Available online at www.jlls.org

JOURNAL OF LANGUAGE AND LINGUISTIC STUDIES

ISSN: 1305-578X

Journal of Language and Linguistic Studies, 13(2), 109-135; 2017

Achievement attributions of preparatory class learners in learning English

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APA Citation:

Paker, T., & Özkardeş-Döğüş, A. (2017). Achievement attributions of preparatory class learners in learning English. *Journal of Language and Linguistic Studies, 13*(2), 109-135.

Submission Date:30/01/2017

Acceptance Date:25/08/2017

Abstract

The aim of the study is to find out the achievement attributions of preparatory class learners studying at pre-intermediate and intermediate levels for their perceived success or failure, and to investigate whether there is a significant relationship between achievement attributions of learners, their gender and level of language proficiency. The data were gathered through a questionnaire and a follow up interview with the participants. First of all, the questionnaire was administered to 223 participants, university English preparatory students. Then, 50 of the participants were interviewed to gain more insight about their perceptions. The quantitative data were analyzed by using descriptive statistics and independent sample t-tests, and the qualitative data were analyzed by means of content analysis. The results revealed that successful learners ascribed "having a successful teacher" as the most important attribution. In addition, internal and controllable causes such as "having self-confidence", "enjoying learning English" and "being interested in English" were the three outstanding attributions of successful learners. On the other hand, unsuccessful learners attributed their failure most to "lack of enough vocabulary" as well as to external, stable and uncontrollable factors such as "difficulty of exams", "short education term to learn English", and "lack of background education" at reasonably high level. In terms of gender, while females attributed success to studying English adequately, listening to the teacher carefully, reading books more than male learners, and getting help from others (friends, instructors, other sources) if necessary more than male learners, male learners found learning English easier than female ones did. In terms of proficiency level, the learners of intermediate level were more likely to view learning English as an easy task. In addition, the learners of pre-intermediate level seemed to depend more on their instructors.

Keywords: Achievement attributions; attribution theory; preparatory classes; English language learning; higher education

1. Introduction

Attribution theory is concerned with how individuals interpret events, and how these interpretations relate to their thinking and subsequent behavior (Kelley, 1992; Weiner, 1985; 1986). In an educational setting, attribution theory, as a constructivist perspective on learning, depends upon the notion that different learners will have different understandings and create their own meanings that are personal to

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them (Williams & Burden, 1999). In that sense**,** those beliefs or reasons constructed by learners serve as attributions that explain why they succeed or fail at a particular task. Therefore, in school settings, attribution theory deals with the ways in which learners make personal sense of their successes and failures. It also assumes that the knowledge of the causes of outcomes will enable learners to understand, predict, and control their own learning process (Försterling, 2001).

Attributions are subjective reasons and explanations given by people for why they have failed or succeeded in a given task, test, or an activity (Weiner, 2010). They can be defined as three broad categories; locus of causality, stability and control (Weiner, 1986; 2010). In each category, different types of attributions belong to one particular dimension. Hence, the "locus of causality" refers to whether individuals perceive the causes of events as internal or external to the self. Internal attributions are those that students feel the outcome is due to their ability or lack of ability that they have in order to carry out a task even though they have made efforts necessary to succeed in the task (Weiner, 1986; 2010). On the other hand, external attributions refer to the level of difficulty ascribed by the individuals to the task, or how lucky/unlucky individuals feel during the activity. The "stability" dimension refers to whether the perceived causes of success or failure will be consistent or alterable, and therefore, they are likely to change or remain unchanged over time in the future. The "controllability" dimension refers to the amount of control which individuals perceive to have control over the outcome of an activity. However, in a given activity, individuals seem to have less control on task difficulty or the amount of luck in task performance than the amount of effort they have made or willing to have in carrying out the assigned task (Weiner, 1986; 2010).

Although Weiner (1979) identified ability, effort, task difficulty and luck as the most common attributions, actually, Bruning, Schraw, Norby & Ronning (2004: 123) suggested that "individuals can make countless attributions that can vary considerably among learners." Vispoel & Austin (1995) added four other attributions to the list by identifying them as non-traditional attributions; strategy, interest, family influence and teacher influence, and suggested that strategy and interest are internal, unstable and controllable whereas family influence and teacher influence are external, stable and uncontrollable. Some other studies in language learning contexts (Graham, 2004; Tse, 2000; Williams et al., 2004) have found a larger array of attributions such as attributional categories of "mood", "other person", "condition in the home", "previous experience", "habits", "attitudes", "self-perception" and "maturity".

1.1. Literature review

1.1.1. Attribution research in second language learning

Some scholars have studied learners' attributions for achievement in the field of learning second or foreign languages (Erten, 2015, Erten & Burden, 2014; Genç, 2016; Gray, 2005; Höl, (2016); Hsieh, 2004; Peacock, 2010; Pishghadam & Modarresi, 2008; Pishghadam & Zabihi, 2011; Thang, Gobel, Nor, & Suppiah, 2011; Tse, 2000; Williams & Burden, 1997; Williams, Burden, & Al-Baharna, 2001; Williams, Burden, Poulet, & Maun, 2004). These studies mostly focused on identifying second or foreign language learners' attributions for success and failure. Findings of these studies often highlight the possibility that language learners have often attributed their performance to uncontrollable attributes. For instance, Williams & Burden (1999) found that while studying French, British primary students attributed their success mainly to their efforts, assistance from other people, and their competence. In addition, the learners perceived that distraction by other students, difficulty of language learning, poor teaching, and not concentrating were the causes of not doing so well. In another study, Williams, Burden, & Al-Baharna (2001) found that the 25 participants learning English also attributed that their success was due to their effort (practice), help from others (family and teachers), seeing and listening to the language, and having a positive attitude. On the other hand, the

participants attributed the causes of failure to poor teaching methods, lack of support from others, poor comprehension and negative attitude. In their study, Williams, Burden, Poulet, & Maun (2004) conducted their research with 285 students learning different foreign languages in the UK, and the participants were asked to give reasons for their success and failure. In this study, while the participants attributed success to 21 different causes, they attributed failure to 16 different causes. A greater proportion of attributions given for both success and failure was internal.

1.1.2. Individual differences in achievement attributions

Even though the findings of many attributional studies (Nurmi, Aunola, Salmela-Aro, & Lindroos, 2003; Stevenson & Lee, 1990; Christenson et. al., 1992; O'Sallivan & Howe, 1996; Georgiou, 1999) indicate that people tend to have self-serving bias or hedonic bias in that they explain success in terms of internal causes (e.g. ability, effort) and failure as resulting from external, situational factors (e.g. task difficulty, luck) to protect their self-esteem (Bradley, 1978; Zuckerman, 1978). In addition, the fact that there are also other factors such as gender, age, culture, motivation, self-efficacy beliefs that contribute to success and failure attributions cannot be denied (Little, 1985; Vispoel & Austin, 1995).

Gender: The gender difference may play as an important factor which affects learners' attributions for success and failure and their expectations. Therefore, how females and males perceive their successes and failures and to what they attribute them in certain fields has been an important issue. Kang (2000) found that Korean middle school girls scored consistently higher on all attribution aspects, indicating female students are more likely to attribute their success to internal factors than male students are. In the Turkish context, Satıcılar (2006) reported that female sixth grade learners of English attributed their success to effort more than their male counterparts did while his male participants attributed it to ability more than female participants did. In addition, Cochran, et al. (2010) reported significant gender differences in effort attributions. In their study, girls attributed their achievement more to their efforts than boys did. However, there are some studies of which results are the reverse. Williams, et al. (2004) found that boys referred to their effort more than girls did as the main cause of their effort while girls referred to the use of learning strategies and their teachers for doing well more than boys did. On the other hand, for failure, girls gave lack of effort, ability, and strategies as main factors, whereas boys gave misbehaving as the main factor more than girls did.

Achievement Motivation: The most frequently investigated individual differences in making attributions are those associated with achievement needs (Bar-Tal, 1978). Research on achievement motivation has demonstrated that individuals high in achievement needs differ in their attributions and behaviors from individuals low in achievement needs. For instance, learners high in achievement motivation attribute their successes to their ability and effort, while learners low in achievement needs attribute their success to external causes (Georgiou, 1999; Williams & Burden, 1999). Moreover, learners with high achievement motivation attribute their failures to lack of effort whereas learners with low achievement needs attribute their failure to low ability (Weiner & Kukla, 1970; Weiner & Potepan, 1970; Kukla, 1972).

It is obvious that approaching achievement-related activities is based on the learners' prior contentment with successful achievement experience. Since internal ascriptions lead to pride or reward for the successful performances, individuals high in achievement needs differ from those low in achievement motivation in terms of behavioral outcomes as well. Weiner (1972) asserted that learners in the high motive group are more likely to approach achievement-related activities; they work with greater intensity, persist longer in the face of failure, and choose more tasks of intermediate difficulty (tasks of intermediate difficulty can provide the most self-evaluative feedback) than learners low in achievement needs. It is because they consider that their performance is determined by their effort. However, learners low in achievement motivation avoid achievement related activities to evade

negative feelings, have low expectations of success, tend to be unwilling to try hard and quit when faced with failure because they believe that the outcome is beyond their control (Licht & Kistner, 1986; Kistner, Osborne & LeVerrier, 1988). To differentiate these learners, Covington & Omelich (1979), categorize learners into three groups: *mastery-oriented, failure avoiding* and *failure accepting* According to Covington & Omelich (1979), while mastery-oriented learners have a high need for achievement and ascribe their failure to lack of effort, failure-avoiding learners and failure-accepting learners attribute their failure to lack of ability since the former group has a fear of failure and the latter one has no hope for success in the future.

Culture: There is no doubt that cultural beliefs and values specific to a given culture influence people's self-attributions. For instance, in the study carried out by Williams, Burden & Al-Baharna (2001), it was found out that in the case of the Arab students, family influence played an important role while it was not mentioned as a cause for success by other groups. Similarly, Holloway (1988) after reviewing the research on concepts of ability and effort cross-culturally concluded that effort is considered the main determinant of achievement in Japan while in the United States, it receives relatively less emphasis compared to ability. These findings suggest that causal attributions of one cultural group cannot be generalized across other groups. That's why, attributional studies have shown that there are important differences in how casual attributions are made between cultures (Smith & Bond, 1993; Nisbett, 2003; Brown, 2004). As Thomas (2001: 7) points out, "the folk psychology of one culture can differ from the folk psychology of another."

Many cross cultural studies (Williams, Burden & Al-Baharna's, 2001; Lee & Seligman, 1997; Miller, 1984; Schneider, Hastorf, & Ellsworth, 1979; Smith & Bond, 1998) have revealed that while learners from western cultures associate success to internal attributions coming from within the self such as effort expended and equate failure to external ones, Asians are more likely to cite external attributions such as task ease or good luck for their success and attribute their failure to internal causes such as lack of ability or effort (Heine & Lehman, 1995; Kitayama, Takagi, & Matsumoto, 1995; Kurman, 2003; Shikanai, 1978, 1983, 1984 cited in Brown, Gray, Ferrara, 2005).

Thus, it is claimed that people in collectivist cultures fail to show the bias or show a reversal of the bias unlike people in western cultures. For example, in the study conducted by Parson & Schneider (1974), data collected from eight countries (Japanese, France, Germany, Canada, Italy, Israel, the United States and India) revealed significant cross-cultural differences, as well as significant gender differences (female respondents were found to be more external than male respondents). As a result, the findings were interpreted by Maqsud (1983) in that individuals living in individualistic cultures are more internal when compared with people from collectivistic cultures.

In another study conducted by Brown, Gray, & Ferrara (2005), apart from East Asian cultures, an Islamic culture was included. In the study, the attributional thinking of Turkish, Japanese and Chinese university students were investigated through a questionnaire. The results revealed that all three groups endorsed effort and ability for success and rejected task and agreed that failure is the result of lack of effort. For the Turks and Chinese while internal causes were stronger for success than for failure, external factors were more prevalent for failure. However, for the Japanese external factors were stronger for success than for failure. In addition, although they agreed that failure is the result of lack of effort, they also endorsed lack of ability, and rejected task, as a cause of failure.

We may infer from the brief review presented above that the findings are not always all confirming, however, gender, achievement motivation and culture factor seem to be likely to influence learners' explanation regarding their language learning performance. Females seem to attribute internal factors for success although they refer to their teacher more than males as the source of their success. In this study, we attempted to find out how preparatory school learners studying English

evaluate their academic achievement, and to what causes they attribute their academic performance in their particular context. Since every context has its own distinct characteristics in terms of different environments such as teachers, methods and resources, it is plausible that language learners may have different attributions and beliefs about themselves relating to the language they are learning. In our context, we believe that preparatory school learners may represent a particular group in universities where the medium of instruction is English. They are mostly 18 or 19 years old. They are not freshmen and they do not enroll any courses in their departments yet. However, they are exposed to intensive English language teaching program for an academic year so that they can improve their level of English at an academic level, and later on, they can continue their education through English as a medium of instruction in their departments. We believe that such a study will shed light on the students and staff and the program directors in more than 70 schools in various universities in Turkey. Hence, the primary aim of the present study is to grasp an understanding of to what causes preparatory class language learners at a School of Foreign Languages attribute their success or failure in English language learning process in Turkish context.

1.2. Research questions

The study addresses the following research questions:

1. To what factors do Turkish preparatory class EFL learners at School of Foreign Languages attribute their success or failure in learning English?

2. Is there a significant relationship between the achievement attributions of learners and their gender?

3. Is there a significant relationship between the achievement attributions of the learners and their level of language proficiency?

2. Method

The research design of the study is based on the exploratory sequential design, which, in the first phase, focuses on the collection and analysis of qualitative data and based on the findings, the researcher conducts a second quantitative phase in order to test or the generalize the initial findings (Cresswell & Clark, 2011). Hence, first of all, an open-ended items questionnaire administered to 345 learners from both pre-intermediate and intermediate groups. The participants were simply asked to write down what factors make them successful and their possible reasons, and what factors make them fail and their possible underlying reasons while learning English. The qualitative data have been analyzed through content analysis. The main themes have been identified and also a second researcher has gone through the same process and the parallel and contradictory findings have been compared and contrasted. Based on the agreed themes, a five-point Likert Scale questionnaire was developed, then, piloted and reviewed. The quantitative data were collected through this questionnaire and a follow up interview with some participants.

2.1. Participants

The participants (P) in the study were 223 preparatory class learners studying at the School of Foreign Languages, Pamukkale University, Turkey, among whom 117 were male and 106 were female, and 115 of them were at pre-intermediate and 108 of them were at intermediate levels. Their age ranged between 17 and 22. Although the learners were from various departments, they were grouped according to their language proficiency levels based on a placement test. Among 223

participants, the learners who perceived themselves as successful was 119 (53.4%) and unsuccessful was 104 (46.6%). They were exposed to one academic year English preparatory program to improve their English at an academic level so that they could attend their department where the medium of instruction is English. Students study English in various levels (from beginners to intermediate) for at least two semesters to get proficient at B2 level according to Common European Framework of Reference for Languages.

2.2. Instrument(s)

Two instruments were used to collect the data; an administered questionnaire with a five-point Likert Scale and a follow-up face-to-face, semi-structured interview to allow an in-depth exploration of relevant issues emerging from the questionnaire. The questionnaire was developed from an open-ended items questionnaire administered to 345 learners from both pre-intermediate and intermediate groups. The participants were simply asked to write down what factors make them successful and the possible reasons, and what factors make them fail and the possible underlying reasons in learning English. Depending on their results, we had a content analysis and grouped the factors and their possible reasons and all such data were transferred into statements with a five-point Likert Scale, then, piloted and reviewed. The questionnaire collected two types of data: 1) demographic data about the participants, 2) 15 items for learners' achievement attributions for success and 22 items for learners' achievement attributions for failure in learning English.

2.3. Data collection procedures

The data were collected using two instruments, an administered questionnaire with a five-point Likert Scale and a follow-up face-to-face, semi-structured interview to allow an in-depth exploration of relevant issues emerging from the questionnaire. The questionnaire was distributed and returned in a class hour. The participants rated the items from 1 to 5 assigning "completely disagree to 1" and "completely agree to 5." Among the participants, 119 of them attributed themselves successful in language learning, and 104 of them attributed themselves unsuccessful. The reliability of the questionnaire was computed, and it had a Cronbach-alpha value of $\alpha = 0.71$. The interviews were conducted with 50 participants 25 of whom were from the group perceiving themselves successful (P1-P25) and 25 of whom were from the group perceiving themselves unsuccessful (P26-P50). The interviews were recorded with the consent of the participants, and transcribed and analyzed.

2.4. Data analysis

The quantitative data were analyzed by using descriptive statistics and independent sample t-tests with a significance level of 0.05, and the qualitative data were analyzed by means of content analysis, through which the results were used to identify attributional relationships. While analyzing the qualitative data, the main themes have been identified and also a second researcher has gone through the same process, and the parallel and contradictory findings have been compared and contrasted.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. Learners' attributions for their success in learning English

When the mean values of items for those perceiving themselves successful are considered, Item 11: *having a successful teacher*, which is an external, uncontrollable cause, emerged as the most rated factor to achieve success, however, these learners also attributed their success to internal and

uncontrollable causes such as having self-confidence, enjoying learning English and being interested in English at high level (see Table 1). The learners believed that success was something that was related to the teacher as the main driving force in their learning English. This result is in line with the findings of the scholars in the field (Tse, 2000; Gobel & Mori, 2007; Lei & Qin, 2009; Peacock, 2010; Gobel, Mori, Thepsiri, & Pojanapunya, 2010; Thang, Gobel, Norl, & Suppiah, 2011). It shows, in a way, that the highly respected status of qualified teachers and their input play a significant role in learning English for our participants, too.

Several studies have identified the teacher as the main attribution for success. In the study conducted by Tse (2000) with university students, the participants who saw themselves successful attributed their success mainly to external factors (e.g. teacher or classroom environment and family or community assistance, and a personal drive to learn). On the other hand, the less successful ones ascribed their lack of success to themselves for not studying enough or being sufficiently motivated, poor teaching or the teaching method as well as peer group influence. In a similar study conducted by Lei & Qin (2009), significant relationships were found between learners' teacher and effort attributions and their English language achievement. Likewise, Peacock (2010) found significant relationships between attributions and EFL proficiency in his research with 505 Chinese university students through qualitative and quantitative methods. According to Peacock (2010), most attributions of learners were unstable and controllable, as expressed in effort, and participants identified their teacher as a source of their success. Similar results were also observed among Japanese and Thai students (Gobel & Mori, 2007; Gobel, Mori, Thepsiri, & Pojanapunya, 2010) and Malaysian students (Thang, Gobel, Norl, & Suppiah, 2011). Gobel & Mori (2007) and Gobel, et al., (2010) found that both Japanese and Thai students attributed success to external factors and failure to internal factors. In their study, Thang, et al., (2011) reported that most frequently mentioned reasons for success included interest for getting good marks and teacher influence, and they attributed failure to the lack of preparation and ability. In addition, Erten (2015), Erten & Burden (2014), in the Turkish context, found that 6th and 10th grade learners of English attributed their latest English test score achievement to their teachers. These findings may be explained by the highly respected status of qualified teachers and their input.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics for the learners' achievement attributions related to their success

Items	N	Mean	sd	Level of Agreement
Item 11	119	4.32	1.03	Completely Agree
Item 15	119	4.13	.95	Agree
Item 4	119	4.03	.88	Agree
Item 5	119	4.00	.88	Agree
Item 10	119	3.89	.86	Agree
Item 14	119	3.75	1.05	Agree
Item 6	119	3.59	.87	Agree
Item 12	119	3.55	1.26	Agree
Item 2	119	3.35	1.03	Partly Agree
Item 3	119	3.33	1.23	Partly Agree
Item 7	119	3.03	1.05	Partly Agree
Item 1	119	3.03	.96	Partly Agree

Item 13	119	2.90	1.21	Partly Agree
Item 8	119	2.89	.88	Partly Agree
Item 9	119	2.50	1.08	Disagree

On the other hand, it seems that these learners are not autonomous in studying English yet, but are still teacher dependent as they go through 'interlanguage' (Selinker, 1972) and a process of learning (Cook, 2008). In that sense, 'the secure environment' (Asher, 1982; Krashen and Terrell, 1983; Curran, 1976) that the teacher creates in learning may have them feel self-confident and motivate them to learn better.

Parallel with these ideas, we can quote some of the participants' ideas (participants will be coded as P), identified in the qualitative data regarding how much they were influenced by their class teachers:

"My teacher makes use of different type of methods and techniques while teaching, and knows how to attract our attention. She always tries to utilize various types of resources, so I get more motivated to learn" (P12).

"My teacher has a good sense of humor, so we have fun while learning English. Moreover, she is able to relate the topics in the book to our own experiences, which increases my interest to the class" (P7).

"My teacher is good at teaching, she provides us with many examples about the topic in the class. She always encourages us to do better, and makes us believe we can be successful, which motivates me a lot" (P21).

Thus, teachers have an important role in engaging learners in the language learning process for these learners, and a successful teacher may play an important role in increasing learners' motivation to learn English and making the learners have fun or enjoy while learning English.

The data also displayed that Item 15: *I have a self-confidence* (χ= 4.13), Item 4: *I enjoy learning English* (χ= 4.03), and Item 5: *I am interested in English* (χ= 4.00), were internal, stable and uncontrollable and referred at high frequency by successful learners. Therefore, these internal items were recognized as significant factors which contributed to their success by the learners. It is interesting to see the supporting ideas of two participants stated in the interviews:

"I believe in myself in learning English, and this enables me to participate in the classes more than my friends do. I try to respond to the questions asked by the teacher, and talk in English as much as possible in the class. Also, I am not afraid of making mistakes, which helps me to talk with native speakers on the internet and improve my English" (P3).

"I am not afraid of making mistakes in the class in front of my teachers and my friends. Other students lacking confidence are shy; they do not participate in speaking activities as they do not want to make mistakes. Therefore, they can't produce or practice what they have learnt. And they fail to understand lessons leading to failing in exams" (P17).

The statements of the participants signify that self-confidence contributes to learner's willingness to communicate in English (MacIntyre, Dörnyei, Clement & Noels, 1998). Another participant (P10) emphasized that "The more I do the tasks in the class successfully, the more I gain confidence in learning English and I study more. This brings about success to me." These statements underlie the significance of engaging learners in the tasks with reasonable challenge. When learners feel that they are capable of completing the tasks successfully, their self-esteem and motivation will rise automatically. In the studies of Brodkey & Shore (1976), Gardner & Lambert (1972), and Watkins, Biggs, & Regmi (1991), self-esteem was found to be an important variable in second language

acquisition. Besides, it is considered critical to subsequent successful academic performance (Akama, 2006; Bandura, 1986; Cheng & Chiou, 2010; Skaalvik & Skaalvik 2004).

In addition, successful learners considered being interested in English and enjoying learning English as important factors that served their success. The quotations from the interviews on this topic provided the similar data:

> "I am interested in English because English is the language of the world. You can communicate with people all around the world in English easily. Also, in order to find a decent job, it is a must today" (P13)

> "I want to go on my education and study abroad when I graduate. Therefore, I want to learn English a lot" (P7).

These quotations indicated that successful learners were aware of the advantages of knowing English, thus they had instrumental motivation (Gardner & Lambert, 1972) to be competent enough. The following quotations from the learners revealed that these learners were intrinsically motivated to learn English, and this raised their curiosity and interest, which in turn, promoted learning.

> "Loving English keeps me motivated about learning English and it makes easier for me to concentrate on what we are learning and it stops me from giving up" (P8).

> "Loving English motivates me to learn it. Firstly, I love the pronunciation of words in English. I try to pronounce words, the sounds in English like native speakers do. Therefore, I listen to music and watch movies in English, which is really enjoyable" (P19).

> "I love the process of learning English. It is different from learning and studying other subjects like mathematics or history. I am having interaction with my classmates and my teachers by means of role play activities, dialogues and group activities. I think these types of activities are really amusing and I like participating in them. Also, I like the textbooks we are following during the process. They are colorful, full of pictures from real life and include cultural knowledge, so I wonder about its content" (P25).

According to Pintrich & Schunk (2002), learners who are intrinsically motivated are ready to engage in an activity for its own sake. They work on tasks because they find them enjoyable. Dörnyei (1990) also emphasizes that intrinsic motivation may promote long-term retention of language. Moreover, it is stressed by a number of researchers that those who learn intrinsically gain superior understanding of the material being learned (Crookes & Schmidt, 1991; Deci & Flaste, 1995).

Furthermore, Item 14: *I get help from my teacher or friends if necessary*, which is external, unstable and controllable, appears to be a significant factor for the learners (χ= 3.75). Getting help from others is a strategy that is used by the successful learners. Since these learners were self-confident and intrinsically motivated to learn, they did not hesitate to ask for help or persist when they encounter obstacles. In addition, Item 6: *I have ability in learning English* (χ= 3.59), which is internal, stable and uncontrollable, is perceived significant by learners as a reason to explain their success. Thus, the finding suggests that many learners believe in their capabilities to succeed in language learning, which signifies high self-efficacy beliefs (Bandura, 1993). This is an adaptive attribution because high self-efficacy level is important in the motivation of learners in that it influences level of effort, degree of persistence, and quality of performance regardless of the skills one might possess (Bandura, 1997; Schunk, 1995).

The results regarding achievement attributions of successful learners do not seem to be parallel with the findings of previous studies completely. In some previous studies (Christenson et al., 1992; O'Sullivan & Howe, 1996; Stevenson & Lee, 1990; Williams & Burden, 1999) learners made internal attributions and explained their success in terms of effort and ability. In other studies (Graham, 2004;

McQuillan, 2000; Niles, 1985; Park & Kim, 1998; Watkins & Regmi, 1994; Williams & Burden, 1999; Williams, Burden & Al-Baharna, 2001; Williams, Burden, Poulet & Maun, 2004) effort emerges as the most prominent factor in the explanation of success. However, in the present study, the most referred attribution by the learners to account for their success was "having a successful teacher" which is external, stable, and uncontrollable, and this attribution is followed by internal and uncontrollable causes such as having self-confidence, enjoying learning English, and being interested in English.

Additionally, learners believed that the ability was an important factor in their success, however, in this study, ability attribution was not found in the top four causes for success. The significance of teacher, interest in English or enjoying learning English was also emphasized in the study conducted by Tse (2000). In her study, in which she investigated learners' self-perception on foreign language learning through the autobiography approach, it was found out that most of the students attributed foreign language learning success to teacher or classroom environment, family and personal drive to learn. Other studies (Lei & Qin, 2009; O'Sullivan & Howe, 1996; Park & Kim, 1998; Qin, 1998, 2002; Qin & Wen, 2002; Williams & Burden, 1999) reported that learners tended to attribute foreign language learning success and failure to the teacher or classroom environment factors. Lei & Qin (2009: 45) reasoned that "in comparison with other academic tasks such as mathematics and reading, foreign language learning is more practice- and communication-oriented with teachers and peer learners".

3.2. Learners' attributions for their failure in learning English

As for the learners who perceived themselves unsuccessful, the most prominent causes to which they mostly attributed their failure were Item 22: *I don't have enough vocabulary* (χ= 3.96), Item 18: *I'm anxious about failing the preparatory class* (χ= 3.81), and Item 6: *Exams are difficult for me* (χ= 3.78) (see Table 2). Among these attributions, Item 22 is internal, unstable, and controllable, Item 18 is internal, stable, uncontrollable, and Item 6 is external, stable, and uncontrollable. These learners believed that having enough vocabulary (internal, unstable, and controllable) was the key element to succeed in English. This is an adaptive attribution in that learners hold themselves responsible for their failure and they can control it.

Besides, Item 15: *I don't watch movies or read books in English* (χ= 3.54) and Item 1: *I don't study enough* (χ= 3.50), which are internal, unstable, and controllable, followed the most striking attributions. During the interviews, one of the participants emphasized that "When I start watching movies or reading books in English, I give up soon because I do not know enough vocabulary in English, so I cannot understand what I watch or read, and after a while I get really bored" (P42). This statement also revealed that particular learner's language competence was not enough to watch a film or read a book in English due to lack of enough vocabulary.

In addition, learners rated Item 18: *I'm anxious about failing the preparatory class* (χ= 3.81), and Item 6: *Exams are difficult for me* (χ= 3.78), at high level. It may be claimed that since unsuccessful learners do not make enough effort in studying English, and lack rich vocabulary, they regard exams as difficult tasks which are above their language level. The learners might think so because in midterm exams, sufficient vocabulary is required especially to comprehend reading and listening passages, to carry out the related tasks, and to convey ideas thoroughly in the writing section. Explaining failure with an external and uncontrollable cause, in this case, is Item 6: *Exams are difficult for me*, which is a maladaptive attribution because learners relate their failure to some outer factor on which they have no control. In this situation, their motivation to make more effort diminishes automatically. As a result,

this 'learned helplessness' attitude (Seligman, 1975) may cause them to be more anxious about failing the class.

Table 2. Descriptive statistics for the learners' achievement attributions to failure in English

Items	N	Mean	sd	Level of Agreement
Item 22	104	3.96	1.14	Agree
Item 18	104	3.81	1.52	Agree
Item 6	104	3.78	1.19	Agree
Item 15	104	3.54	1.11	Agree
Item 16	104	3.53	1.35	Agree
Item 1	104	3.50	1.16	Agree
Item 2	104	3.50	1.46	Agree
Item 13	104	3.48	1.21	Agree
Item 12	104	3.46	1.20	Agree
Item 4	104	3.38	1.23	Partly Agree
Item 17	104	3.18	1.31	Partly Agree
Item 11	104	3.03	1.09	Partly Agree
Item 7	104	2.93	1.13	Partly Agree
Item 21	104	2.73	1.15	Partly Agree
Item 14	104	2.71	1.24	Partly Agree
Item 8	104	2.65	1.31	Partly Agree
Item 20	104	2.55	1.24	Disagree
Item 3	104	2.45	1.17	Disagree
Item 9	104	2.29	1.07	Disagree
Item 19	104	2.23	1.23	Disagree
Item 5	104	2.18	1.25	Disagree
Item 10	104	1.71	1.05	Completely Disagree

On the other hand, Item 16: *One-year preparatory class education is not enough to learn English* (χ= 3.53), and Item 2: *I don't have enough background education* (χ= 3.50), are parallel causes and are among the reasons that are rated at high level by these learners. Both of these factors are external, stable and uncontrollable in which the learners put the blame on the causes which are external to them, thus holding no hope for a change or no expectation for a different outcome in the future. This finding also points out the fact that learners tend to associate their being unsuccessful partly with inadequate English education they received at high school. During the interviews, one of the participants pointed out that:

> "I graduated from a state high school, so I did not know anything about English when I started the preparatory class at the beginning of the term. Moreover, I had not had any English class for the last two years at high school, so I started from zero level" (P30).

Another interviewee stated that "Our English teacher at high school was not good at teaching skills, she was unable to respond to our needs. Besides, I did not receive any English education in the last two years of the high school" (P34). With respect to these statements, it is explicit that since the learners are deprived of sufficient background education in English, they consider it difficult to achieve enough competence in an academic year. Furthermore, Item 12: *I don't know how to study* (χ= 3.46), suggests that these learners may not have developed adequate learning strategies suitable for themselves. Hence, they may not have proper notions of how to approach to studying English. In addition, it is important to underline that the English classes these learners had at high school is based mostly on behaviourist approaches with a focus on the structure, mechanical drills, and memorization of vocabulary out of context. Therefore, these learners might not have developed or have difficulty in developing adequate listening, writing or speaking skills to achieve communicative competence required for them to pass the proficiency exam, which mainly focused on four language skills communicatively. Thus, they may think that one-year preparatory class education is not enough and exams are too difficult for them to achieve.

In addition to these, Item 12: *I don't know how to study effectively* (χ=3.46) is followed by Item 4: *Learning English is difficult* (mean: 3.38) which is external, stable and uncontrollable. The data reveal that half of the learners (51.2%) regard learning English as a difficult task and view it as an important factor having impact on their being unsuccessful. One of the interviewees stated that:

> "In my opinion, learning English is really challenging because the grammatical structures of English are not similar to those of Turkish. Therefore, I have difficulty a lot in comprehending and using the grammatical structures in English. Also, English words are really complicated and difficult to remember. (P36)"

Perceiving English as a difficult task may be related to learners' self-efficacy beliefs. This is a maladaptive attribution because when learners hold preconceived ideas about the difficulty of learning English, their self-efficacy beliefs which are "personal judgments of performance capabilities in a given domain of activities" (Schunk, 1985: 208) are also influenced in a negative way. Consequently, perceived self-efficacy beliefs affect learners' choice of activities. As Bandura (1986) claimed, people undertake and perform confidently activities that they believe themselves capable of doing, however they avoid the tasks they believe exceed their ability.

Our data also indicate that learners prefer to rate Item 13: *I'm unlucky in exams* (χ=3.48) which is an external, unstable and uncontrollable attribution at average level. This finding shows that more than half of the learners (52.9%) are likely to see luck as a factor affecting their being unsuccessful in learning English. This result is in contrast with the one found out among the learners perceiving themselves successful. While successful learners rate attribution of luck the least frequently, unsuccessful learners tend to acknowledge that their being unlucky in exams is one of the reasons resulting in their failure. During the interviews one of the participants stated:

> "I believe that luck is a factor that has an influence on my performance during exams to some extent. For example, in the last midterm, two of the reading texts included vocabulary that I was unfamiliar with and I could not generate effective ideas about the topics of the writing section. (P42)"

This finding is in line with self-serving bias which refers to the propensity for individuals to take personal responsibility for successful outcomes and deny responsibility for failure outcomes (Gobel & Mori, 2007). It seems that making an external situational attribution after failure and internal one after success serves to maintain learners' self- esteem (Brown & Rogers, 1991). On the other hand, Item 7: I do not have ability to learn English (χ=2.93) and Item 20: I do not have enough confidence in learning English (χ=2.55) that are internal, stable and uncontrollable are among the causes that are rated lower

than average level by the learners. This finding indicates that unsuccessful learners do not prefer lack of ability or lack of enough confidence as excuses for their failure. This is something adaptive (helpful) because ascribing failure to internal, stable and uncontrollable factors hinders learners' motivation and continued effort (Weiner, 1985; Brophy, 1998; Dörnyei, 1994). In that case, learners believe the outcome is unchangeable and beyond their scope of control, which closes the door on the possibility to persist in modifying the outcome (Lim, 2007; Weiner, 1985). This result is important in that learners perceiving themselves unsuccessful generally see themselves capable of learning English, thus having desirable self-efficacy beliefs (Bandura, 1986) necessary to succeed in learning English. This result is in line with the findings of some previous studies (Hassaskhah & Vahabi, 2010; Brown, Gray & Ferrara, 2005). In the study carried out by Hassaskhah & Vahabi (2010), it was found out that children rarely believed in "ability" as a failure factor. Similarly, the study carried out by Brown, Gray & Ferrara (2005) revealed that neither the Chinese nor Turks endorsed lack of ability as a cause of failure.

On the other hand, Item 3: I do not like learning English (χ= 2.45), Item 9: I do not listen to my teacher carefully in class (χ= 2.29), Item 19: I have some private problems like family, money, health, etc. (χ= 2.23), and Item 5: I do not want to learn English (χ= 2.18), are among the attributions rated the least frequently. These results illustrate that unsuccessful learners do not explain their failure with internal, stable and uncontrollable causes such as dislike for learning English or not having a desire to learn English. This finding has promising implications in that these learners have intrinsic motivation which is very crucial in terms of willingness to learn a language and enjoy doing the tasks especially for long-term success. It is acknowledged that so as to succeed in learning a foreign language, the learners should be motivated because nobody can really learn a subject or a language meaningfully without having an innate feeling that encourages them (Gardner & Lambert, 1972; Dörnyei, 1994; Williams & Burden, 1997). The participants have also emphasized the importance of motivation during the interview:

> "The key element to succeed in learning English is the desire to learn English or being interested in English, other environmental factors such as friends, classroom atmosphere or private problems come in second place" (P30)

> "If you are not interested in learning a language, it is impossible to achieve success because in that case, you are apt to give up in the face of difficulties (P29)

"It is not possible to learn English successfully just because it is obligatory without enjoying it" (P47).

In that sense, it might be argued that it is possible for these learners to achieve success if more effort is put forward by them. In addition, learners' reference to Item 9: *I do not listen to my teacher carefully in class*, which is an internal, unstable and controllable cause at low frequency for their failure is parallel to their reference to Item 3 and Item 5. Since unsuccessful learners had a desire to learn English and enjoy learning English, it seems that they tried to listen to their teacher carefully in class. Therefore, they preferred not to agree with the statement that their being unsuccessful is linked to not listening to their teacher carefully. Hence, these learners did not consider Item 9 as an important factor influencing their failure.

Finally, Item 10: *My teacher is not successful* (χ= 1.71), is the least frequently rated item by the learners considering themselves unsuccessful. This finding reveals that these learners did not attribute their failure to an external, stable and uncontrollable cause like having an unsuccessful teacher. One of the participants expressed that:

"I am unsuccessful in learning English; however, it has nothing to do with my teacher because she really knows how to teach without letting us get bored, she pays attention to our interests, desires and feelings, and she tries to exploit different types of activities" (P29).

Another participant pointed out that "I am unsuccessful in learning English since I do not study regularly, but I would be even worse condition if I did not have such a qualified teacher" (P37). These expressions imply that having a well-equipped teacher is not a guarantee for the learners' success but can be a leading force behind it. Furthermore, learners' reference to Item 10 for their failure with the least frequently level hints that these learners tend to hold themselves responsible for their failure rather than an external cause whereas the successful learners relate their success to the successful teacher mostly.

3.3. The relationship between the achievement attributions of learners and their gender

In terms of gender, there is a significant difference in the following items (see Table 3). The result for Item 1: *I study enough*, (t = -2.370, p=.019), displayed that females attributed success in English to studying adequately more than males did. In addition, the difference between males and females in terms of Item 10: *I listen to the teacher carefully in class*, (t = -2.605, p=.010) was significant. In other words, female learners attributed success in English to listening to the teacher carefully more than male learners did. Furthermore, a significant difference was seen on Item 13: *I read books in English out of school*, (t = -2.074, p=.040). Female learners attributed success to reading books in English more than male learners. Moreover, the significance (t = -2.836, p=.002) showed that there was an important difference on Item 14: *I get help from my teacher or friends if necessary*. In other words, female learners ascribed their success to getting help from others if necessary more than male learners did. The only item that was referred more frequently by male learners was Item 7: *Learning English is easy*, (t = 2.454, p=.016). It indicated that male learners found learning English easier than their female counterparts significantly.

Table 3. Independent samples t-tests results for gender differences in the learners' achievement attributions to success

Items	**Gender**	**N**	**Mean**	**sd**	**t**	df	p
Item 1	Male	65	2.85	1.01	-2370	117	.019
	Female	54	3.26	.85			
Item 7	Male	65	3.25	1.01	2.454	117	.016
	Female	54	2.78	1.45			
Item 10	Male	65	3.71	.91	-2.605	117	.010
	Female	54	4.11	.74			
Item 13	Male	65	2.69	1.29	-2.704	117	.040
	Female	54	3.15	1.05			
Item 14	Male	65	3.50	1.14	-2.836	117	.002
	Female	54	4.04	.84			

Our data revealed that female learners tended to ascribe their success more to internal, unstable and controllable attributions compared to males. Item 1: *I study enough*, Item 10: *I listen to the teacher carefully in class*, Item 13: *I read books in English out of school*, were all internal, unstable and controllable attributions, and these attributions were all related to making effort to attain success in

language learning process. Thus, females tended to attribute their perceived success to effort more frequently than male learners did. Although Item 14: *I get help from my teacher or friends if necessary*, are an external attribution, it is still unstable and controllable by the learner. In other words, female learners believed that their success in English was based on their effort, and they could control their performance. Hence, female learners held themselves responsible for their success.

On the other hand, Item 7: *Learning English is easy*, which is an external, stable and uncontrollable cause was attributed more frequently by male learners. These findings are in agreement with the results of the studies of Georgiou (1999), Lightbody et al. (1996), Peacock (2010) and Power & Wagner (1984). They found out that female learners preferred effort attribution more to explain their performance in language learning when compared to male learners. The difference between two genders may result from the fact that female learners have significantly higher levels of motivation and more positive attitudes towards language learning (Bacon & Finneman, 1992; Csizér & Dörnyei, 2005; Gardner & Lambert, 1972). Moreover, studying a foreign language is traditionally perceived as feminine subject (Birenbaum & Kraemer, 1995).

Regarding gender differences in learners' achievement attributions to failure, there was a significant difference between males and females in terms of Item 3: *I do not like learning English,* (t = 2.000, p=.048) which is internal, stable, uncontrollable, Item 9: *I don't listen to my teacher carefully in class,* (t = 2.178, p=.032) which is internal, unstable and controllable, Item 11: *Classes are boring,* (t= 2.680, p=.009) which is external, unstable and uncontrollable, and Item 17: *I get nervous during exams,* (t= -.945, p=.042) which is internal, stable and uncontrollable (see Table 4). Our data revealed that except Item 17: *I get nervous during exams,* male learners attributed their failure to Item 3: *I do not like learning English,* Item 9: *I don't listen to my teacher carefully in class,* and Item 11: *Classes are boring,* more than female learners did. In terms of Item 3: *I do not like learning English,* the dominance of male learners might be interpreted in the way that female learners had more positive attitudes toward language learning (Gardner, 1985; Wright, 1999). For Item 17: *I get nervous during exams,* the dominance of female learners can be explained in that "females may display higher anxiety levels prior to stressful events because of a physiologically-based phenomenon (Frankenhaeuser, 1980)" (cited in Morton et al., 1997: 76). The research carried out by Wolters & Pintrich (1998) also yielded into findings that supported this claim. According to their findings, in terms of English test anxiety, female learners reported feeling more anxious in the English test than male learners. When items in which gender difference was most significant in both success and failure attributions were compared, it was noticed that while female learners were more dominant across five items for success, male learners turned out to be more prominent for failure among four items.

Table 4. Independent samples t-tests results for gender differences in the learners' achievement attributions to failure

Items	**Gender**	**N**	**Mean**	**sd**	**t**	df	p
Item 3	Male	52	2.67	1.20	2.000	102	.048
	Female	52	2.22	1.11			
Item 9	Male	52	2.52	1.20	2.178	102	.032
	Female	52	2.06	.99			
Item 11	Male	52	3.31	1.20	2.680	102	.009
	Female	52	2.75	.94			
Item 17	Male	52	3.31	1.23	-.945	102	.042
	Female	52	3.45	1.36			

Although there were items that depict significant differences between male and female learners, when both genders were taken into account, some similarities were also noticed. With regard to effort and ability attributions accepted as two of the most common causal explanations for success or failure in the literature (Weiner, 1979), it was found out that both females and males tended to attribute their failure to effort than to attribute their success to effort, and they were both more likely to choose ability attribution for success in learning English than for failure.

3.4. The relationship between the achievement attributions of learners and their proficiency level

Our results revealed a significant difference between pre-intermediate and intermediate level of learners' achievement attributions to success in terms of Item 3: *I have some background education,* (t= -2.134, p=.035), Item 7: *Learning English is easy,* (t= -2.279, p=.024), Item 11: *I have a successful teacher,* (t= 3.166, p=.002), and Item 15: *I have self-confidence in learning English,* (t= 2.305, p=.023) (see Table 5). The learners of intermediate level attribute their success to both Item 3, and Item 7 more than the learners of pre-intermediate level do. On the other hand, the learners of pre-intermediate level attribute their success to both Item 11 and Item 15 more than the learners of intermediate level do.

Table 5. Independent samples t-test results for pre-intermediate and intermediate level learners' achievement attributions to success in English

Items	Level	N	Mean	sd	t	df	p
Item 3	Pre-int.	45	3.02	1.39	-2.134	117	.035
	Int.	74	3.51	1.10			
Item 7	Pre-int.	45	2.76	1.00	-2.279	117	.024
	Int.	74	3.20	1.60			
Item 11	Pre-int.	45	4.69	.90	3.166	117	.002
	Int.	74	4.09	1.05			
Item 15	Pre-int.	45	4.38	.75	2.305	117	.023
	Int.	74	3.97	1.04			

Due to some background education in English, the learners of intermediate level were more likely to view learning English as an easy task. On the other hand, it is possible that the learners of pre-intermediate level depended more on their teachers especially in the first term of the academic year when they first started being exposed to English intensively. The findings about the relation between proficiency level of learners and their attributions for success were not compatible with the ones found in the study of Peacock (2010). Peacock investigated whether there was a statistically significant connection between six attributions and EFL proficiency with 505 university students in Hong Kong. The results revealed that more proficient students attributed success to the factors such as paying attention in class, being interested in English, competing with one's self, and studying hard. In addition, less proficient students attributed success to easiness of the tests. It is striking that in Peacock's study, while more proficient students attributed success primarily to internal factors like their own efforts and less proficient students attributed success to external factors. However, in the

present study, the findings suggested the opposite. This difference might be linked to some cultural or situational factors.

The results regarding learners' achievement attributions to failure displayed that there was a significant difference between pre-intermediate and intermediate level of learners' achievement attributions in terms of Item 2: *I don't have enough background education,* (t= 5.074, p=.000), Item 9: *I don't listen to my teacher carefully in class,* (t= -2.020, p=.046), Item 10: *My teacher is not successful,* (t= -3.266, p=.001), Item 11: *Classes are boring,* (t= -3.648, p=.000) and Item 16: *One-year preparatory class education is not enough to learn English,* (t= 2.040, p=.044) (see Table 6).

According to our findings, out of five Items, the learners of pre-intermediate level ascribed their failure to both Item 2 and Item 16 more than learners of intermediate level. Since the pre-intermediate learners lacked sufficient background education, they might think that it is much more challenging for them to attain the competence necessary to be successful in an academic year. Both Item 2 and Item 16 are external, stable, and uncontrollable causes. This finding is parallel with the one obtained with less proficient students in the study conducted by Peacock (2010). In Peacock's study, less proficient learners tended to attribute failure to other factors outside their control.

Table 6. Independent samples t-test results for pre-intermediate and intermediate level learners' achievement attributions to failure in English

Items	Level	N	Mean	sd	t	df	p
Item 2	Pre-int.	70	3.96	1.33	5.074	102	.000
	Int.	34	2.56	1.16			
Item 9	Pre-int.	70	2.14	.99	-2.020	102	.046
	Int.	34	2.59	1.18			
Item 10	Pre-int.	70	1.49	1.00	-3.266	102	.001
	Int.	34	2.18	1.02			
Item 11	Pre-int.	70	2.77	1.10	-3.648	102	.000
	Int.	34	3.56	.86			
Item 16	Pre-int.	70	3.71	1.33	2.040	102	.044
	Int.	34	3.15	1.32			

4. Conclusions

The results reveal that for the learners perceiving themselves successful, having a successful teacher which is an external, uncontrollable attribution is the most rated attribution to which learners ascribed their success. However, the important point is that internal and controllable attributions such as having self-confidence, enjoying learning English and being interested in English are referred at high level by the learners. The results indicate that these learners mostly have adaptive attributions. It seems that they have high self-efficacy level and believe in their ability, and they are intrinsically motivated to learn English. In addition, their reference to luck at the least frequently level to account for success signifies that they have a sense of control on their success. However, their reference to teacher at the highest level to explain their success implies that these learners are mostly teacher-dependent, and view the teacher as a coach in their language learning process.

For the learners perceiving themselves unsuccessful, the result of the study indicates that the main attribution to which these "unsuccessful" learners ascribe their failure is lack of enough vocabulary, which is adaptive in that it can be controlled by the learners' own efforts. Likewise, other internal, unstable, controllable attributions such as not watching movies or reading books in English and not studying enough are the attributions on which most unsuccessful learners agreed upon. On the other hand, these learners also associate their failure greatly with an internal, uncontrollable attribution; anxiety of failing the class, and external and uncontrollable causes such as the difficulty of exams, short education term to learn English, and lack of background education, which are beyond their control. When all of these findings are taken into account, it can be suggested that unsuccessful learners are not helpless learners because they do not relate their failure simply to external causes which they cannot change. They also make internal and controllable attributions to account for their failure, which is quite promising. It means that they still feel they are responsible for their failure in learning English to a certain extent. These learners seem to believe that it is possible to get the desired outcome with reasonable amount of effort. Furthermore, limited or lack of critical thinking skills as well as their former educational experiences and incorrect strategies may have an impact on this outcome (Gürsoy, & Çelik-Korkmaz, 2015).

Concerning the relationship between attributions and factors such as gender and proficiency level, the results display that among successful learners, females attribute success in English to studying enough, listening to the teacher carefully, reading books in English, and getting help from others more than male learners do. The gender difference on these attributions implies that female learners tend to make internal, unstable and controllable attributions more than male learners do. Since all of these attributions involve a sense of making effort to be successful, they are all adaptive attributions. The only attribution that is referred more frequently by male learners is the easiness of learning English. As to unsuccessful learners, male learners attribute their failure to not enjoying learning English, not listening to the teacher carefully in class, and getting bored in classes more than female learners do.

With respect to proficiency level of learners, the intermediate learners tended to attribute their success to external factors such as having background education and the easiness of learning English more than the pre-intermediate learners. On the other hand, learners of pre-intermediate level attributed their success to internal factors such as having a successful teacher and having self-confidence in learning English more than those of the intermediate level. It seems that a qualified teacher can create the right atmosphere for them to study and learn as they have less proficiency compared to the intermediate level. In the case of failure, the learners of pre-intermediate level ascribed their failure to not having enough background education and short education program to learn English more than the learners of intermediate level. The reason may be that they cannot keep up with the pace of the syllabus and they get lost by the time.

This study has created a perspective about how learners view foreign/second language learning. We believe that their performance outcomes will provide teachers with valuable information about the profile of learners' perceptions. As (Weiner, 1979, 1985, 1994) stressed, effort and persistence are greater in individuals who attribute their performance to internal and controllable causes. Therefore, an understanding of situations in which learners are apt to make internal attributions within their control and external ones beyond their control will bring about a lot of benefits to teachers. We hope that such awareness will enable teachers to see the cognitive reasons behind learners' success or failure and the probable influence of these attributions on their upcoming achievements. In the light of such knowledge, teachers can make necessary amendments with the instructions and feedback they give to promote learners autonomy and agency. To achieve this, teachers may reinforce learners' positive beliefs in their abilities, and as Dörnyei (2001) suggests, they should emphasize and model the importance of effort in achieving a successful outcome. Thus, teachers may encourage learners to

believe that if enough effort is put forward with appropriate strategies, success is inevitable. Therefore, examples of successful learning based on effort should be praised. Being aware of the learners' problems and their underlying reasons, teachers may encourage learners to carry out tasks that they can manage and have the feeling of success, which will hopefully lead to self-confidence. In addition, teachers should also adapt their language, teaching techniques and methods, and the emotional, cognitive and physical atmosphere in the classroom according to the needs and readiness of learners so that they may have a successful learning outcome (Şad, 2010). In this respect, the teacher's role is so crucial that the teacher dependent learners will be cared and modelled with communicative tasks and task-based activities towards being independent learners. In this process, the understanding, appreciation, encouragement and constructive feedback of teachers are vitally important factors.

On the other hand, in order to alter maladaptive attributions based on lack of ability, tasks of achievable level can be presented to learners to make the learners believe that they are capable enough to complete the tasks successfully. Apart from these, as Woolfolk (1998) stressed, it is significant to emphasize learners' progress in time and provide suggestions for further improvement by setting achievable goals for them. Furthermore, in the case of failure, when learners become unsuccessful at a certain task, the steps which lead to unsuccessful outcomes should be analyzed to come up with possible solutions to the problems. All in all, learners may ascribe all language learning failure to a lack of ability; however, their attention can be drawn to a lack of effort. By doing so, teachers could create awareness and help learners to take control of their own learning process. If teachers can provide achievable tasks, students will be aware that they can achieve them by spending necessary effort, which will also lead them to build self-confidence. Dörnyei (2001: 120-21) proposes encouraging students' effort attributions and playing down ability attributions, adding that everyone has an equal chance with the former but not the latter. He also suggests giving feedback for effort and having the learners see the connection between effort and outcomes. When learners believe that they are able to control the causes of their achievement, they can perform better in the future.

Though this study provides evidence to describe the achievement attributions of English language learners with regard to attribution theory and underlines the importance of attributional dimensions in terms of subsequent motivation, actions and future expectations, the reader should note its limitations and the ways in which future research might be enhanced. This study was conducted with a group of English language learners in a preparatory school in an academic year. For this reason, additional studies with more students over longer periods of time are needed to fully understand the achievement attributions of English language learners. Moreover, attributions for success or failure may show variance when skills are taken into account, however, in this study, the main concern is on the language learning process in general. Further research may investigate attributions on the basis of language skills such as listening, speaking, reading, and writing.

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İngilizce öğrenen hazırlık sınıfı öğrencilerinin dil öğrenim sürecinde başarı veya başarısızlık algılarına yönelik nedensel yüklemeleri

Öz

Bu çalışmanın amacı, Türkiye'de bir devlet üniversitesinin Yabancı Diller Yüksekokulunda okuyan hazırlık sınıfı öğrencilerinin (orta alt ve orta düzey) İngilizce öğrenim sürecindeki başarı veya başarısızlıklarını kendi algıları doğrultusunda ne tür nedensel yüklemelere bağladıklarını incelemektir. Bu amaçla, araştırmacılar tarafından geliştirilen "başarıya anlam yükleme" sormacası kullanılmış ve mülakatlar düzenlenmiştir. İlk olarak sormaca 223 katılımcıya uygulanmış, daha sonra da katılımcılardan 50 öğrenci ile kendilerini başarılı veya başarısız algılama nedenleri üzerine daha ayrıntılı bilgi edinebilmek için mülakatlar yapılmıştır. Sonuçlara göre, kendilerini başarılı olarak algılayan öğrencilerin, başarılarını en çok dışsal ve kontrol edilemez olan "başarılı bir öğretmenim var" nedensel yüklemesine atfettikleri ortaya çıkmıştır. Ancak, içsel ve değişmez olan "İngilizce öğrenmede kendime güveniyorum", "İngilizce öğrenmeyi seviyorum" ve "İngilizceye ilgi duyuyorum" nedensel yüklemelerinin de öğrenciler tarafından, "başarılı bir öğretmenim var" nedensel yüklemesinden sonra en fazla atfedilmiş diğer nedensel yüklemeler olduğu anlaşılmıştır. Diğer taraftan, kendilerini başarısız algılayan öğrencilerin başarısızlıklarını en çok bağladıkları nedensel yüklemenin içsel ve kontrol edilebilir olan "yeteri kadar kelime bilgisine sahip değilim" olduğu bulunmuştur. Ayrıca, aynı öğrencilerin başarısızlıklarını dışsal ve kontrol edilemez olan "sınavlar zor", "bir sene İngilizce öğrenmek için yeterli değil" ve "İngilizce temelim yok" nedensel yüklemelerine de önemli ölçüde bağladıkları tespit edilmiştir. Ek olarak, kendilerini başarılı algılayan öğrencilerin nedensel yüklemeleri ile cinsiyet etkeni arasında bazı yüklemeler açısından anlamlı bir fark tespit edilmiştir. Anlamlı bir fark tespit edilen nedensel yüklemeler incelendiğinde, kız öğrencilerin başarılarını erkek öğrencilere nazaran daha çok içsel, değişken ve kontrol edilebilir yüklemelere atfettikleri bulunmuştur. Bunun yanısıra, öğrencilerin dil düzeyleri ile nedensel yüklemeleri arasındaki ilişki incelendiğinde, orta düzeydeki öğrencilerin algısal başarılarını, orta alt düzeydeki öğrencilere nazaran dışsal olan "İngilizce temelim var",

"İngilizce öğrenmek kolay" nedensel yüklemelerine daha çok dayandırdığı sonucuna varılmıştır. Diğer taraftan, orta alt düzeydeki öğrencilerin algısal başarılarını hem dışsal olan "mesleğinde başarılı bir öğretmenim var" hem de içsel olan "İngilizce öğrenme sürecinde kendime güveniyorum" nedensel yüklemelerine, orta düzeydeki öğrencilere nazaran daha çok atfettiği ortaya çıkmıştır. Kendilerini başarısız olarak algılayan öğrencilerde ise, orta alt düzeydeki öğrencilerin algısal başarısızlıklarını orta düzeydeki öğrencilere nazaran "bir sene İngilizce öğrenmek için yeterli değil" ve "İngilizce temelim yok" gibi dışsal nedensel yüklemelere daha çok bağladıkları tespit edilmiştir.

Anahtar sözcükler: Nedensel yükleme-katkı; nedensel (anlam) yükleme-katkı kuramı; hazırlık sınıfı;

İngiliz dili öğrenimi; yükseköğrenim

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