully applied to predict various behaviours among university students, ranging from health-related decisions (Ajzen, 2011) to academic performance (Komarraju & Nadler, 2013). Further theoretical elaboration comes from Deci and Ryan's (2000) Self-Determination Theory (SDT), which distinguishes between autonomous motivation (analogous to internal LOC) and controlled motivation (similar to external LOC). SDT has proven particularly useful in explaining why internal LOC correlates with better academic outcomes and enhanced psychological well-being in university settings (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

Empirical research has consistently demonstrated the significant role of LOC in various domains of university students' lives. In the academic realm, internal LOC has been associated with higher GPAs (Komarraju & Nadler, 2013), greater academic persistence (Robbins et al., 2004), and better time management skills (Britton & Tesser, 1991). These findings hold particular relevance in relationships between LOC and sexual risk-taking (Slap et al., 2003), substance use (Hampson et al., 2001), and healthcare utilisation patterns (Wallston et al., 1978). Ugandan studies specifically have found that external LOC correlates with higher HIV risk behaviours among university students (Kaggwa et al., 2022).

The mental health implications of LOC orientations have also received considerable empirical attention. Internal LOC has been consistently linked to lower levels of depression (Benassi et al., 1988), more effective stress coping mechanisms (April et al., 2012), and higher self-esteem (Judge et al., 2002). Conversely, university students with external LOC tendencies report greater psychological distress and poorer adjustment outcomes (Cheng et al., 2013). These findings underscore the protective function of internal LOC in navigating the challenges of university life.

Demographic variations in LOC have emerged as another important area of investigation. Research has identified significant differences across gender lines, with female students typically reporting higher external LOC orientations than their male counterparts (Cheng et al., 2013). Socioeconomic status also appears influential, as lower SES consistently correlates with more external LOC beliefs (Judge et al., 2002). Cultural factors further complicate this picture, with collectivist cultural contexts tending to foster higher external LOC orientations compared to individualist societies (Smith et al., 1996). In the Ugandan context specifically, religious affiliation and living arrangements have been shown to significantly influence LOC orientations among university students (UBOS, 2024).

Despite this extensive body of research, several notable gaps remain in the literature. There exists a paucity of studies examining LOC specifically within Ugandan university contexts, leaving important questions unanswered about how cultural and institutional factors unique to this setting might shape control beliefs. Additionally, the mediating mechanisms through which LOC influences various outcomes warrant further exploration. The field would also benefit from more longitudinal studies

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tracking the development of LOC orientations across the university experience. The current study seeks to address these gaps by systematically examining LOC patterns among Ugandan university students while considering key demographic variables that may influence these orientations.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a mixed-methods convergent parallel design to provide a comprehensive understanding of locus of control (LOC) levels among young adults in Ugandan universities. The design allowed for the simultaneous collection and analysis of both quantitative and qualitative data, enabling the researcher to integrate numerical trends with rich narratives from students. This combination strengthened the study by producing well-triangulated findings that captured both breadth and depth (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). The convergent approach was particularly appropriate for developing a more complete understanding of the research problem by obtaining different but complementary insights, as well as enhancing the validity of results through cross-verification. Employing a mixed-methods design further provided the flexibility to select techniques and procedures most suitable for addressing the study's objectives and context.

The research was guided by post-positivist and social constructivist philosophical frameworks. The post-positivist approach facilitated an objective examination of how LOC influences behavioural outcomes, aligned with the Theory of Planned Behaviour (Ajzen, 1991). Meanwhile, social constructivism provided the foundation for interpreting students' subjective experiences and social realities, particularly through the perspectives of peer educators and student leaders (Kaushik & Walsh, 2019).

Participants were selected through stratified random sampling, ensuring representation from both public and private universities in Kampala. The choice of the universities was based on their being in an urban setting that is characterised by a high level of information, many recreational centres and all lifestyles associated with the city that lure many to possibly risky sexual behaviours. Besides, students from different backgrounds, exposed and none/exposed to risky sexual activities, converge in the city (Aluzimbi et al, 2013). The sample comprised 527 students, calculated with a 95% confidence level and 5% margin of error. Additionally, 64 peer educators and student leaders were purposively sampled for their unique insights into student behaviours and campus dynamics (Etikan & Bala, 2017). Eligibility criteria restricted participation to students aged 18–25 enrolled in bachelor's degree programs, excluding postgraduate students, to maintain focus on the young adult demographic.

Quantitative data were collected using a structured self-administered questionnaire with a validated scale measuring LOC (Pettijohn, 1992). The qualitative component utilised focus group discussions (FGDs) with peer educators and student leaders, comprising two groups per university, each with eight participants. These discussions were audio-recorded and transcribed to capture rich, detailed accounts of students' experiences (Krueger & Casey, 2015).

For data analysis, quantitative responses were processed using descriptive statistics and multiple linear regression in SPSS (Version 23) to identify patterns and relationships among variables. Qualitative data were analysed through interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA), which allowed for deep exploration of emerging themes and personal narratives (Smith et al., 2009).

Ethical oversight was provided by Mbarara University's Research Ethics Committee and the National Council for Science and Technology. All participants provided informed consent, with strict measures in place to ensure confidentiality, including anonymisation of data and secure storage (Bryman, 2016). This methodological approach

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ensured both rigorous empirical analysis and meaningful engagement with the sociocultural context of Ugandan university students.

RESULTS

Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

A total of 527 out of 536 undergraduate students participated in this study, with a response rate of 98%. Of these, 277 (52.6%) were female, and 250 (47.4%) were male. The majority of the respondents were 20 years of age at 124(23.5%). Regarding the type of university, more than half 285(54.1%) were from public universities and 242(45.9%) were from private universities, concerning living arrangements, the highest number of students 173(32.8%) lived in hostels, followed by 159(30.2%) with parents and relatives, 135(25.6%) in rentals and 60(11.4%) in halls of residence.

Levels and Demographic Variations of Locus of Control among Young Adults in Ugandan Universities

The findings classified locus of control (LOC) among young adults in Ugandan universities into three categories: very strong external LOC, strong external LOC, and a combination of both external and internal LOC, as presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Levels of Locus of Control among Young Adults in Ugandan Universities

	Frequency	Percent
Very strong ELOC	4	.8
Strong ELOC	412	78.2
Both ELOC & ILOC	111	21.1
Total	527	100.0

According to Table 1, the highest level of locus of control (LOC) among young adults in Ugandan universities was Strong External Locus of Control (ELOC), with 412 (78.2%) participants falling into this category. This was followed by participants categorised under both ELOC and Internal Locus of Control (ILOC) at 111(21.0%) participants. The least represented category was Very Strong ELOC, with only 4 (0.8%) participants.

The findings reveal that young adults have more ELOC than ILOC. This characteristic is typical of the age group that is easily influenced by peer pressure. During the study, a female peer educator 2 from FGD 2 stated that "**sometimes we are forced to do some things because of what our friends do".** She lamented a situation when she was under pressure from her roommate, as she mentioned that **"My roommate kept telling me to get a lover who can give me money to survive like her".** This exposure contributed to her involvement in sexual activities to raise money for various needs while on campus. The prevalence of ELOC among young adults suggests a susceptibility to external influences such as peer behaviour, societal norms, and financial incentives, all of which can contribute to engaging in risky sexual behaviours.

Below is a presentation of the relationships between young adults' LOC and demographic characteristics, tested using cross-tabulations. Levels of LOC were tested against gender, religion, frequency of attendance at church/mosque, university type, year of study, living arrangements, sexual relationships, and social media use, as presented in Table 2:

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Table 2: Young Adults' Locus of Control in Relation to Demographic Characteristics

			Levels of LOC			Total
			very strong ELOC	strong ELOC	both ELOC & ILOC	
A3 Gender	Male	Count	0(0.0%)	191(76.4%)	59(23.6%)	250(100.0%)
	Female	Count	4(1.4%)	221(79.8%)	52(18.8%)	277(100.0%)
A4 Religion	Catholic	Count	2(1.1%)	143(80.3%)	33(18.5%)	178(100.0%)
	Anglican	Count	0(0.0%)	56(77.6%)	45(22.4%)	201(100.0%)
A5 How frequently do you go to Church/ Mosque	Muslim	Count	0(0.0%)	49(83.1%)	10(16.9%)	59(100.0%)
	SDA	Count	0(0.0%)	10(76.9%)	3(23.1%)	13(100.0%)
	Others		2(2.6%)	54(71.1%)	20(26.3%)	76(100.0%)
A6 What kind of university do you go to?	Private	Count	2(0.8%)	179(74.0%)	61(25.2%)	242(100.0%)
A8 In which year of study are you currently?	I	Count	3(1.8%)	129(77.7%)	34(20.5%)	166(100.0%)
	II	Count	1(0.5%)	151(80.7%)	35(18.7%)	187(100.0%)
	III	Count	0(0.0%)	121(75.6%)	39(24.4%)	160(100.0%)
	IV	Count	0(0.0%)	10(83.3%)	2(16.7%)	12(100.0%)
	V	Count	0(0.0%)	1(50.0%)	1(50.0%)	2(100.0%)
A9 What are your current living arrangements?	Hostel	Count	1(0.6%)	139(80.3%)	33(19.1%)	173(100.0%)
	Hall of Residence	Count	0(0.0%)	50(83.3%)	10(16.7%)	60(100.0%)
	Living with parents/ relatives	Count	2(1.3%)	126(79.2%)	31(19.5%)	159(100.0%)
	Rental	Count	1(0.7%)	97(71.9%)	37(27.4%)	135(100.0%)

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Young Adults' Locus of Control in Relation to Demographic Characteristics (continued)

A14 Sexual relationships are good with	Sugar daddies	Count	0(0.0%)	9(100.0%)	0(0.0%)	9(100.0%)
	Sugar mummies	Count	0(0.0%)	7(87.5%)	1(12.5%)	8(100.0%)
	Agemates	Count	2(0.5%)	319(77.4%)	91(22.1%)	412(100.0%)
	None	Count	2(2.0%)	77(78.6%)	19(19.4%)	98(100.0%)
A19 How frequently do you use social media (WhatsApp, Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, etc)?	Often	Count	3(0.8%)	286(77.1%)	82(22.1%)	371(100.0%)
	Rarely	Count	1(0.7%)	115(82.1%)	24(17.1%)	140(100.0%)
	Not at all	Count	0(0.0%)	11(68.8%)	5(31.2%)	16(100.0%)

Based on Table 2 and considering the data from Table 1, which indicates a strong ELOC at 412 (78.2%), the study analysed young adults' LOC in relation to their demographic characteristics. Specifically, the study found that female students exhibited a strong ELOC, with 222 (79.8%) reporting this tendency, compared to their male counterparts, of whom 191 (76.4%) reported a strong external locus of control. This suggests that female students are more likely than male students to feel that their lives are influenced by external factors.

The data regarding the relationship between religious denomination and strong ELOC reveals the following distribution: Muslims: 49 (83.1%), Catholics: 143 (80.3%), Anglicans: 156 (77.6%), Seventh-day Adventists (SDA): 10 (76.9%) and others: 54 (71.1%). This distribution shows that while there are some variations in the percentage of individuals with a strong ELOC among different religious groups, these differences are not substantial. The relatively small differences in the percentage of strong ELOC among the various denominations suggest that the specific religious affiliation might not significantly influence the LOC.

The high percentages across all groups imply that other factors, such as personal beliefs, social context, or broader cultural influences, might play a more critical role in shaping an individual's LOC.

Since all religious groups report a strong ELOC, it could indicate that being religious, in general, is associated with a higher ELOC. This could be due to religious teachings that emphasise the role of a higher power in influencing life events, leading adherents to feel less personal control. The nearly uniform distribution of strong ELOC across denominations suggests that future research might benefit from examining other variables, such as the intensity of religious belief, the role of religious practices, and individual psychological factors, to better understand the sources of ELOC among young adults. While the data shows some variation among religious denominations regarding strong ELOC, the differences are not significant enough to suggest that religion, or specific denominations, play a major role in determining the LOC among young adults. This implies that other factors are likely more influential in shaping these perceptions.

The study also examined the relationship between young adults' LOC and their religious attendance. The findings indicate that young adults who rarely go to church or mosque for prayers exhibited the

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highest strong ELOC, with 122 (80.8%) in this category. This was followed by those who often attend religious services, at 270 (77.7%). Finally, those who do not attend religious services at all had the lowest strong ELOC, with 20 (76.9%). These results suggest that irregular attendance at religious services is associated with a higher perception of external influences on one's life compared to regular or no attendance. Overall, the implication is that there is a different relationship between religious attendance and LOC among young adults. These findings suggest that religious engagement, whether regular or infrequent, can impact how young adults perceive control over their lives, with those attending less frequently feeling more externally controlled.

The data regarding the relationship between religious denomination and strong ELOC reveals the following distribution: Muslims: 49 (83.1%), Catholics: 143 (80.3%), Anglicans: 156 (77.6%), Seventh-day Adventists (SDA): 10 (76.9%) and others: 54 (71.1%). The findings on the LOC among young adults in relation to their type of university and living arrangements reveal strong ELOC in the following insights: Public Universities: 233 (81.8%), Private Universities: 179 (74.0%), Halls of Residence: 50 (83.3%), Hostels: 139 (80.3%), Living with Parents: 126 (79.2%) and Rentals: 97 (71.9%). The results indicate that both the type of university and living arrangements significantly influence young adults' perceptions of control, with those in public universities and more communal living situations feeling more influenced by external factors. This highlights the need for targeted strategies to enhance personal control and agency in these settings. A female leader 6 FGD 3 indicated that the type of university and living arrangements have a significant impact on young adults' sense of control, with students in public universities and communal living environments perceiving greater external influence on their lives. She noted that "**being in a public university, with a larger student population, sometimes leaves me feeling less in control"** and reported that "**When I moved off campus, I felt a shift in control. While I enjoyed more freedom"**. The latter is clear as to why many young adults prefer residing in hostels and or rentals.

The data on the LOC among young adults in relation to their year of study reveals the following distribution of strong ELOC: Year IV: 10 (83.3%), Year II: 151 (80.7%), Year I: 129 (77.7%), Year III: 121 (75.6%) and Year V: 1 (50.0%). Year I and Year II students in their first and second years show high levels of strong ELOC. This may be due to the transition from high school to university life, where students face new and unfamiliar challenges, leading to a greater perception of external control. This is in agreement with one male peer educator 1 from FGD 1, who mentioned that "**Year I and II students sometimes can't say no to some people and end up engaging in behaviour that causes them problems".** They feel less confident in their ability to influence their environment and outcomes, relying more on external factors. The data indicate that the perception of external control among university students varies significantly with their year of study, with higher ELOC in the earlier years and peaking in the fourth year.

The data on the LOC in relation to young adults' sexual relationships reveals the following distribution of strong ELOC: engaged with sugar daddies: 9 (100%), engaged with sugar mummies: 7 (87.5%), no sexual encounters: 77 (78.6%) and engaged with age mates: 319 (77.4%). Young adults who had sexual engagements with significantly older partners (sugar daddies or sugar mummies) exhibited the highest ELOC. This suggests that these relationships, characterised by substantial power and resource imbalances, may contribute to feelings of less personal control and greater influence by external factors. These young adults might perceive that their circumstances and outcomes are heavily influenced by their older partners' decisions and resources, which can heighten a sense of external control.

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The data indicate that the type of sexual relationships young adults engage in significantly influences their perception of control. Relationships with significant age disparities are associated with a higher ELOC, highlighting the need for targeted interventions to promote personal agency and healthy relationship dynamics. The report from the peer educator 4 from FGD 2 provides qualitative insights into the motivations behind young adults, particularly females, engaging in RSBs with multiple partners. When further probed, she mentioned that **"girls have sexual intercourse with classmates for coursework, sugar daddies for their hair, while other sexual partners can support them with dressing and upkeep"**. The statement underscores the complex and various reasons driving these behaviours, often linked to fulfilling various material and academic needs.

The study on social media usage and its relation to the LOC among young adults yielded results which indicated that young adults who rarely used social media had the highest strong ELOC at 151(82.1%), followed by those who often used social media at 286 (77.1%) and those who did not use it at all at 11(68.8%). The data suggest a correlation between social media usage and LOC, with higher rates of strong ELOC observed among both rare and frequent users compared to non-users. This implies that social media engagement may be associated with a greater perception of ELOC over one's life. Social media platforms often expose users to a wide range of external influences, including peer opinions, societal norms, and media portrayals. A peer educator 2 from FGD 5 mentioned that "**some young adults get influenced or pressured by what they see on social media**. **They see bad pictures online and also want to practice what they have seen".**

The study highlights the potential influence of social media usage on young adults' LOC, with both rare and frequent users showing higher rates of strong ELOC compared to non-users. While both rare and frequent social media users exhibit high rates of strong ELOC, the discrepancy in percentages suggests that the intensity or nature of social media use may influence the degree of perceived external control. Rare users, who likely have less exposure to social media influences, show slightly higher rates of strong ELOC compared to frequent users.

Further analysis was done and an ANOVA test was conducted to determine demographic variations in LOC based on gender, religious affiliation, and living arrangements, as presented in Table 3.

Table 3: Demographic Variations in LOC Based on Gender, Religious Affiliation, and Living Arrangements among Young Adults in Ugandan Universities.

ANOVAa							
Model		**Sum of Squares**	**df**	**Mean Square**	**F**	**Sig.**	**R Square**
1	Regression	119.262	3	39.754	1.054	.368[b]	.006
	Residual	19724.382	523	37.714			
	Total	19843.643	526				

The regression model with gender, religion, and living arrangements as predictors did not significantly explain variations in locus of control (LOCSUM) (f = 1.054, p = .368). This means that the model was not statistically significant, and these predictors together accounted for only 0.6% of the variance (R^2 = .006) in locus of control. The results are further reflected by the beta values in Table 4

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Table 4: Beta Values of LOC Based on Gender, Religious Affiliation, and Living Arrangements among Young Adults in Ugandan Universities.

Coefficients[a]								
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	95.0% Confidence Interval for B	
		B	Std. Error	Beta			Lower Bound	Upper Bound
1	(Constant)	33.988	1.112		30.567	.000	31.804	36.173
	A3 Gender	-.896	.540	-.073	-1.658	.098	-1.957	.166
	A4 Religion	-.084	.202	-.018	-.414	.679	-.480	.313
	A9 What are your current living arrangements?	.033	.226	.006	.144	.885	-.410	.476

The beta values are not significant for gender (β = 0.896, p =0.098), religion (β = 0.084, p = 0.679) and living arrangements (β = 0.033, p = 0.885). This implies that any simultaneous unit increase in the values of the independent variables does not significantly cause an effect on LOC.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS ON LOCUS OF CONTROL AMONG UGANDAN UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

The study revealed a striking predominance of external locus of control (ELOC) orientations among Ugandan university students, with the vast majority exhibiting strong ELOC and only a small proportion demonstrating a combination of external and internal control beliefs. This finding aligns with previous research in Sub-Saharan Africa documenting high external LOC among young adults facing socioeconomic constraints (Mutinta, 2012; Kaggwa et al., 2022). The results support Rotter's (1966) theoretical proposition that control beliefs that develop through reinforcement histories, suggesting that Ugandan students' lived experiences—such as economic instability and limited opportunities—may reinforce perceptions of limited personal agency.

Notably, the near-absence of purely internal LOC contrasts with Western studies, where internal control beliefs are more prevalent among university populations (April et al., 2012). This discrepancy may reflect cultural differences, as collectivist societies like Uganda traditionally emphasise communal interdependence over individual autonomy (Smith et al., 1996). The findings extend Kakal et al.'s (2022) research on Ugandan youth by providing quantitative evidence of LOC distributions in higher education settings.

Regression Model with Gender, Religion, and Living Arrangements

The findings indicate that gender, religion, and living arrangements do not significantly contribute to explaining differences in LOC within the sample. In other words, variations in LOC appear to be largely independent of these demographic characteristics. This aligns with some studies that have reported no significant demographic differences in locus of control (Ng et al., 2006). However, other research has revealed mixed results; certain studies have found gender differences, with males often exhibiting a slightly more internal LOC compared to females (Sherman et al., 1997). Lefcourt (2014) reports that living arrangements and cultural or religious orientation can influence one's sense of control. The current findings suggest that in this population, locus of control may be shaped more strongly by psychological factors such

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as personality traits, coping styles, and stress experiences, rather than by demographic attributes.

Gender and Socioeconomic Influences

Female students exhibited stronger ELOC than their male counterparts, corroborating global trends of gender differences in perceived control (Cheng et al., 2013). Qualitative insights from peer educators highlighted financial dependence as a key factor, with female students often feeling pressured into transactional relationships for survival. This aligns with Choudhry et al.'s (2022) findings on the economic motivations behind risky behaviours among Ugandan university women. However, the gender gap in this study was narrower than in Western research, possibly indicating that socioeconomic pressures in Uganda affect both genders similarly, mitigating some of the disparities seen in more affluent contexts.

Religious and Institutional Factors

Contrary to assumptions about religion's protective role, minimal denominational differences in LOC were observed, with all faith groups displaying high external control beliefs. This suggests that macroeconomic challenges, such as widespread poverty (Uganda Bureau of Statistics [UBOS], 2024), may overshadow religious influences on students' sense of agency. Interestingly, irregular worship attendees exhibited higher ELOC than regular attendees, a finding that diverges from Western studies linking religiosity to internal LOC (April et al., 2012). This may reflect Uganda's unique religious landscape, where economic hardships often shape spiritual engagement in ways that do not necessarily foster personal control beliefs.

Institutional factors also played a significant role, with public university students showing stronger ELOC than their private university peers—likely due to disparities in institutional resources (Musisi & Mayega, 2010). Living arrangements further influenced LOC, as students in university hostels and halls exhibited higher external control beliefs than those in private rentals. This supports Bücker et al.'s (2018) argument that institutional living environments can erode personal agency, though the effect was less pronounced than in Western settings.

Academic Progression and External Pressures

The U-shaped trajectory of ELOC across academic years—peaking in the final year after a temporary dip in the third year—extends Tinto's (2005) transition theory. While first-year students' high ELOC aligns with global findings on university adjustment challenges (Bücker et al., 2018), the fourth-year spike contradicts Western models where seniors typically develop greater internal control. This may reflect Ugandan final-year students' acute anxieties about post-graduation unemployment (UBOS, 2024), underscoring how structural economic pressures shape control beliefs.

Transactional Relationships and Digital Influences

Students engaged in transactional relationships with older partners exhibited near-total ELOC, starkly illustrating how power imbalances reinforce externalised control beliefs. Even peer relationships showed high ELOC, suggesting that external control perceptions are pervasive across relationship types. Social media usage also played a complex role, with both frequent and rare users displaying higher ELOC than non-users—a pattern consistent with global research on digital media's psychological effects (Twenge et al., 2019). This suggests a threshold effect where any exposure to social media may amplify external control perceptions, though further research is needed to explore causality.

Theoretical and Practical Implications

These findings complicate universalist assumptions in self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000), demonstrating how collectivist and economically constrained contexts may normalise external LOC. While the theory of planned behaviour (Ajzen,

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1991) remains useful, it requires contextual adaptation for Ugandan settings where perceived control is often structurally limited. Practically, universities should implement targeted interventions—such as workshops and mentorship programs—to foster internal LOC, particularly among female students and first-years. Digital literacy initiatives could also help mitigate social media's influence on control beliefs. At a structural level, addressing institutional resource disparities and broader economic barriers is essential to enhancing students' sense of agency.

CONCLUSIONS

This study reveals that Ugandan university students predominantly exhibit an external locus of control (LOC), with 78.2% demonstrating strong beliefs that life outcomes are determined by external forces rather than personal agency. Only 21.0% of participants displayed a combination of external and internal LOC orientations. Gender disparities were notable, with female students (79.8%) more likely than males (76.4%) to report external LOC, often linked to financial dependence and societal expectations. Institutional factors also played a significant role, as students residing in university hostels (80.3%) showed higher external LOC than those in private accommodations (71.9%), suggesting that structured living environments may constrain autonomy.

The findings carry important implications for policy and practice. At the institutional level, universities should integrate LOC development programs into student support services, emphasising self-efficacy training and mentorship opportunities. Targeted interventions for female students, such as financial literacy workshops and leadership initiatives, could help mitigate gender disparities in perceived control. Policymakers should consider reforming hostel environments to foster greater student autonomy through participatory governance structures. At the national level, these results underscore the need for youth empowerment policies that address systemic barriers to personal agency, including unemployment and limited economic opportunities. Collaboration between universities, government agencies, and NGOs could develop cross-sectoral programs combining psychosocial support with skills development.

Future research should explore longitudinal LOC trends and evaluate intervention effectiveness. By addressing both individual perceptions and structural constraints, stakeholders can cultivate more adaptive control beliefs among Ugandan youth, ultimately enhancing their educational outcomes and psychosocial well-being. Additionally, research could benefit from examining psychosocial predictors like self-efficacy, resilience, or family dynamics to provide a deeper understanding of what influences locus of control.

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