



**ACHIEVEMENT ATTRIBUTIONS OF PREPARATORY CLASS LEARNERS
AT THE SCHOOL OF FOREIGN LANGUAGES AT PAMUKKALE
UNIVERSITY FOR THEIR SUCCESS OR FAILURE IN LEARNING ENGLISH**

Alev ÖZKARDEŞ

June 2011

DENİZLİ

**ACHIEVEMENT ATTRIBUTIONS OF PREPARATORY CLASS LEARNERS
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UNIVERSITY FOR THEIR SUCCESS OR FAILURE IN LEARNING ENGLISH**

**Pamukkale University
Institute of Social Sciences
Master of Arts Thesis
English Language Teaching Department**


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June, 2011

YÜKSEK LİSANS TEZİ ONAY FORMU

İngiliz Dili Eğitimi Anabilim Dalı öğrencisi Alev ÖZKARDEŞ tarafından Yrd. Doç. Dr. Turan PAKER yönetiminde hazırlanan “Achievement Attributions of Preparatory Class Learners at The School of Foreign Languages at Pamukkale University for Their Success or Failure in Learning English” başlıklı tez aşağıdaki jüri üyeleri tarafından 28/06/2011 tarihinde yapılan tez savunma sınavında başarılı bulunmuş ve Yüksek Lisans Tezi olarak kabul edilmiştir.



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Müdür

Bu tezin tasarımı, hazırlanması, yürütülmesi, arařtırmalarının yapılması ve bulgularının analizlerinde bilimsel etięe ve akademik kurallara özenle riayet edildiđini; bu çalıřmanın doğrudan birincil ürünü olmayan bulguların, verilerin ve materyallerin bilimsel etięe uygun olarak kaynak gösterildiđini ve alıntı yapılan çalıřmalara atfedildiđini beyan ederim.

İmza :
Öğrenci Adı Soyadı: Alev ÖZKARDEŐ

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

It would not have been possible to accomplish this study without the help of many people. First of all, I would like to express my gratitude to my thesis supervisor Asst. Prof. Dr. Turan PAKER for his thoughtful guidance, worthy recommendations and continuous support during my study. His belief in the worth of this study has helped me overcome many moments of indecisiveness. I would also like to express my sincere appreciation to him for his positive personality, his positive attitude has always encouraged me and lessened my anxiety.

I would also like to express my gratitude to my instructors from the ELT Department Asst. Prof. Dr. Recep Şahin ARSLAN, Asst. Prof. Dr. Selami OK and Asst. Prof. Dr. Demet YAYLI for their contributions and support throughout the M.A program.

I am also thankful to to Assoc. Prof. Dr. Ramazan BAŞTÜRK, for his invaluable guidance for the computation of the statistical procedures. I would also like to thank Asst. Prof. Dr. Şevki KÖMÜR for his contributions and invaluable comments about my thesis as a jury member.

I would like to thank Pamukkale University Research Projects Office (BAP) and the staff as they have supported my thesis financially and provided assistance for various occasions.

I am also thankful to my friends, Eda ASLAN and Şefiye TUZCU for their support, invaluable remarks, and motivating attitudes.

I wish to thank preparatory school students who participated voluntarily in my research by giving their time and effort.

I especially owe thanks to my parents, Güler ÖZKARDEŞ and Hayrettin ÖZKARDEŞ for their love, trust, constant patience and support throughout the whole process.

ÖZET

PAMUKKALE ÜNİVERSİTESİ, YABANCI DİLLER YÜKSEK OKULU HAZIRLIK SINIFI ÖĞRENCİLERİNİN DİL ÖĞRENİM SÜRECİNDEKİ BAŞARI VEYA BAŞARISIZLIK ALGILARINA YÖNELİK NEDENSEL YÜKLEMELERİN İNCELENMESİ

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Yüksek Lisans Tezi, İngiliz Dili Eğitimi Anabilim Dalı
Tez Danışmanı: Yard. Doç. Dr. Turan PAKER
Haziran 2011, 132 Sayfa

Bu çalışmanın amacı, Pamukkale Üniversitesi Yabancı Diller Yüksekokulunda okuyan hazırlık sınıfı öğrencilerinin 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. Kendilerini başarılı algılayan öğrencilerin nedensel yüklemeleri ile cinsiyet etkeni arasında bazı yüklemeler açısından anlamlı bir fark tespit edilmiştir. Özellikle, kız öğrencilerin başarılarını erkek öğrencilere nazaran daha çok içsel, değişken ve kontrol edilebilir yüklemelere atfettikleri bulunmuştur. Bunun yanı sıra, öğrencilerin dil düzeyleri ile nedensel yüklemeleri arasındaki ilişki incelendiğinde, daha üst düzeydeki öğrencilerin algısal başarılarını dışsal olan “İngilizce temelim var”, “İngilizce öğrenmek kolay” nedensel yüklemelerine daha çok dayandırdığı, daha alt düzeyde kendilerini başarısız olarak algılayan öğrencilerde ise, öğrencilerin algısal başarısızlıklarını “bir sene İngilizce öğrenmek için yeterli değil” ve “İngilizce temelim yok” dışsal nedensel yüklemelere daha çok bağladıkları tespit edilmiştir.

Anahtar Sözcükler: Nedensel Yükleme-katkı, Nedensel (Anlam) Yükleme-Katkı Teorisi, Hazırlık Sınıfı, İngilizce Dili Öğretimi

ABSTRACT
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Özkardeş, Alev
M.A. Thesis in ELT
Supervisor: Asst. Prof. Dr. Turan PAKER
June 2011, 132, Pages

The aim of this study is to find out the achievement attributions of preparatory class learners studying at School of Foreign Languages, Pamukkale University, for their perceived success or failure. For this purpose, an “achievement attribution” questionnaire developed by the researchers, and interview technique were used. First of all, the questionnaire was administered to 223 participants. Then, 50 of the participants were interviewed to gain more insight about the perceptions of the participants. The results revealed that “having a successful teacher,” an external, uncontrollable attribution, is the main attribution to which successful learners ascribed for their success most. However, internal and controllable causes such as “having self confidence”, “enjoying learning English” and “being interested in English” were the three outstanding attributions. On the other hand, unsuccessful learners attributed their failure to “lack of enough vocabulary,” an internal, controllable cause at the highest level. In addition, these learners also attribute their failure 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. Furthermore, a significant relationship between achievement attributions for perceived success and gender was observed on some items; the female learners tended to ascribe their success to internal, unstable and controllable attributions more frequently than male learners do. With respect to proficiency level, the more proficient learners tended to attribute their success to external factors such as “having background education and the easiness of learning English.” In the case of unsuccessful learners, the less proficient learners tended to attribute failure to external, stable, and uncontrollable causes such as “lack of background education in English and short education term to learn English.”

Keywords: Achievement Attributions, Attribution Theory, Preparatory Classes, EFL

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1. BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Human beings seek to understand why things happen in order to gain predictability and control in their own world (Hunter and Barker, 1987). To this end, they act as observers and make attributions about the causes of events or other people's behaviors (Pintrich & Schunk, 1996). This search for understanding has become one of the most active areas of social psychological research, and how individuals in everyday life "figure out" what causes behavior has become one of its major focus of investigation (Bar-Tal, 1978).

People may attribute different causes or reasons to events in their lives when they want to explain why a particular outcome occurred; why they have failed or succeeded. These explanations assigned by individuals for their success or failure at a particular performance are called as attributions (Hsieh and Schallert, 2008; Banks & Woolfson, 2008). Weiner's attribution theory is concerned, therefore, with how individuals perceive the cause of outcomes and behaviors and how their perception affect those behaviors and motivation (Fiske & Taylor, 1984). In that sense, attribution theory is a cognitive theory since the core of this theory lies in human perception in that a person's behaviours, his affective and cognitive reactions to positive or negative outcomes are shaped by the causal attributions that are used to explain why a particular outcome occurred (Whitley & Frieze, 1985).

In the educational context, students are continuously engaged in making attributions for their success or failure. As psychologists suggest attribution is how students learn about themselves and impose order on uncertain environments (Graham 1994:32). To this end, they, too, try to make sense of the nature of their learning and teaching environments, their own abilities, and the tasks and demanding situations they are faced with (Bandura, 1997; Fraser, 1998; Williams & Burden, 1997). This search for understanding may direct them to ask such a question as " Why did I succeed or fail?". The inference they make; whether they see the outcome as caused by lack of effort, lack

of ability or as someone else's fault is a crucial point because personal explanations an individual makes for his success or failure will not only affect his subsequent actions but also give rise to different affective and emotional reactions (Williams et al., 2001). Because of this reason, in order to find an answer to such a question (Gardner & Lambert, 1972:130) "How is it that some people can learn a second or foreign language so easily and do well while others, given what seem to be the same opportunities to learn, find it almost impossible?" Gobel and Mori (2007) state that researchers have increasingly looked at how the learners themselves make sense of the tasks they are exposed to (Williams and Burden, 1997), the role of the learning environment and its effect on learning (Dörnyei and Murphey, 2003), and the beliefs and perceived capabilities of the students themselves (Bandura, 1997). As a result, attributions which are the reasons or beliefs learners hold about the causes of outcomes (Weiner, 1986) have been acknowledged as one of the most significant factors affecting learners' persistence, expectancy of future success, motivation, and in return, academic achievement (Brophy, 1998; Pintrich & Schunk, 1996; Weiner, 2000).

From educational point of view, attribution theory can help explain how second language learners view their language learning process based on their past experiences. Bernard Weiner has played the biggest role in the application of attribution theory in educational context (Pintrich & Schunk, 1996). Weiner (1974), in his theory of achievement attribution examines how a person's perception of outcomes shapes his/her thoughts, psychological situation, and future behavior such as giving up or persistence.

When learners do not know why they have succeeded or failed, they enthusiastically seek out information that can help them explain what has happened (Weiner, 2000). During this process, they ascribe various causes to their success and failure, and these attributions have been shown to have a significant impact on their future performance and motivation. Also, they are likely to generate different affective and emotional reactions such as pride, shame etc. (Kukla, 1972a; McMahan, 1973; Weiner et.al., 1971; Schell, Bruning, & Colvin, 1995; Weiner, 1986, 1994; Williams, Burden & Al-Baharna, 2001). Moreover, it is emphasized by Pintrich & Schunk (1996) that since these attributions are the causes *as perceived by the individual*, they can have significant psychological and behavioural consequences regardless of their accuracy.

Attribution theory links learners' past experiences to their future success endeavors by means of the causal attributions as the mediating link (Dörnyei, 2005). These attributions of learners may include different causes. Indeed, there are a great number of different attributions an individual could make. Since attributions rely on individual's own perceptions and beliefs, attributions of causality may differ from culture to culture, from social group to social group, as well as from person to person and task to task (Graham, 1991). In other words, attributions are situation-specific and cannot be generalized (Siegel & Shaughnessy, 1996). Apart from ability, effort, task difficulty, and luck that have traditionally been mentioned as the most prevalent attributions (Weiner, 1979), some recent studies in language learning contexts (Weiner, 1992; Tse, 2000; Williams et al., 2004) have found a greater range of attributions. These attributions are mostly elicited after a negative outcome is experienced because people are more likely to be concerned about negative or unexpected outcomes in order to control them in the future.

Learners' belief that they are capable of having control over their language learning process is a key determinant for success because such a belief plays an important role in learners' actions, motivation, and achievement (Bandura, 1977; Schunk, 1991; Weiner, 1985). If learners become conscious about their attributions to failure or success, and how those attributions are related to certain emotional responses and behaviours, they will be able to alter some maladaptive attributions into more favourable ones that could provide an opportunity for self control. In that way, by modifying maladaptive beliefs and perceptions they hold, it may become possible for them to take charge of their language learning process. Therefore, attribution theory seeks to outline perceptions, motives and opinions of the learners which, in turn, affects their performance (McDonough, 1989).

To conclude, it should be underlined that understanding learner perceptions and their attributions for success and failure outcomes is a complex process. There exists a number of contributing factors such as gender, cultural influences, age, type of task, motivation, etc., and these variables together with past learning experiences interact with each other and help attributions of learners to be formed. It is clear that attributions are significant means to delve into the cognitive reasons of learners' achievement, predict their future academic performance and to assist learners to gain more autonomy

in their achievement. However, they have received relatively little attention in EFL research (Peacock, 2009; Williams and Burden, 1999). Thus, more research is required to find out how learners evaluate their academic achievement, and to what causes they attribute their academic performance in various cultural contexts. To this end, this study aims to investigate the perceptions of language learners about the causes of their successes and failures in English language learning process in a Turkish context.

1.2. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Even though the significance of attribution theory has been acknowledged by many researchers Dörnyei (1994), Oxford and Shearin (1994), Crookes and Schmidt (1991), and Skehan (1989), attributions for success and failure in the field of language learning have been investigated relatively little (cited in Williams and Burden, 1999). Dörnyei (2001:117) points out:

“ ... the past becomes closely tied to the future and, accordingly, a very important aspect of motivating learners is to help them to deal with their past in a way that it will promote rather than hinder future efforts. ... Students’ appraisal of their past performance does not only depend on the absolute level of success they have achieved but also on how they interpret their achievement”.

Thus, learners’ attributions, perceived (interpreted) reasons of why they have become successful or have failed in learning English provide the basis to gain insight of their motivation and language acquisition.

Futhermore, attributions are situation-specific and cannot be generalized (Siegel & Shaughnessy, 1996). Learners from different cultural backgrounds may cite different reasons for their success or failure in various academic situations. Although many studies have investigated the attributional styles of both individuals from Western (see Weiner, 2001) and Eastern culture (see Crittenden, 1996, and Hong, 2001, for reviews cited in Brown, Gray, Ferrara, 2005) there is a lack of data on attributions in achievement contexts, mainly on foreign language learning in Turkey. Therefore, this study aims to contribute to attribution research in EFL context in Turkey.

In addition, at Pamukkale University, while the medium of instruction is totally English in some departments, it is at least % 30 English in others. Therefore, students have to be proficient in English in order to be able to carry out their study and be successful in their departments. However, observations by the administrators and instructors at the university reveal that high rates of unattendance and a large number of students failing in exams are major handicaps. Therefore, this study aims to search English language learners' attributions for their successes and failures in foreign language learning process at School of Foreign Languages, Preparatory School, Pamukkale University. In that way, further insights about learners' beliefs, perceptions concerning potential causes for their successes and failures will be gained.

1.3. THE AIM AND SCOPE OF THE STUDY

Even though many learners put forward a certain amount of effort or devote their time to learn English, very few seem to achieve an adequate level of second language (L2) competence. As a result of this, these learners develop a particular set of beliefs about themselves as language learners and make attributions with regard to their experiences in language learning. These attributions are incredibly important for English language learning because they are signs of learners' perception of achievement, and they do not only clarify their present performance in learning English but also illuminate their future performance (Weiner, 1986, 1994). Hence, the primary aim of the present study is to grasp an understanding of to what causes prep-class language learners at Pamukkale University attribute their success or failure in language learning. Since every context has its own distinct characteristics in terms of different environments, teachers and methods and resources, it is plausible that language learners may have different attributions and beliefs about themselves relating to the language they are learning. By this way, it is also possible to gain new insight on learner motivation.

Apart from these, this study will make it possible to compare different attributional patterns displayed by students who consider themselves successful in learning English with those who perceive themselves as unsuccessful. In addition, such variables as gender, proficiency level and achievement grades of learners will be taken into consideration. The study also seeks to examine dimensions of learners' attributions

with regard to attribution theory. It is acknowledged that not only attributions but also underlying causal dimensions are significant determinants of learners' subsequent performance, future goals and emotional reactions (Graham, 1994; Weiner, 1986).

Finally, the study enables lecturers to gain awareness for learner attributions. For example, if students attribute EFL success or failure to external or uncontrollable rather than internal or controllable factors, this hinders language learning. Thus, the knowledge of causal attributions may provide opportunities for lecturers to alter unhelpful attributions with those that are conducive to learning through the feedback they give or the tasks they prepare. Tse (2000) points out that being aware of the perceptions of learners has important pedagogical implications. It is claimed that if knowledge about students' opinions and attitudes towards language learning and classroom activities is gained, it would be easier to become aware of their affective states and it would become easier to decide how best to design certain classroom activities and methods in language classrooms (2000).

In short, the knowledge of attribution is valuable for EFL teachers, learners and their achievement in language learning process. With the help of this awareness, it might be possible to increase persistence and expectancy levels of the students, which in return enhances academic achievement.

The study addresses the following research questions:

1. To what factors do Turkish prep class EFL learners at The School of Foreign Languages, Pamukkale University 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?
4. Is there a significant relationship between learners' perception of success for themselves as language learners and their achievement scores in the midterm exams?

1.4. THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The fact that learning a second language is a complex process has been recognized by most of the second language teachers, researchers and learners. Learning a second language requires the acquisition of vocabulary and grammar structures, the development of communication skills, and an awareness of culture. Although some learners are successful in language learning process, others find it challenging and are unable to make progress. In order to understand why some learners are more successful than others, researchers have gradually concentrated on how the learners themselves make sense of and evaluate their own learning process (Williams and Burden, 1997; Bandura, 1997).

Beliefs are central constructs in every discipline which is concerned with human behaviour and learning. Ames (1986) suggests that perceptions and beliefs that make the student involved, independent and self-confident in learning should be examined. Likewise, McCombs (1990) points out that beliefs and attitudes about the self, learning process and the environment are very influential in learners' willingness to learn, participation and struggling in the learning process, and effort to survive in the tasks presented to them. Such an attitude has put learners' beliefs and perceptions at the centre of language learning process. Many researchers have acknowledged the significance of learner perception and tried to explain achievement behavior by analyzing perceived causes of success or failure by learners themselves. To this end, some of the researchers in the field of education (Weiner, 1979; Weiner et.al, 1971; Williams, Burden, Poulet and Maun, 2004; Gobel & Mori, 2007; Tse, 2000) have looked at what kind of causal attributions people make to explain their successes and failures in educational settings, how these attributions influence both expectations for future success or failure and emotions of learners, and in turn, how they affect achievement behaviors on the basis of attribution theory.

Although the importance of perceived causes for success or failure has received considerable attention, most of the studies investigating the relationship between attributions and achievement (Basturk & Yavuz, 2010; Bempechat, Ginsburg, Nakkula, & Wu, 1996; Boruchovitch, 2004; Green & Holeman, 2004; Powers, Choroszy, Douglas, & Cool, 1986 cited in Pishghadam and Zabihi, 2011) and attributions and

gender (Brown & Josephs, 1999; Mau & Lynn, 2000; Reis & Park, 2001; Eccles, Adler, & Meece, 1984; Stipek & Gralinski, 1991; Morgan, Griffin, & Heyward, 1996; Peterson, 1980; Riordan, Thomas, and James (1985) have been conducted in the areas of mathematics and sports. As Peacock (2009), and Oxford (2002) emphasized, in EFL research, it has not received adequate attention. Only a few studies have been conducted so far to investigate learners' attributions for success and failure in the area of learning second or foreign languages (Gray, 2005; Pishghadam & Modarresi, 2008; Tsi, 2000; Williams & Burden, 1997; Williams, Burden, & Al-Baharna, 2001; Williams, Burden, Poulet, & Maun, 2004). In addition, perceptions of success and failure are without doubt context-specific (Williams, Burden and Al-Baharna, 2001). All of these lead to a call for more attribution studies in different cultural contexts (Williams et.al., 2004). Thus, the aim of the study is to identify the factors to which EFL learners in Turkish context attribute their success or failure in the light of attribution theory, and how these attributions vary in relation to learners' gender, proficiency level, and achievement scores.

It is obvious that learning about achievement attributions of learners will assist English teachers considerably. If instructors are able to recognize how individuals perceive themselves as language learners, what causes they ascribe for their successes or failures, and whether they feel they are in control of their language learning experiences, then they might achieve to help them manage their learning outcomes successfully. Moreover, with the help of information about students' opinions and attitudes toward language learning and classroom activities, it will be easier to become aware of learners' affective states and it becomes easier to decide how best to design certain classroom activities and methods in language classrooms. This way, instructors will have the opportunity to promote motivation and learner autonomy as well. Therefore, the main purpose of this study is to gain more insight into learners' perception, to investigate learners' attributions with respect to causal dimensionality patterns.

1.5. ASSUMPTIONS AND LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

It is assumed that all the participants take part in the study willingly. It is also assumed that all the participants will answer the questions in the questionnaire and interview honestly and frankly.

There are some limitations to the present study. First of all, this study is limited to the English language learners in the School of Foreign Languages, Pamukkale University in 2010-2011 academic year. For this reason, it is not possible to generalize the results of this study for all English language learners in Turkey. It is obvious that the larger the sample, the more stable results would be achieved. If more participants were included, inferences about Turkish learners' attributional styles would be more generalizable. Secondly, in this study, the questionnaire and interview have been designed by the researchers of the study on the basis of open-ended questionnaire that was previously applied. Therefore, the results of the study are limited to these instruments. 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. Finally, in this study, dimensional location of attributions have been decided according to the researcher's own perception based on literature review instead of that of the learners although it is acknowledged that perceived causality differs from person to person and within an individual over occasions (Weiner, 1985). For example, a learner may attribute success to being a "lucky person" or a factor that is dispositional or temporary. In that sense, luck which is regarded as external, unstable cause of success for one learner may be conceived as internal, stable for another.

1.6. OPERATIONAL DEFINITIONS

Attribution: Attribution is defined as the perceived causes of outcomes (Shunk, 1991; Weiner, 1986). In EFL context, they are the reasons or beliefs learners hold about why they have succeeded or failed (Peacock, 2009).

Successful Learners: Learners who perceive themselves as successful in language learning process.

Unsuccessful Learners: Learners who perceive themselves as unsuccessful in language learning process.

Prep School: It is a one-year preparatory program in which students study English to attain language competence for their future academic studies in their departments where the medium of instruction is English.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

1. INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, first of all, the meaning of attribution and the background of attribution theory will be explained, and then information about main attributions in attribution theory, attributional dimensionality, consequences of attributions: adaptive / maladaptive attributions and attributional retraining will be covered in the chapter. Moreover, the relationship between some individual differences and attributions will be discussed together with related researches in the field.

2.1. ATTRIBUTION AND ATTRIBUTION THEORY

Attribution theory has originated from within the field of social psychology basically to deal with the way people explain the causes of events, their own behaviour, as well as other people's behavior. It posits that people are not content with only observing events happening around them, but have a desire to understand why a particular event occurred to provide order in their own world (Heider, 1958; Försterling, 2001). To this end, they are continually involved in a search for causes of events in their daily lives (Alderman, 1999; Weiner, 1974, 1979) and act as "naive scientists" trying to find out explanations for their own and other individuals' behaviours and behavioural outcomes (Försterling, 2001). Therefore, they always ask questions beginning with "Why?; Why did I put on weight? Why did my computer crash? And why did I get a higher mark in the exam?" and in order to find reasons behind the events, they make causal attributions. Thus, causal attributions are inferences on why events occur.

According to Shunk (1991) and Weiner (1986), attributions are individual's perceived causes of events and outcomes. These causes individuals infer gradually become beliefs or expectations that allow the person to predict and understand the events they observe and experience. In that sense, attribution theory concerns what Heider (1958) has called "naive psychology" and it is about how common sense operates. That is; how the "man (or woman) in the street" accounts for events, what psychological outcomes such explanations bring and, in turn, how they react to the

outcomes and shape their behaviours (Kelley, 1992). In other words, attribution theory is concerned with how individuals interpret events, and how these interpretations relate to their thinking and subsequent behavior.

In attribution theory, it is important to note that the main concern is not the actual but perceived (interpreted) causes of behaviour by the individual. For instance; the actual cause of why an individual failed an exam could not be included in the realm of attribution theory. However, how the individual process and evaluate the negative outcome and, in the end, what s/he perceives as the cause of the failure, is the main focus of this theory (Försterling, 2001; Stipek, 1988; Weiner, 2000). In this sense, attribution theory can be regarded to be an aspect of the constructivist approach as opposed to the behaviourist one in which situations or stimuli directly trigger reactions such as behaviours and emotions (Neisser, 1966). In contrast to behaviourist theories that imply direct transmission of knowledge without any cognitive process, attribution theory assumes that cognitions mediate between stimuli and reactions. Hence, attributional research is related to the effect of cognitions (causes) on subsequent behaviour and emotional reactions.

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 them (Williams and 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). For example, when a learner becomes unsuccessful in an exam, s/he may pose such questions as “ Why did I fail that exam” or “I worked really hard, so why was my grade so poor?” The responses given to these questions may include effort or ability attributions on their part or to some other situational factors. With respect to attribution theory, no matter what reason the learner come up with, it is likely to produce different affective, cognitive reactions and subsequent motivation, which, in turn, will affect that learner’s subsequent actions (Heider, 1958; Weiner, 1979, 1992; Williams et.al., 2004).

Attribution theory which focuses on how people explain the causes of their own success and failures (Slavin, 2000) is one of the cognitive theories of motivation that gained ground in the mid 1970s in educational psychology. The central assumption in cognitive theories is that people actively, rather than passively, respond to their surroundings. As a cognitive theory of motivation, attribution theory explains motivation as a function of people's thinking and interpretation instead of some instinct, need or drive (Stipek, 2002). Therefore, attribution theory regards motivation as a process rather than a product, and it deals with how learners process their past experiences of failure and success, and how these causal explanations of past experiences influence expectations and behaviours (Dörnyei and Ottó, 1998; Dörnyei, 2001). It is explicit that in the case of education, there is a strong relation between students' perceptions of success on the one hand, and success and motivation on the other hand.

2.2. THE HISTORY OF ATTRIBUTION THEORY

The foundations of causal explanations can be traced back to the philosophers such as Aristotle, Hume, and Mill, however the first systematic analysis of causal structure was proposed by Heider (1958), who is considered as the founder of attribution theory with his book called "*The Psychology of Interpersonal Relationships*" (cited in Försterling, 2001: 7). Heider (1958), in his book, embraced "naïve" or "lay" psychology in which he believes people act on the basis of their beliefs. In his theory of attribution, Heider (1958) asserts that humans have an innate desire to understand the causes of behavior and by making attributions about the cause of certain outcomes, they try to make sense of their world and lessen the feeling that the world is unstable and unpredictable (cited in Sweeton & Deerrose, 2010).

Basically, Heider's attribution theory relies on a three-step process: (1) people believe that there are causes behind behaviors (2) people believe that it is important to understand why others behave as they do; and (3) the cause of a behavior is in a person, a situation, or both (Sweeton and Deerrose, 2010). In that way, Heider differentiated personal causes from situational ones. According to Heider (1958), behavioral outcomes, success and failure, can be ascribed to *Can* × *Try*. In an achievement context, *Can* refers to the relation of ability to the difficulty of the task and *Try* represents effort.

Hence, the outcome is either determined by the factors residing within the person (ability and effort) or by the factors residing within the environment (task difficulty). In other words, attributions made by people can be internal, external, or a combination of both. Thus, a person's behaviours may result from his/her disposition, the environment or his/her disposition and the environment. Heider (1958:146-147 cited in Lei and Qin, 2009:30) suggests that this understanding of the causal structure of human behavior is quite significant because it has an important effect on expectancy to future success and subsequent behaviors. As a result, he argues that this consciousness of the causal structure of human behavior serves as an important factor for people's future expectancies and behaviors.

Heider's understanding of attributional structure inspired others to look into the processes by which people explain their own successes and failures. His attributional structure was taken up and extended by many social psychological researchers like Kelley & Michella, 1980; Rotter, 1966; Jones, 1976; Weiner, 1986. As a result, Weiner and his colleagues (Jones et al., 1972; Weiner, 1974, 1986) developed a theoretical framework that has become a major research paradigm of social psychology.

Rotter (1966) made the plain distinction between internal and external factors and introduced *locus of control* dimension to the attribution theory claiming that some people are inclined to perceive themselves in control of events in their lives, whereas others see events as beyond their control and affected by environmental circumstances.

Kelley advanced Heider's theory of attribution and examined how people decide whether to make external or internal dispositional attributions (Kelley & Mihella, 1980). He suggested that perceivers examine three different kinds of information in their efforts to establish validity for their attribution-making (Ross and Fletcher, 1985): consistency, distinctiveness, and consensus.

Consensus information - do all or only a few people respond to the stimulus in the same way as the target person?

Distinctiveness information - does the target person respond in the same way to other stimuli as well?

Consistency information - does the target person always respond in the same way to this stimulus?

As it is seen, Kelley's ANOVA model (1967) is concerned with how observers assign responsibility for the outcomes of others (Martinko, 1995).

Weiner elaborated Heider's ideas and played a significant role in the development of attribution theory by focusing his attribution theory on academic and other achievement contexts (Pintrich & Schunk, 1996). Weiner and his associates (Weiner, 1972b, 1974; Weiner et al., 1971) have suggested that individuals' beliefs about causes of success and failure may play an important role in understanding achievement-related behavior. To explain achievement behavior, they proposed an attributional model that is based on the assumption that beliefs about the causes of success and failure mediate between the perceptions of an achievement task and the final performance. In other words, Weiner (1974), in his theory of achievement attribution discusses how a person's perceptions of event outcomes shape their thoughts, psychological stance and future behavior (e.g how attributions for one's own failure influence one's own behaviour such as giving up or persistence). He built upon Rotter's locus dimension and came up with a three-dimensional taxonomy of attributions: locus of causality (internal or external) which he developed from Rotter's locus dimension, stability over time (stable or unstable), and controllability (controllable or uncontrollable) which he (1979) suggested as a third dimension (Stipek, 1988). Moreover, Weiner suggested that people tend to refer to four main sets of attributions for their perceived success and failures in life: a) ability, b) effort, c) luck, and d) the perceived difficulty of the task with which they are faced (Williams & L.Burden, 1997:105). These achievement attributions have been classified according to three attribution dimensions of locus, controllability, and stability.

In this classification, locus of causality is a concept which seeks whether people see themselves as the cause of the events or they regard the causes as resulting from outside factors or other people. In that sense, ability and effort are considered internal because they originate within the person, whereas task difficulty and luck originate outside the person and are therefore considered as external causes (Bar-Tal, 1978). The stability dimension examines whether causes change over time or not. So, a cause may be thought as fixed or likely to change with time (Weiner et al., 1971). For instance, ability can be classified as a stable, internal cause, and effort and luck can be classified as unstable and internal because unlike ability, effort is considered to vary if the same

task is repeated. Likewise, task difficulty and luck can be classified as external- stable causes and external-unstable causes respectively since contrary to the task difficulty, luck can fluctuate over time. And finally, controllability is concerned with people's perception of whether they are responsible for their own actions or not (Carlyon, 1997; Stipek, 1988). As Weiner (1983) suggests, controllability reflects the degree of volitional influence people feel they have over a cause. This dimension distinguishes causes one can control, such as skill, effort from causes one cannot control, such as aptitude, mood, others' actions and luck. These dimensions are of high importance in terms of designating willingness to exert effort for future tasks, individuals' belief in himself and emotions they bring about with them (Weiner, 1986; Stipek, 1993).

In the following figure, the relation between achievement attributions and dimensions is shown:

Table 1.1. The relationships among attributions and dimensions (Eggen and Kauchak 1994).

	LOCUS OF CONTROL	STABILITY	CONTROLLABILITY
Ability	<i>Internal</i>	<i>Stable</i>	<i>Uncontrollable</i>
Effort	<i>Internal</i>	<i>Unstable</i>	<i>Controllable</i>
Luck	<i>External</i>	<i>Unstable</i>	<i>Uncontrollable</i>
Task difficulty	<i>External</i>	<i>Stable</i>	<i>Uncontrollable</i>

Weiner (1986, 1994) and Schell, Bruning, & Colvin (1995) point out that the causes individuals attribute to events have an impact on the way they cognitively, affectively, and behaviorally respond on future occasions, therefore attributions play an important role in language learning and teaching. For instance, when individuals believe success results from effort, they work harder in the hope of achieving the same result. According to Weiner, attributing results to internal and controllable factors furnishes individuals with feelings of control and encourages them to try hard and succeed while explaining causes with respect to external and uncontrollable attributions may discourage people and cause them not to struggle hard since in that case, they keep no hope for success. Thus, how individuals perceive outcomes and define success and failure in terms of the dimensional scale is highly significant.

When the dimensions are taken into account, the relevance of attribution theory to motivation becomes explicit, which has roots in Weiner's attribution theory of motivation and emotion (2000). This theory asserts that each dimension is associated with certain psychological consequences (Weiner, 1979; 1983), affective states such as pride, guilt, shame, etc. and expectancies for future success, and altogether they can formulate an individual's subsequent behaviour (Weiner, 1992). Weiner (1985) claims that attributing failure to *internal / unstable / controllable* rather than *internal / stable / uncontrollable* causes will result in more productive results for future performance. For example, if failure is ascribed to lack of effort that is internal, unstable, and controllable, the student will hold enough hope for future success and will be motivated to put forward much effort to attain success (Brophy, 1998; McLoughlin, 2007). In contrast; if failure is ascribed to low ability which is internal, stable and uncontrollable or to the difficulty of a task that is external, stable and uncontrollable, the learner will most probably lose his expectation for future success, and this situation, in the end, will render him hopeless. In this case, the learner considers that he has no control over the outcome, thus any further effort would be useless in bringing success. This maladaptive (having negative consequences for future motivation and achievement) behaviour is called as *learned helplessness*. This refers to a passive and pessimistic state experienced when success is regarded as being beyond the learner, or when control is entirely in the hands of external factors. Learned helpless learners lack in motivation and tend to give up easily since they believe that they can never stay away from failure, so they work on school tasks less, and they have lower persistence levels (Brophy, 1998).

With regard to success, attributing results to internal and controllable factors such as ability is thought to be adaptive since such an attribution increases self- efficacy and gives people feelings of control, which stimulates them to try hard and expect success in the future as well (Schunk & Gunn, 1986; Tremblay & Gardner, 1995). Hence, it is apparent that raising the awareness of both teachers and learners about learners' causal attribution of their academic achievement is very valuable for educational practice.

One of the basic assumptions of attribution theory offered by Weiner (1985) is that even though learners tend to ascribe specific causes to all academic outcomes, they are more likely to do so when encountered outcomes that are negative, unexpected or

important to them (Gendolla & Koller, 2001 cited in Weiner, 2010:15). In that case, learners ask explicit why-questions and consciously search for the causes of negative outcome in an attempt to control them in the future. The idea that unexpected events trigger more causal research has received approval in some studies as well (Lau and Russell, 1980; Wong and Weiner, 1983 cited in Försterling, 2001:16). On the other hand, in success circumstances, the same level of control is not essential because as Gobel and Mori (2007:150) pointed out rather than a change of outcome only a maintenance of a past performance level is required.

Although Weiner (1979 cited in McLoughlin, 2007:32) identified ability, effort, task difficulty and luck as the most common attributions, actually, as Bruning, Schraw, Norby, and Ronning (2004:123) stated individuals can make countless attributions that can vary considerably among learners. For instance, Vispoel and Austin (1995) added four other attributions to the list. These are strategy, interest, family influence and teacher influence. They define these attributions as nontraditional attributions. They have 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”.

Furthermore, in other areas of research, Roberts and Pascuzzi (1979), for instance, claim to have found that Weiner's four original causes were cited by only 45% of their sample of sportspersons, whereas Little (1985) identified 18 different causes invoked by children to explain academic outcomes (Little, 1985 cited in William and Burden, 1999:194). In addition, Vispoel and Austin (1995) found that in music classes students cited ability as a stronger determinant of success/failure in singing activities than in other music tasks such as reading music. These findings suggest that attributions for success or failure may considerably differ with respect to specific areas of achievement. Thus, in FLL, in which interaction is highly vital, such attributions as peer and teacher influence should be considered when conducting research in this field.

2.3. MAIN ATTRIBUTIONS IN ATTRIBUTION THEORY

As indicated before, ability, effort, task difficulty and luck are most prevalent causes to which learners ascribe their achievement (Weiner, Russell and Lerman, 1979).

According to Weiner (1979, 1992), doing well and doing badly can be attributed to:

- a) ability: my ability let me do the task or I'm not very smart
- b) effort: I worked hard or I didn't try enough
- c) task ease: anybody could have managed it or no one could have done it
- d) good luck: I was lucky or I was unlucky

Understanding these main causal attributions is of high importance in educational contexts. As Gardner (1985 cited in Tse, 2000:70) states, students' views and beliefs will be signs of individual differences in affect and attitude during language learning process. Besides, these attributions for success or failure, whether real or perceived, serve as a bridge between learners' past experiences and their future endeavors and will influence their future goals and emotional reactions (Graham, 1994; Weiner, 1986). Thus, being aware of causal attributions enables both learners and teachers to interpret learners' previous success and failure experiences, to explain their present performance in learning and to make predictions about their future performance.

2.3.1. Ability

Ability is one of the most frequently mentioned attributions by learners while explaining their achievement results. If a learner has become unsuccessful on a certain task repeatedly despite his/her effort to be successful, s/he is likely to assume that s/he is lacking in the ability to accomplish that task. This suggests that learners' past experiences of failure has a direct relation to ability attributions.

Besides, learners resort to ability attributions more when they compare their own performance with the performance of others. For instance, if a learner becomes unsuccessful at a task while others succeed it, the learner probably attributes his/her failure to a lack of ability. On the contrary, if a learner succeeds at a task while others become unsuccessful, s/he will attribute his/her failure to ability and feel pride.

Bernard Weiner (1992) has argued that the subjective reasons to which people attribute their past successes and failures considerably shape our motivational disposition. If, for example, a learner ascribes his/her past failure on a particular task to low ability, s/he will probably not try the activity ever again because s/he thinks that his/her ability will not change and, therefore, that future performance will not show any improvement. As a result; s/he will experience *learned helplessness* which is the situation in which people lack the intention to behave since they believe that however hard they endeavor, the outcome they get will not get better. This happens when learners feel they lack control on the desired outcome (Keblawi, 2009). In that case, as Weiner (1994) has suggested, they are more likely to feel shame since failure is attributed to an uncontrollable factor like ability. Conversely, when learners believe that successful outcomes are due to their high ability, they are apt to feel great happiness and increased pride, and in turn their self-esteem is enhanced. Self-esteem of individuals is influenced most severely by attributions to ability (Covington, 1984, 1992; Covington & Omelich, 1979). This is quite important because as Covington (2002) and Thompson (1994) state, self-esteem is highly related to sustained achievement motivation. Learners with higher self-esteem will have higher expectations for success in the future, and more persistence.

Therefore, it is clear that ability attribution requires great concern in education because it has an impact on learners' affective reactions and their expectations of success in the future to a large extent.

2.3.2. Effort

Effort is another factor that is regularly cited by learners when they account for their success or failure. For example, when a learner fails in an exam, he initially experiences unhappiness and starts to search for the reasons. However, if he has done well in previous exams and the night before the exam he could not study for some reasons, his current failure can, therefore, be ascribed to insufficient effort.

Similarly, a learner's success in an exam can be explained as due to hard work if he studied hard. As Weiner (2010) indicates, if learners explain their high grade as resulting from great effort, they will feel high self-satisfaction and pride. On the other

hand, when learners attribute their failure to lack of effort, they are more likely to regret or feel guilty because they feel responsible for their failure. However, as Burden (2003) emphasized such learners are still able to remain optimistic about their future performance. In that case, they know that their achievement result is under their control, that is; they can improve their performance by studying harder.

In conclusion, when learners attribute their achievement to effort, they feel control over the outcome, so they will have enough potential to change or make the performance better in the future. For this reason, when learners fail, making effort attribution is more advantageous to preserve hope and persistence for possible future success.

According to Graham (1994), Weiner (1992) the most dominant of attributions cited for success or failure are ability and effort. That is, success is ascribed to high ability and hard work while failure is attributed to low ability and the absence of trying. Weiner (1985) also claimed this holds true for the majority of cultures that have been examined.

2.3.3. Task difficulty

It is sometimes possible for learners to relate their success or failure to the difficulty of a task; when they become unsuccessful, they may think that the task is too difficult to handle and it is almost impossible to succeed in it. When they become successful at a task, they may feel that it is because of the easiness of the task and their success is easily gained. According to Försterling (2001), success at a very difficult task will be probably attributed to good luck, and failure at a very easy task to bad luck. This suggests that only when tasks are of intermediate difficulty can attributions be made to internal factors like ability and effort (Bar-Tal, 1978:264).

In addition, According to Weiner and Kukla (1970) and Weiner and Frieze (1971), other learners' success has an influence on learners' attributions to task difficulty. To illustrate, the greater the percentage of others succeeding a task, the more likely learners attribute their success to the ease of task. Likewise, the greater the

percentage of others failing at a task, the more likely learners attribute their failure to the difficulty of the task.

Moreover, when learners ascribe their either success or failure to task difficulty, they hold themselves less responsible for the outcome. Therefore, in the case of success, they may not be proud of themselves, or in the case of failure, they may feel decreased shame because they believe that the outcome is dependent on an external factor that they can not control.

At last, attribution of achievement to task difficulty may lead to a similar performance in the future. That is to say, if learners do not attribute their failure to task difficulty, they may still have hope, and the chance of becoming successful in future performance increases.

2.3.4. Luck

Learners could also account for their success or failure as due to good or bad luck at a particular time. In this case, learners believe that they are not responsible for their success or failure, and they can not make predictions about their future performance. For this reason, when learners perceive their success as caused by good luck, they may expect that failures might occur in the future because luck is considered as an external factor that can change within time.

Furthermore, when learners explain their achievement results as due to luck, similar to achievement attributions to task difficulty, they are likely to feel less pride in the case of success and decreased guilt or shame in the case of failure. It means that they believe they are unable to control their achievement since they may not be so lucky or unlucky next time. As a result, they may give up trying hard for a better performance in the future.

In conclusion, achievement attributions have significant consequences for subsequent achievement motivation and behavior; attributing success to one's ability and failure to lack of effort promotes positive achievement motivation and behavior,

whereas attributing success to external factors such as task ease and failure to lack of ability has negative consequences (Weiner, 1979).

2.4. CAUSAL DIMENSIONALITY

The essential development of attribution theory occurred with the inclusion of attribution dimensions (Russell, McAuley, & Tarico, 1987; Weiner, 1986). As mentioned earlier, the first systematic analysis of causal structure was proposed by Heider (1958). Heider (1958:82) stated that: "In common-sense psychology (as in scientific psychology) the result of an action is felt to depend on two sets of conditions, namely, factors within the person and factors within the environment". However, Weiner (1985) stated that the comparison between internal and external individuals in psychology became dominant with the work of Rotter (1966). Weiner et al. (1971) claimed that a second dimension of causality was needed because among the internal causes, while some fluctuate, others remain relatively constant within time. Thus, Weiner et al. (1971) portrayed the causes such as ability, effort, task difficulty, and luck, within a 2 X 2 categorization scheme. In this categorization, ability was classified as internal and stable, effort as internal and unstable, task difficulty was thought to be external and stable, and luck was considered external and unstable. Rosenbaum (1972) has proposed adding intentionality as a third causal dimension. He indicated that mood, fatigue, and temporary effort are all internal and unstable causes, but they are diverse in that effort is subject to volitional control since an individual can increase or decrease effort expenditure. Weiner (1979), later, identified this feature as controllability dimension.

As a result, Weiner (1986) constructed his latest formulation of attribution theory which claims individuals attribute events to causes that fall within the dimensions of locus of causality (internal, external), stability (stable, unstable), and controllability (controllable, uncontrollable). Kelley and Michela (1980), on the other hand, stressed the effect of those attributions on individuals' motivation, affect and behavior and described it as attributional process. This process brings about both psychological (expectancy for success, self-efficacy, affect) and behavioral consequences (choice, persistence, level of effort, and achievement).

2.4.1. Locus of control

Locus of control beliefs suggest that outcomes are either controlled by personal characteristics, actions or they are beyond one's control and affected by environmental circumstances (Rotter, 1966). Williams and Burden (1999:194) define locus of control as "perceived location of a cause as internal or external to the learner". In other words, locus refers to the degree to which outcomes are perceived to be dependent on conditions within the person or conditions within the environment. Examples of internal causes are aptitude, ability and degree of effort, and examples of external causes are luck and task difficulty. For example, when a learner becomes successful in learning English, s/he may think that this success is the result of being "talented" in English. In that sense, the learner makes an internal (ability) attribution. On the other hand, if a learners believes that his/her success is owing to the easiness of the task, s/he makes an external attribution (task difficulty).

Weiner (1979, 1986), Santrock (2004) emphasized that internal attributions are more likely to result in bigger changes in affect than external attributions and adds that internal locus of causality brings about pride and growth in self-esteem in successful outcomes. To illustrate; one can experience happiness following a high grade in an exam however, s/he can be proud only when s/he ascribes the reasons of success to internal causes like ability and effort. On the contrary, if s/he believes that success is due to the teacher who gives only high grades, it becomes unlikely to experience pride. Thus, in a success situation, people feel pride (self-satisfaction) when they can attribute their performance to either ability or effort, both internal causes. However, if as Bartal (1978) emphasized, they attribute their success to good luck or the ease of the task which are external causes, people feel considerably less pride. On the other hand, failures attributed to lack of ability or lack of effort result in shame (self-dissatisfaction), whereas failures attributed to the difficulty of the task or to bad luck result in little shame since no personal responsibility is then taken for failure. It is therefore reasoned that pride and positive self-esteem are experienced as a consequence of attributing a positive outcome to the self and that negative self-esteem is experienced when a negative outcome is ascribed to the self (Stipek, 1983; Weiner et al., 1978, 1979).

Lim (2007) asserts that if learners have a sense of internal locus of control, their previous successes influence their future expectations of success positively, while their previous failures affect perceived probability of future success negatively. However, if individuals have sense of external locus of control such as luck or other uncontrollable factors, they are less likely to connect their previous failures or successes to expectancies of future outcomes.

In short, whether learners see an achievement outcome as being caused by their own behaviour (internal) or caused by environmental factors (external) plays a key role in learners' feelings of pride and shame as well as their future strivings.

Studies conducted on achievement attributions demonstrate that internal attributions of achievement are connected to higher actual achievement (Stevenson & Lee 1990; Christenson et. al., 1992; O'Sullivan & Howe, 1996). This finding suggests that successful language learners attribute their achievement to effort and ability while unsuccessful language learners attribute their achievement to task difficulty and luck (Moore and Chan, 1995; Williams and Burden, 1999; Georgiou, 1999).

There are also data that suggest a close connection between having self-esteem and internal/ external control. For example, Fitch (1970 cited in Bar-Tal, 1978:262) has shown that in a failure situation, low-esteem individuals made more internal attributions than did high self-esteem individuals. However, in a success situation, no differences were found between the attributions of high and low self-esteem individuals.

2.4.2. Stability

Williams and Burden (1999:194) define stability as “the potential changeability of a cause over time”. In other words, it refers to permanent situations or to temporary causes. For example, one's own effort at a particular situation would generally be perceived as unstable, because it can vary from situation to situation, whereas a personality characteristic such as ability would commonly be perceived as stable since it can not be changed. Therefore, when learners attribute their failure to effort which is an unstable attribution, they can improve their performance next time by studying harder.

It is obvious that the stability dimension is related to learners' future expectations of success. If a learner attributes a positive outcome to a stable cause, the same outcome will be expected again. However, if s/he ascribes a negative outcome to a stable cause, s/he is liable to anticipate future failure (Santrock, 2004; Weiner, 2000). Hence, if failure is considered to be resulted from lack of ability or an unfair teacher, which is stable, then the learner expects to be unsuccessful in another exam from the same teacher again since s/he assumes that his/her ability will not increase greatly. In contrast, when the learner attributes failure to effort, s/he would not necessarily expect to fail at future tasks because s/he believes that if more effort is exerted, the performance can get better (Weiner, 1986; Gobel and Mori, 2007).

Weiner (1986:114), after summarising more than 20 articles that address the stability-expectancy relation indicates that “ Changes in expectancy of success following an outcome are influenced by the perceived stability of the cause of the event”. Hence, as Woolfolk (1998) pointed out, if performances are considered to be based upon stable causes (ability and task difficulty), similar performance is expected in the future, however if they are explained via unstable attributions (effort and luck), different performances in the future can be expected. Therefore, failure attributed to stable factors entails the fearful expectation that it will reoccur in the future, whereas attribution of failure to variable causes could create hope for the future. In addition, if success is attributed to ability which is an internal- stable cause, high anticipation for future success exists. According to the same reasoning, when success is ascribed to ease of task, an external- stable cause, high expectancy for success occurs. However, when failure is attributed to difficulty of task, low expectancy for success comes out.

Thus, if an individual attributes a positive outcome to a stable cause, s/he expects future success; however, if s/he ascribes a negative outcome to a stable cause, s/he expects future failure (Santrock, 2004). This assumption has been verified by numerous empirical studies (McMahan, 1973; Rest, Nierenberg, Weiner, & Heckhausen, 1973; Weiner, Nierenberg, & Goldstein, 1976).

Stability dimension is highly important in that it promotes feelings of hopelessness (or hopefulness) by affecting expectancy. (Weiner et al., 1978, 1979; McLoughlin, 2007). A learner after having failed at a certain task many times may

attribute his/her failure to lack of ability that is stable. In that case, s/he could feel hopeless for the future, which ultimately leads to learned helplessness.

2.4.3. Controllability

Controllability is the last dimension. According to Williams and Burden (1999: 194) controllability represents “the extent to which an event or outcome is under the control of the learner”. Distinguishing attributions as controllable or uncontrollable is significant because if a cause is thought to be out of their control, people are less likely to be persistent in their efforts in the future. For example, if learners attribute their failure to lack of effort, the only attribution that is controllable, they may believe that they can try harder and succeed a similar task in the future. Thus, they can control their future performance.

The controllability dimension is associated with feelings such as anger, gratitude, embarrassment, guilt, pity, and shame. As indicated by Weiner (2000), controllability, along with locus, has an influence on whether guilt or shame is experienced after the nonattainment of a specific goal. For example; if a student attributes his/her failure to insufficient effort, which is internal and controllable, he often feels guilty because s/he is aware that if s/he had put enough effort, a better outcome would have been gained. On the other hand, if s/he ascribes it to lack of ability or aptitude, which is internal but uncontrollable, often feelings of shame, embarrassment, and humiliation will be aroused. This is because, in such cases, the learner has no control over the outcome.

Furthermore, Woolfolk (1998) states that if students succeed at a task that is controllable, they may feel proud, however, when they succeed in an uncontrollable task, they are likely to feel lucky or grateful.

Additionally, controllability dimension is closely related to individual's future persistence and strivings. Dörnyei (2001) theorizes that failure attributed to uncontrollable factors hinders achievement. If learners associate their failure with stable-uncontrollable causes, they will be unwilling to exert effort for their future performance, then their motivation to learning the language is likely to decrease or even

vanish completely. They believe that any further effort is futile in that whatever they do, there is no possibility of changing the outcome. That is to say, the belief in stable and uncontrollable causes, such as ability does not motivate the person to perform with intensity, since there is no belief in having control over causes of success or failure. This situation leads to learned helplessness that halts improvement. On the other hand, individuals who tend to attribute their failure to unstable- controllable causes such as effort tend to persist for a long time even in failure situations. Hence, as Bar-Tal (1982) explained, the belief in unstable-controllable causes such as effort causes the person to suppose that the outcome relies on will. Therefore, these individuals perform with great intensity on achievement tasks.

In brief, it is obvious that controllability dimension is an important determinant of students' responses to setback, pressure, and fear of failure (Martin and Dowson, 2009). Besides, it might be thought as the most critical factor in educational settings because a learner who fails, but believes that the cause of failure was out of his or her control, will not expect future success.

All in all, rather than the causal attributions themselves, their place on the dimensional scale is of high importance (Martinko, 1995). It is clear that the cognitive processes that produce attributions have strong consequences on the learning process; they affect individuals' expectancies for future success, their affective states, subsequent behaviour and performance.

Locus of control and stability, have been found to be especially significant in understanding the affective reactions to the success or failure and the changes in perceived probability of success for future outcome, respectively (Weiner, 1974). Controllability dimension, on the other hand, is especially influential in fostering future strivings. Furthermore, each causal dimension is thought to be connected to particular affective states (Weiner, 1985). The locus of causality reflects changes in pride and self-esteem. The stability dimension is linked to feelings of hopelessness or hopefulness and the controllability dimension causes emotions such as anger, gratitude, guilt, pity and shame and all of these affective states can have subsequent behavioural consequences. These affective states are labelled as "attribution- dependent" emotions by Weiner since they are triggered by attributions themselves and their place on a causal dimension.

There are also “outcome-dependent” emotions that are not influenced by attributions but triggered immediately following success or failure. For instance, emotions such as satisfaction, happiness, and “feeling good” following success and feelings of unhappiness, dissatisfaction following failure belong to this category.

2.5. ADAPTIVE – MALADAPTIVE ATTRIBUTIONS AND ATTRIBUTION RETRAINING

It is obvious that attributional process is a key concept within the framework of motivational processes in educational contexts (Pintrich & Schunk, 2002). In a broad brush, attribution theory hypothesizes that the reasons to which individuals attribute their past successes or failures shape to a great extent their motivational disposition and achievement (Bernard Weiner, 1992; Dornyei, 2001). There is no doubt that a functional (adaptive) attributional style has positive effects on a group of personal traits and behavioral patterns in achievement contexts such as learners’ expectations of success, self-concepts, experiences of helplessness, and invested effort and performance (Marsh, Cairns, Relich, Barnes, & Debus, 1984; Peterson, Maier, & Seligman, 1993; Platt, 1988; Schunk & Gunn, 1986; Skaalvik, 1994; Weiner, 1986 cited in Dresel, Schober, Ziegler, 2005:38). Bempechat (1998:37) explains that

Children will not reach potential if ... they are prone to beliefs about and behaviors in school that are not conducive to learning, such as a lack of persistence, a preference for easy tasks over challenging tasks, or a tendency to fall apart at the first sign of difficulty.

(Bempechat, 1998:37 cited in Alderman, 1999)

As Weiner (1985) emphasized making more internal, unstable and controllable attributions in failure situations promises better results than making internal, stable and uncontrollable ones. If learners attribute failure to factors that are internal, unstable and controllable (e.g. lack of effort), they may be more apt to change future behaviors, thus having more control over their academic performance. In that case, these learners are likely to make greater efforts over time and achieve success because they believe that such attributions as insufficient knowledge or insufficient effort can be altered (Brophy, 1998; Dörnyei, 1994). However, attributions of failure to stable and uncontrollable factors (e.g., low ability) are less likely to result in continued effort (Lim, 2007:4). For example, attributing poor test performance to an unchangeable lack of ability will likely

to result in feelings of hopelessness and shame (due to the attribution being stable and uncontrollable, respectively), potentially resulting in decreases in motivation, achievement striving, test performance, and class attendance. Thus, attributions for failure that are stable and uncontrollable are especially detrimental to student motivation (Weiner 1985, 1995, cited in Hall, Hladkyj, Perry, & Ruthig, 2004:592). In its most extreme form, such an attitude constitutes *learned helplessness* in which effort is seen as pointless because success appears impossible.

On the other hand, in the case of successful outcomes, learners' belief that successful outcomes are due to their high ability (internal-stable) would also seem crucial because such beliefs may lead to increase in self-efficacy, higher expectations for success in the future and more persistence as explained earlier. Thus, ability attribution helps motivation and can be defined as adaptive. However, attributions to the context or to luck in success situations would be maladaptive because they signify external factors that are beyond learners' control (Tremblay & Gardner, 1995).

In achievement situations, researchers have found that successful students tend to be more adaptive in their attributions. They generally attribute success to ability (internal-stable) or effort (internal-unstable), and failure to low effort (internal-unstable) (Carlyon, 1997). It means that they take personal responsibility for both successful and failure outcomes. Weiner (1980, 1992) claimed that consistently successful students (high achievers) have higher self-esteem and attribute their success to ability, which is an uncontrollable, internal, and stable attribution. However, after failing, successful students tend to attribute their bad performance to a lack of effort, which is an internal and controllable explanation. Therefore, as Deerrose and Sweeton (2010) indicated these learners are motivated to approach challenging tasks because they believe in their natural abilities. Also, when tasks are difficult, they are likely to persist because they believe that an exertion of effort will lead to success. Thus, it is still probable for them to maintain their self esteem and hope and expect a positive future performance after failure (Perry, Hechter, Menec, Weinberg, 1993).

Conversely, low-achieving students who have frequent failure experiences, thus low self-esteem tend to attribute academic failure to internal-stable-uncontrollable causes such as lack of ability (Carr & Borkowski, 1989; Kistner, Osborne, & LeVerrier,

1988) and academic success to external- uncontrollable causes such as ease of the task and luck (Cook, 1983; Dweck, 1975; Licht, 1983). These students tend to avoid challenges due to their lack of self-esteem and they are often unable to enjoy their success. This is because they link their success to factors outside their control and these uncontrollable causes make them feel less hopeful about the replication of success (Brophy, 1998). As a result, their self-esteem is not enhanced and they remain unmotivated in the learning process.

Covington (1992:63) notes that “educators should arrange learning so that falling short of one’s goals, which inevitably happens to everyone, will be interpreted in ways that promote the will to persist” (cited in Burden, 2003:57). To cope with this situation, attribution retraining programs in which learners’ maladaptive explanations for failure and success are restructured to adaptive ones have been developed (Försterling, 2001). These programs encourage students to adopt controllable and unstable explanations for academic failure such as a lack of effort or a poor study strategy (Forsterling, 1985) and to adopt effort, ability and proper strategy use attributions for academic success. In turn, as stated by Schunk (1998), these “modified” attributions promote greater motivation to succeed because learners believe that the outcome is within their control. Therefore, these students can strive harder or make use of a better strategy, which results in increased effort and improved performance. To emphasize this, Ruthig et al., (2004:713) states that attribution retraining “focuses on inducing effort attributions for failure and related unstable, controllable causes, thereby increasing students’ perception of control over their academic performance”. Similarly, Williams and Burden (1997:134) point out the “extent to which learners are in control of a language will have a pronounced effect upon their motivation to be continually involved in learning that language”.

Most of the studies on attribution retraining have resulted in behavioral change. Robertson (2000), after analyzing 20 different studies on attribution training, claims that the majority of these projects have demonstrated success. This is because in general, attribution retraining programs have caused significant increases in expectations for future success, subsequent persistence, and academic performance (Foersterling, 1985). For example, some researchers (Dweck 1975; Andrews and Debus 1978 cited in Alderman, 1999:55) carried out attribution retraining programs for learners called as

helpless and the results revealed that learners who were taught to attribute failure to insufficient effort continued to persist even after failure on the task. Moreover, Weiner (2010:35) indicated that Perry and his colleagues (Perry, Hechter, Menec, & Weinberg, 1993) have recorded that interventions altering the attributions of failing students from low ability to lack of effort improve college performance. Also, Wilson, Damiani, & Shelton (2002) have emphasized that modifying causal beliefs so that failure is regarded as unstable rather than a stable factor produce improvement in school-related outcomes.

In conclusion, as Weiner (2010) stated attribution intervention or retraining has focused on the fact that self-doubt (attributions of failure to the self and success to external factors) and stable beliefs about the causes of failure are important obstacles to motivation, so unstable ascriptions for failure should be taught to learners to adopt. To this end, learners should be taught to believe that their failure is not a question of their ability, that it concerns unstable, controllable factors like effort and strategy use. Besides, it is important to note that ability should be presented as knowledge or skills that can be learned. By this way, learners preserve hope, which facilitates motivation. As Graham (1991) notes, it is the instability of a cause that is important, not the cause per se, so any self-attribution that the learner sees as unstable could have the same positive effects as an attribution to lack of effort.

2.6. INDIVIDUAL DIFFERENCES IN ATTRIBUTIONS AND ATTRIBUTION RESEARCH

Even though the findings of many attributional studies (Nurmi, Aunola, Salmela-Aro, & Lindroos, 2003; Stevenson & Lee, 1990; Christenson et. al., 1992; O'Sullivan and 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), the fact that there are also other factors such as gender, age, culture, motivation, self-efficacy beliefs that contribute to success and failure attributions can not be denied (Little, 1985; Vispoel & Austin, 1995).

2.6.1. 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. For this reason, a lot of studies have been conducted in different academic fields, however research on gender differences in attributional patterns have yielded contradictory results (Pintrich & Schunk, 2002).

A good deal of research (Bar-Tal & Frieze, 1977; Feather, 1969; McMahan, 1973; Murray & Mednick, 1975; Weiner et.al., 1971; Deaux, 1976; Frieze et.al., 1982) has shown girls to have more maladaptive patterns of attribution than boys. They are more likely to attribute success to external causes (luck) rather than ability while male learners tend to attribute it to their ability (Wieggers & Frieze, 1977; Parsons, Meece, Adler & Kaczala, 1982; LaNoue & Curtis, 1985; Ickes and Layden, 1978, Erkut, 1983 cited in Beyer, 1999; Power and Wagner, 1984; Lightbody et. al., 1996; Georgiou, 1999). On the other hand, in failure outcomes, while girls are likely to refer to internal and stable causes (ability), male learners tend to attribute their failure to bad luck (Yee and Eccles, 1988; Stipek and Gralinski, 1991; Burgner and Hewstone, 1993). Thus, girls tend to underestimate their abilities by taking less credit for their success and to show decreased persistence or performance. They also in general show lower expectations of success than do boys across a wide variety of domains (Dweck and Licht, 1980: 203; Eccles et al., 1998).

Gender influence on attributions may differ from one content area to another, however it has been most obvious in subjects where traditionally, males are believed to be more competent than females such as maths (Wolleat, Pedro, Becker, & Fennema, 1980) and science (Licht, Strader & Swenson, 1989). For instance, Stipek (1984) tried to assess attributions on the basis of classroom tests of mathematics and spelling. She found that girls tended to attribute failure on a mathematics test to ability while boys did not show the same kind of negative attributions on the spelling test. Nelson and Cooper (1997), in addressing grade-schoolers engaged in a computer task, found males to engage more in egoprotective unstable, external attributions after failure, whereas females to engage more in self-defeating, unstable external attributions for success.

Likewise, in addressing college students' attributions to academic performance, Beyer (1998/1999) found that men were more ego-protective, making internal, stable attributions for success, whereas women engaged in more self-defeating internal, stable attributions for failure. Frieze, Fisher, McHugh, and Valle (1975:35 cited in Bar-Tal) pointed out that "since people appear to have lower expectations for women and to make detrimental causal attributions about their successes and failures, girls internalize these beliefs and form maladaptive patterns".

On the other hand, there are also studies (Johnson, Vincent, & Ross, 1997; Robins & Beer, 2001) which demonstrated the lack of gender difference with regard to self-enhancement in achievement performance. For example, Riordan, Thomas, and James (1985) examined athletes' attributions and found an ego-serving pattern for both male and female athletes for successful outcomes. However, for unsuccessful outcomes, men tended to ascribe less ego-enhancing internal causation to self than were women. Beyer (1998/1999) claimed that certain gender differences in self-enhancement have not emerged in some studies because the type of task was ignored. Beyer (1990) suggested that gender differences emerge with regard to expectancy, performance, and self-evaluation for masculine tasks but not for feminine or neutral ones. Kurman (2004) in the investigation of gender differences in level of self-enhancement found that in English (a feminine subject) the gender groups did not differ on their self-enhancement, but in math (a masculine subject) boys revealed significantly higher self-enhancement than did girls.

In the studies of SLA, gender is also a factor which affects the learners' performance and motivation (Oxford, 1993). Contrary to the field of maths and science, it has been asserted that females show higher self-perception in English than males do (Eccles et al., 1989; Meece et al., 1990; Wigfield et al., 1991). Moreover, female learners are claimed to have significantly higher levels of motivation and more positive attitudes (Csizér and Dörnyei, 2005; Bacon and Finneman, 1992; Gardner and Lambert, 1972). This is because studying a foreign language is traditionally perceived as feminine or a girly subject (Birenbaum & Kraemer, 1995). Csizér and Dörnyei (2005) maintain that female students are more successful than male students in every aspect of language learning.

Although gender is considered to be influential as a factor in second language learning, the influence of gender on attributions has not received considerable attention. Thus, Williams and Burden have underlined the need for more research into EFL attribution and theorize that gender may be an important factor, as do Holschuh, Nist, and Olejnik (2001:157). Nevertheless, in a number of studies conducted in SLA context (Forgasz and Leder, 1996; Ryckman and Peckham, 1987; Peacock, 2009; Williams, Burden, Poulet and Maun, 2004) the influence of gender factor on achievement attributions was examined.

Forgasz and Leder (1996) carried out a study in order to investigate the grade 9 students' beliefs about themselves as learners of mathematics and English. The results indicated several gender differences in the attributions of success and failure in English. It was found out that males attributed failure to (lack of) ability, effort and environmental factors more than females. On the other hand, females attributed success to environmental factors, perceived achievement levels, beliefs about achievement levels assigned by teachers, parents, classmates more than males.

Another research was conducted by Ryckman and Peckham (1987) on differences in attributions for success and failure situations across subject areas. The study revealed that for the mathematics and science tests, girls are less likely to attribute success situations to ability than they are likely to attribute failure situations to ability. On the other hand, boys generally attribute success situations to ability more often than do girls. Thus, girls were found to have a more learned helplessness pattern for mathematics and science. As for the language arts, both girls and boys tend to attribute their failure to effort than to attribute their success to effort and they are both more likely to choose ability attribution for success in language art than for failure.

In the study conducted by Peacock (2009), the attributions of 505 university students in Hong Kong and the connections between attribution and proficiency, gender, and academic discipline were investigated. In the study students were asked to what they attributed EFL success or failure and they were also interviewed to investigate the origins of attributions. As a result, it was concluded that attribution affects proficiency, effort, and persistence. The results revealed significant differences between male and female learners in that female students were significantly more likely to attribute

success to their own efforts than were male students. Moreover, most of the attributions made for success by female learners were internal, unstable, and controllable. With respect to language proficiency, it was observed that while more proficient students attributed success primarily to their own efforts, this was not the case with less proficient students, who attributed both success and failure to other factors such as the easiness of the test or lack of interest. This finding provides support for Dörnyei's conjecture that failure attributed to uncontrollable factors hinders achievement.

The study conducted by Williams, Burden, Poulet and Maun (2004) was concerned with examining the ways in which attributions vary according to age, gender, perceived success and specific language to be learnt. The participants were 285 secondary school students (ages between 11 and 16) in UK and they were asked to answer open questionnaire to find out their perceptions of learning specific languages and their attributions to success and failure. 21 attributions for doing well and 16 attributions for not doing well emerged from the data. The results showed that effort, ability and strategy use were attributions cited most by the learners to explain success respectively while luck and reward were disregarded completely. Among these attributions effort was found to be the most widely used one for both success and failure. This finding suggests that in general, learners tended to see themselves as more in control of their learning than dependent upon outside forces. Also, according to the findings, it is clear that both boys and girls attribute their success and failure more to internal than external factors. However, girls were considerably more internal than boys in their attributions for failure, while boys were more external. It is noticeable that girls showed a greater tendency than boys to attribute their failures to lack of effort and ability. If it is compared boys were less internal and girls more internal for failure than success, reflecting much of the literature.

In parallel with these findings, the study carried out by Pishghadam and Modarresi (2008) with 442 EFL students revealed that males more than females attribute their successes to internal factors, which suggests that males develop more positive self-image than females.

2.6.2. Age

Age is another factor which is associated with different attributional patterns. Many researchers have assessed the development of children's attributions for achievement successes and failures (Frieze, 1981 cited in Wigfield, 1988). In general, these studies show that children under age 10 tend to see effort and ability as the same and regard ability as more modifiable than do older students. By age 12 or 13, as they develop cognitively, children's attributions seem quite similar to those of adults. They begin to believe that a child having low ability must compensate for it by increased effort. Nonetheless, Nicholls and Miller (1984, cited in Alderman, 1999:41) pointed out that differentiating effort and ability may affect student motivation in a negative way. If failure is attributed to ability, for instance, exerting effort may be thought as futile and students may lessen effort to protect self-worth. This shows that younger children believe increased effort should cause increased success and ability. In that sense, they have a more adaptive attributional pattern than older children because adolescents often equate expending more effort with having less ability.

In the study conducted by Williams, Burden, Poulet and Maun (2004), attributional patterns of year 7 and year 11 students were compared. In general, effort appeared as being the most widely cited attribution for both success and failure. This is in line with most previous attributional research in schools (Bar-Tal et al., 1984; Whitley & Frieze, 1985; Williams & Burden, 1999). However, it was found out that according to 7th Year students effort was by far the most important reason for success, whereas 11th Year students attributed their success mostly to strategy and interest. As for the attributions for failure both year groups perceived lack of effort as the most important reason for failure. And, lack of ability was cited as a reason for failure less by year 11 students than the other year group. On the other hand, lack of interest was mentioned more by year 11 as a cause of their failures. Overall, it seems that both groups were internal-oriented in their attributions for both success and failure. Thus, the results showed that the students had a tendency to perceive themselves as more in control of their language learning.

Another study carried out by Hassaskhah, Vahabi (2010) focused on different attributions of children, teenagers, and adults toward their success and failure in the

process of learning English, and examined if there is any relationship between their attribution and age. The findings of this study showed that age factor was able to influence the way in which participants communicated their reasons for their language learning success or failures. Nearly all three age-groups believed in effort as the most significant reason of their failure although each of them marked a different score on the "effort" factor. It was also pointed that "effort" was followed by "difficulty of the task"; "ability" and "luck" as the reasons cited in order of significance. And also the factor of "luck" was the least important factor for all three groups. And children rarely believed in "ability" as a failure factor; that is, they saw themselves capable of learning English. Results also showed that children more than the other two age-groups believed in internal factors and saw themselves as capable of changing conditions.

Normandeau and Gobeil (1998) conducted a study in order to investigate the development of children's understanding of causal attributions and causal dimensions. A total of 7 to 11 – year of 90 children were interviewed by using 16 open-ended causal attributions items, half of which were with a success outcome, and the other half with a failure outcome. The study revealed that the older children did not have much tendency to mention external factors, but had the tendency to mention their familiarity with the task. Moreover, the younger children were found to be more likely to make attributions to external factors in failure. It was also found that younger children attributed their success to effort, whereas the older ones attributed their failure to effort. As expected, it was found that children were more likely to explain their successes in reference to their ability.

In the studies of Graham (2004), Williams, Burden, Poulet and Maun (2004), and Williams and Burden (1999) only the older students paid attention to strategy use and perceived it as one of the most important reason for success; however, the study by Normandeau and Gobeil (1998) suggested that 9 – year – old children were more likely to attribute their performance to the use of strategies than 7 – and 11 – year old children were. As for the children's perceptions of causal dimensions, it was found that with increasing age children perceived causal attributions to be more internal, controllable, and less stable which suggests that as children grow older, they take more responsibility for their actions.

Unlike the study by Normandeau and Gobeil (1998) who found that children at all ages were more likely to explain their successes in reference to their ability, the study by Williams et al. revealed that the students attributed both their successes and failures to effort. This finding may indicate that younger students (as in the study by Normandeau and Gobeil) are more likely to attribute success to stable reasons, whereas the older students (as in the study by Williams et al.) attributed success to unstable reasons.

In the study carried out by Williams and Burden (1999), the findings also revealed that there were some distinctions between the age groups that were interviewed. The study was aimed at examining the formation and variation of learners' French learning attributions. The findings of the study revealed that the British primary school children attributed success to external factors, with the number of attributions increasing with age. The groups consisted of participants aged between 10 and 12 attributed success mainly to listening and concentration while older learners mentioned a variety of reasons including ability, interest, level of work, circumstances. It was also found out that many of the attributions mentioned were strongly connected to teacher influence.

2.6.3. Achievement Motivation

If perceptions of causality have an impact on the affect experienced and goal expectancies, and these variables in turn influence achievement-related behaviours, then one's causal predisposition while interpreting success or failure has important implications for different achievement striving and behavioural differences as well. Thus, it can be assumed that achievement motivation of learners is directly linked to their causal disposition and give strong clues about their perceptions.

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 behaviours 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 need attribute their success to external causes (Moore and Chan, 1995; Georgiou, 1999; Williams and 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 behavioural 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 and his colleagues categorize learners into three groups: *mastery-oriented*, *failure avoiding* and *failure accepting* (Covington & Omelich, 1984). According to Covington, 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.

2.6.4. 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 can not be generalized across other groups. That's why attributional studies have showed that there are important differences in how casual attributions are made between cultures (Smith & Bond, 1993; Nisbett, 2003; Brown, 2004). As Thomas (2001:7) says, "the folk psychology of one culture can differ from the folk psychology of another".

One issue concerning causal attributions in cross cultural studies is the dominance of self-serving bias in western cultures. This suggests that learners coming from western cultures take personal responsibility for successful outcomes and deny responsibility for their failures. In the Western literature, it is considered that this self-serving attributional bias serves to maintain self-esteem, or "feelings of self-worth" (Brown & Dutton, 1995).

Many cross cultural studies (Williams, Burden and Al-Baharna's, 2001; Lee and Seligman, 1997; Miller, 1984; Schneider, Hastorf, & Ellsworth, 1979; Smith & Bond, 1998) have revealed 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 and 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 sex 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.

Study carried out by Gobel & Mori (2007) in Asian context has supported the notion that learners from Eastern countries tend to show a reversal of the bias. In the

study, perceived reasons for successes and failures of 1st-year Japanese university students in speaking and reading classes were explored. To collect the data, the researchers listed certain attributions from the findings of previous research in that field and asked students to rate them. The results revealed that students who reported performing poorly attributed poor performance to a lack of ability and lack of effort. On the other hand, students who reported performing well attributed their performance to teachers and the classroom atmosphere. It was pointed out that the results might be explained by cultural differences and are in agreement with studies done in Asian groups.

On the other hand, other studies have found that the self serving bias is universal, in that the bias seems to be present in many different cultures, regardless of its being collectivist or individualist (Chandler, Shama, Wolf, & Planchard, 1981; Kashima & Triandis, 1986; Wan & Bond, 1982 cited in Higgins and Bhatt, 2001: 51). For example, the study conducted by Parameswaran & Hom (2000) has shown that Indian students' structure of causal attributions of self-serving bias is not different from the structure found in western countries. Indian children (in age 6-12) attributed a successful performance to effort rather than to ability, and referred to external attributions (teacher bias and coping) rather than internal attributions (ability) when asked to explain why two children might obtain the same score with different amounts of effort.

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 more strong for success than for failure, external factors were more prevalent for failure. However, for the Japanese external factors were more strong 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. As a result, Brown, Gray and Ferrara concluded that the students in three samples seem to be neither particularly self-serving nor self-effacing. Rather they fairly accept both credit for their successes and blame for their failures.

In a research in Asian context by Watkins and Regmi (1993) the causal dimensionality patterns of learners were explored. The study focused on attributions for academic success and failure among 228 Nepalese university students. Results showed that effort was the most frequently used attribution for success, while failure was attributed uncontrollable internal and external factors such as health problems, lack of resources, and not qualified teaching. It was noticed that ability and superstitious beliefs were rare.

Niles (2001) reached similar conclusions by exploring attributions for success and failure in academic settings in Sri Lankan context with 103 students through free-response-type interviews. Especially external factors, such as luck, and internal factors, such as ability, effort were the primary focus of the study in explaining reasons behind academic success and failure. Both for success and failure hard work was found to be the most common internal factor. Although not commonly mentioned, ability and some external factors such as family support, and good teaching were explained to be influential. However, almost half of the participants felt that luck might affect effort.

Likewise, Park and Kim (1998) studied on two different groups of students in Korean context focusing on the relationship between attributional style, locus of control and academic achievement. The starting point of the study was that students who had higher internal and lower external locus of control were more likely to be high achievers. The first group of students consisted of honor students and the second group included those who were on academic probation. It was predicted that honor students would attribute success to internal, controllable factors, but failure to external, uncontrollable causes such as luck, or task difficulty. 98 honor students and 136 students on probation in various colleges in Korea participated in the study. Based on interviews and open-ended questionnaires scales for locus of control and attributional styles were constructed. Results were consistent with the predictions. When compared to students on probation, honor students were more likely to attribute success to effort, while they were less likely to attribute failure to ability. In general effort perceived to be critical for academic achievement by both groups. Moreover, high achievers were found to have higher internal locus of control in Korean sample.

2.6.5. Self efficacy

Many language learners have pre-assumptions of who can succeed in language learning and often perceive that foreign language learning is difficult and only those who have a special gift can do well (Fisher, 2001; Graham, 2002; Horwitz, 1988). Put it another way, they make ability attributions that can be associated with self-efficacy level.

According to Bandura (1986, 1997), *self-efficacy* refers to the beliefs that individuals have about their capabilities to complete a particular task successfully and to execute specific courses of action necessary to produce desired outcomes. Dörnyei (1994) states that attributions of past achievements, observation of peers and feedback from others all contribute to the development of those beliefs. Self-efficacy is a powerful predictor of various types of behaviour affecting task selection, level of effort, degree of persistence, and quality of performance regardless of the skills one might possess (Bandura, 1997; Schunk, 1995). Therefore, it plays an important role in the motivation of learners. High self efficacy level increases one's ability to deal with problematic situations by influencing cognitive and emotional processes related to the situation together with high levels of effort and persistence (Bandura, 1986, 1997; Zimmerman, Bandura & Martinez-Ponz, 1992).

It is assumed that learners who possess low levels of self efficacy for a given task will either avoid the task or apply little effort to complete it. Conversely, individuals with a high sense of self efficacy are more likely to work harder and persist longer than those who doubt their abilities (Schunk, 1984; Stipek, 1993). In other words, learners are more likely to undertake tasks they believe they have the skills to handle, but avoid tasks they believe require greater skills than they possess.

In language learning, self-efficacy can be associated with self-confidence because it reflects one's level of confidence concerning the ability to accomplish a given task. Self-efficacy does not reflect one's ability, but the beliefs one holds about that ability and in that sense, it is an important determinant of motivation (Oxford and Shearin, 1994). Tremblay and Gardner (1995:507) considered self efficacy to be an important antecedent to motivational behaviour in language learning (e.g. persistence)

and define it as “an individuals’ beliefs that he or she has the capacity to reach a certain level of performance or achievement”. For instance, when learners believe that they are not likely to find learning a language easy, their expectations for success will be low, and this will result in a lack of motivation to learn.

Bandura (1993) pointed out that learners may perform poorly either because (a) they lack the skills, or (b) they have the skills, but lack the confidence that will allow them to use those skills well. Therefore, as Bandura suggests attributions of ability are closely associated with self-efficacy, thus performance. Research indicates that attributing successful performance to ones’ ability increases self-efficacy, whereas attributing failing performance to ones’ ability decreases self-efficacy (Schunk, 1989). Thus, self-efficacy beliefs are highly connected to learners’ perceptions of competence over a task, which is shaped by ability and effort beliefs. In general, attributing one’s successful performance to effort was found to be less strong for increasing self-efficacy than attributing success to ability (Schunk, 1985).

Bandura (1977, 1997) proposed that there is a reciprocal relationship between one’s self-efficacy beliefs and causal attributions. He suggested that as an individual’s self-efficacy can be influenced by the explanations they give for their success or failure on tasks, thus the attributions they make, one’s attributions for an outcome can also be affected by the level of confidence one has for a given task. To illustrate, individuals who have high self-efficacy and experience failure tend to attribute it to lack of effort; whereas individuals with low self-efficacy who experience failure attribute it to low ability. In turn, success will increase one’s self-efficacy if the individual attributes the outcome to an internal attribution such as ability rather than luck. Failure can decrease one’s self-efficacy if the individual attributes the outcome to an internal, stable, uncontrollable factor, such as lack of ability (Chase, 2001). This reciprocal relationship between self-efficacy and attribution was anticipated explicitly by Bandura, however, in the area of foreign language learning, research on the interaction between self-efficacy, attribution, and academic performance is still inadequate (Hsieh and Schallert, 2008).

It has been found out that people with high self-efficacy outperform those with low self-efficacy, and expend greater effort toward a goal, even in response to negative feedback (Bandura & Cervone, 1986). Schunk and Pajares (2002) have pointed out that,

compared with students that doubt their learning capabilities, those who feel efficacious for learning participate more readily, work harder, persist longer when they encounter difficulties and achieve at a higher level. The findings of other researchers (Bouffard-Bouchard, 1990; Pintrich and De Groot, 1990) also indicated that self-efficacy in learning a foreign language was significantly associated with achievement. In addition, according to Pintrich (1999) and Zimmerman (2000), self-efficacy beliefs may serve as an effective factor in learners' performance context, their interaction with the learning processes and academic achievement.

In one of the few studies to consider the role of self-efficacy and achievement in language learning, Ehrman (1996) suggested a positive relationship between high self-efficacy, end-of-training ratings in speaking and reading and scores on the Modern Language Aptitude Test (MLAT). In addition, Yang (1999) found a positive connection between learners' self-efficacy beliefs and their learning strategy use among learners of English in Taiwan.

In another study conducted by P.Hsieh and D. Schallert (2008), 500 German, Spanish and French learners' self-efficacy levels were examined with respect to their attributions for success. In the study, to measure attributions learners were asked to explain actual reasons for a test outcome. Also, dimensions of attributions were used to explore the motivation of these learners. Analysis suggested that self-efficacy was the strongest predictor of achievement, supplemented by ability attributions and it was also found out that students who believed themselves to be unsuccessful but rated the failure as due to lack of effort reported having higher self-efficacy than those who did not endorse an effort attribution. This finding suggests that self-efficacy can be maintained at a high level even for unsuccessful students when failure is ascribed to adaptive attributions. In addition, it can be asserted that effort attributions may protect unsuccessful students' self-efficacy.

2.7. OTHER RELATED ATTRIBUTION RESEARCH IN FOREIGN OR SECOND LANGUAGE

Attributions have been researched in a wide range of psychological disciplines: social, educational, experimental, clinical, organisational and motivational (Försterling,

2001). However, research on attributions in foreign or second language learning is relatively limited though in recent years, the role of attributions in language learning motivation has gradually been acknowledged (McLoughlin, 2004; Tse, 2000; Williams & Burden, 1999; Williams, Burden, & Al-Baharna, 2000; Williams, Burden, & Lanvers, 2002; Williams, Burden, Poulet & Maun, 2004 cited in McLoughlin, 2007). Dörnyei (2001b) claims that although the importance of attributions has been expressed over and over, it is surprising that there are very few studies conducted on attributions, and he states that it is because attribution theory is quite complex and it does not easily render itself to quantitative research. Nevertheless, a number of researchers have provided insight into the attributions for success and failure in the area of learning second or foreign languages.

Apart from studies mentioned previously, there are other related studies in the field of foreign or second language learning. For example; Tse (2000), in her qualitative study examined perceptions of foreign language learners and their attributions of success and failure. She adopted the autobiography approach to investigate students' self-perception on FLL. The participants were 51 American undergraduate and graduate foreign language university students. The findings suggested that most of the students attributed FLL success to teachers' willingness to help students, a positive classroom environment, family or community assistance from target language speakers, and motivation to learn. The participants in general believed that good student teacher interaction helped them improve their learning. In addition, those who did not feel successful tended to blame themselves for lack of effort and lack of motivation, and the teacher and mixed-level classes. Very few students attributed their failure to lack of some innate ability. Tse, in her study, stressed the importance of being aware of the perceptions of students in terms of pedagogical implications. She stated that with the help of information about students' opinions and attitudes toward language learning and classroom activities, it is easier to become aware of their affective states and it becomes easier to decide how best to design certain classroom activities and methods in language classrooms.

McQuillan (2000) carried out a quantitative study in the USA with 81 students studying a foreign language and revealed a similar set of attributions. Motivation, a comfortable pace, a good teacher, ability, time and effort, level and atmosphere were the

most common explanations of success. On the other hand, lack of time and effort, poor study strategies and atmosphere were most frequently cited for failure.

In the study carried out by Williams, Burden, and Al-Baharna (2001) the attributions of students in Bahrain for their success and failure in learning English were investigated. 25 Bahraini EFL schoolchildren were asked to explain why they succeeded or failed in English. The study uncovered 11 positive and 18 negative attributions among students learning English. The study revealed that practice, support from family and teachers, exposure to the language and a positive attitude were the most frequently cited reasons for success by these students. By contrast, inadequate teaching methods, lack of support from family and teachers, poor comprehension and a negative attitude were cited as the most common negative attributions.

Other researchers such as Kalaja (2004), Heikinen (1999), used a discursive model to look at individual narratives of students' language learning histories. Their aim was to connect student beliefs and causal attributions to explain their success and failure in EFL learning. As a result, they offered a group of five interpretive ways in which students construct the learning environment and their roles as learners: individualistic, effort, naturalistic, institutional, and fatalistic. These repertoires were then connected to the following attributions: (a) personal abilities, (b) effort, (c) informal contexts (taking advantage of opportunities), (d) formal contexts (the classroom), and (e) luck.

In another study, Ushioda (2001) investigated attributional patterns, rather than distinct attributions. In her qualitative study, she asked 14 Irish university students why they succeeded in learning French and cited four attributional patterns among the learners: attributing success to personal ability, effort or love of French; attributing negative L2 outcomes to temporary shortcomings that may be changed; attributing negative affective experiences to the learning context; and attributing future success or changes in behavior to personal resources. Ushioda noted that these attributions serve to preserve a positive self-concept.

Graham (2004) conducted another qualitative study with learners of French to explain the relationship between their attributions and achievement level. Data were collected through sentence completion and interviews. The findings revealed that

English students who had high ability and effective learning strategies had higher levels of achievement and persistence while learning French. In addition, those who were more internal in their attributions had higher levels of achievement. As a result, it was concluded that students who have adaptive attributional styles may attribute success to ability and perceive this ability as a fairly stable and internal factor.

Rui and Liang (2008) conducted an attributional study in Asian context with Chinese learners. In the study, it was pointed out that when adult learners attribute their performance to internal and controllable causes rather than to external or uncontrollable causes, they are more likely to exert effort and persist. Attributing success in learning language to internal, stable and controllable causes makes the learners believe that they will be successful on similar tasks in the future as well and this belief renders the learners confident. On the other hand, attribution of success to more external, less stable and controllable reasons will lead to experience of less confidence. In this study, the importance of adaptive attributions and its behavioral effects was underlined.

In one of the recent studies conducted in Iran context by Pishghadam and Zabihi (2011), the relationship between EFL learners' attributions for success and failure in learning a foreign language and their achievement in foreign language classes was examined. The results showed that effort attribution was the best predictor for achievement, indicating that learners who attributed the outcome of their test to effort got higher grades on the final exam. Furthermore, the results indicated that only stable and personal (internal) attributions significantly predicted students' foreign language achievement.

In a similar vein, Hsieh (2004) looked at the relationship between foreign language learners' attribution, their foreign language achievement and self efficacy beliefs. As a result of the quantitative research conducted with 500 participants in Spanish, German and French classes, it was found out that those learners who made more internal, stable, and personal attributions received higher grades in foreign language classes than those who made more external, unstable, and non-personal attributions. Moreover, results indicated that self-efficacy correlated positively with internal, personal, and stable attributions, and negatively with external attributions.

Another study that investigated the relationship between EFL learners' attributions and their English learning achievement was carried out by Lei and Qin (2009) with Chinese tertiary-level EFL learners. Results revealed that the teacher and effort factors strongly predicted success in learning English, whereas lack of confidence, lack of practical use and test-oriented learning defined EFL failure.

In Lim's study (2007), it was aimed to find out learners' perceptions and beliefs, how they affect the learning outcomes in language classrooms and how this information is related to the anxiety of these learners. One of the hypotheses of Lim's study was that students who had higher internal locus of control would experience less anxiety. Although findings showed that learners' attributions of success and failure are directly related to their language learning anxiety, the predictions were not verified. In contrast to the predictions, learners who attributed their achievements in foreign language learning to external factors, which they believe beyond their control, had lower level of language anxiety compared to those who believed that their achievements were owed to internal factors that they could control. It was argued that this unexpected result was related to the uniqueness of language learning anxiety.

Another attribution study related to anxiety was conducted by Kapıkıran (2008) in Turkish educational context. The aim of the study was to analyse the relationship between locus of control and achievement anxiety among 594 high school students in Denizli. Results showed that there is a negative correlation between internal locus of control and achievement anxiety. In other words, learners who explained their successes in terms of internal locus of control, thus feeling responsible for the outcomes tend to experience less anxiety. Such learners believed that they had more control over events, and they were able to change the course of events. This state of mind enabled them to have a better psychological state. It was concluded that making internal attributions allows students to feel less anxious and become more optimistic about future tasks.

In consequence, all of the studies mentioned so far seem to verify the fact that attributional processes play an important motivational role in language learning process. Therefore, studying attributions will help to clarify the underlying reasons of language learner's success and failure. When the high frequency of failure among learners of English is considered, in the light of attribution studies it becomes easier to figure out

how we can encourage these learners to keep on learning English. Although many attribution studies have been carried out in different EFL or ESL contexts, there has been very little research on this area in Turkish context. Thus, the aim of the present study is to contribute to attribution research in FL context in Turkish culture.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

3.1. INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents the setting in which the study was conducted, the participants and the sampling of the study, the instruments for data collection, and the data collection and analysis procedures.

3.2. THE RATIONALE FOR THE RESEARCH DESIGN

This study is a descriptive study designed as a mixed method design using both qualitative and quantitative data. It aimed to describe achievement attributions of learners for their success or failure in learning English and to examine dimensionality of these attributional response with respect to different variables such as gender and language proficiency.

In the field of SLA, some researchers have employed qualitative methods to explore learners' attributional beliefs in second/foreign language learning. (Williams and Burden, 1999; Williams, Burden, Poulet and Maun, 2004; Tse, 2000; Williams, Burden and Al-Baharna, 2001; Ushioda, 2001, Moore and Chan, 1994; Georgiou, 1999). In these studies, the data were gathered through qualitative methods such as open-ended questionnaires, interviews, or questionnaire - interview data collecting instruments so that the data would not be affected by pre-determined categories. Similarly, in the present study, an open-ended questionnaire in the form of short-answer questions are employed to construct the questionnaire that is going to be used to elicit data in the main study. Since attributions are context-specific, and they might vary from one person to another, in this study, the participants were not given pre-determined causal explanations. Instead, categories were let to emerge from the data gathered through the open-ended questionnaire in which they were allowed to come up with various attributions. Thus, the aim of the open-ended questionnaire in the study was to permit greater freedom of expression to collect rich and detailed information about the achievement attributions of the English language learners to their success or failure.

Depending on the outcomes of the open-ended questionnaire, we have identified the range of possible response categories and formulated the items to be included in the questionnaire.

In order to investigate how causal attributions are related to perceptions of achievement and how they are related to different variables, in the study, quantitative research technique was utilized as the first technique. As an entity of quantitative research, after identifying and determining attributional categories, a questionnaire with selected-response items established in the conceptual framework of the Likert scale was constructed by the researcher. Likert scale was preferred because it allows for fairly accurate assessments of the participants' beliefs or opinions about the statements and are considered as the most widely used scale in the survey research. (McMillan & Schumacher, 1993). It enables respondents to specify their level of agreement or disagreement to a statement by choosing one of the stems (Oppenheim, 1992). The numerical data gained through quantitative methods make it possible to generalize findings and make statistical conclusions through the use of descriptive or inferential means. By this way, whether there exists significant differences between variables were found out in the study.

In the present study, interview was used as the second data collecting technique to enrich the findings of the questionnaire, and to gain more insight about the achievement attributions of the English language learners to success or failure. To this end, semi-structured interview technique was utilized. The semi-structured interview consists of specific and defined open-ended questions determined beforehand, but at the same time it allows for some elaboration in the questions and answers (Seliger, 1989). These questions have highly gained ground with researchers because of their flexibility (Nunan, 1992). Therefore, in the present study semi-structured interview was employed to supplement the data. According to McNamara (1999), interviews are particularly useful for getting the story behind a participant's experiences. The interviewer can pursue in-depth information around the topic. Thus, interviews may be useful as follow-up to certain respondents to questionnaires, e.g., to further investigate their responses.

3.3. SETTING

The study was carried out on preparatory class learners studying in the School of Foreign Languages at Pamukkale University. The curriculum followed changes from level to level but the exit level is B2 level according to Common European Framework (CEF). In this program, the learners have to take English preparatory education for two terms (25 hours a week, a total of 32 weeks) in an academic year. They must successfully complete the preparatory education program in order to study in their own departments where the medium of instruction is English. Before the academic year starts, the learners are placed into different classes such as elementary, pre-intermediate and intermediate level consisting of approximately 25 learners according to the results of the placement test administered by The School of Foreign Languages at the beginning of the academic year. In addition, most of the learners have been placed as elementary and pre-intermediate levels as a result of the placement test.

The elementary level learners are exposed to listening, speaking, reading and writing exercises embedded in the core language course until December from the beginning of the academic year. After 10 weeks, skill-based courses such as reading and writing courses are introduced because they reach pre-intermediate level, and when the spring term starts, listening and speaking course is also included in the curriculum. The pre-intermediate level learners are exposed to core language and reading and writing courses from the beginning of the semester and they start intermediate level at the end of the first term. When the spring term starts, listening and speaking course is also included in the curriculum. During each term, learners at all levels take three midterm exams and twelve pop quizzes.

3.4. PARTICIPANTS

The participants in the main study are 250 prep- class learners studying at School of Foreign Languages, Pamukkale University. All are native speakers of Turkish. 27 of the participants were excluded from the study because they either filled out the questionnaire inappropriately or chose none of the options. Although some of them perceived himself or herself successful, they marked all items for not being successful or vice versa. Because of this reason, their questionnaires were not included

in the sample size. Therefore, the final number of participants in this study was 223. Among the participants, 117 were male and 106 were female learners, and 115 of them were at pre-intermediate and 108 of them were at intermediate levels.

Table 3.1. The distribution of participants in the main study according to their gender

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	male	117	52.5
	female	106	47.5
	Total	223	100.0

Table 3.2. The distribution of participants in the main study according to their proficiency level

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	pre-int.	115	51.6
	int.	108	48.4
	Total	223	100.0

Although the learners were from various departments in the School of Foreign Languages, they were grouped according to their English proficiency levels. The participants were chosen with regard to convenience among the preparatory learners for whom we believe they represent their proficiency levels appropriately.

The participants had different educational backgrounds in terms of high school they graduated. As it is seen in Table 3.4, 2.2% of the learners graduated from “Science High School,” 47.6% of the learners graduated from “Anatolian High School,” 3.1% of them graduated from “Super High School,” 37.6% of them graduated from “State High School” and 9.5% of them graduated from other high schools.

Table 3.3. The distribution of participants in the main study according to the high school they graduated

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	Science High School	5	2.2
	Anatolian High School	106	47.6
	Super High School	7	3.1
	State High School	84	37.6
	Other high schools	21	9.5
	Total	223	100

One of the aims of the study was to compare achievement attributions of language learners according to their perceived level of success. The distribution of learners who perceive themselves as successful and unsuccessful is shown in Table 3.5. According to the Table 3.5, among 223 learners, 53.4% of them perceives themselves successful while 46.6% of them perceives themselves unsuccessful.

Table 3.4. The distribution of learners in the main study according to their perceived success

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	Successful	119	53.4
	Unsuccessful	104	46.6
	Total	223	100.0

Before conducting the main study, a pilot study was carried out by the researcher to find out possible shortcomings in the design of the procedure. To this end, the questionnaire developed for the main study was administered to 85 prep class students at School of Foreign Languages, Pamukkale University at the end of the fall term. Among the participants of the pilot study, 38.8% of them were female and 61.2% of them were male learners. The profile of these learners was similar to the one in the main

study. The learners had different proficiency levels (pre-intermediate and intermediate) and educational backgrounds. As it is seen in Table 3.7, among 85 participants of the pilot study, 72.9% of them were the learners of pre-intermediate level classes and 23 27.1% of them were the learners of intermediate level.

Table 3.5. The distribution of the learners according to their gender in the pilot study

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	male	52	38.8
	female	33	61.2
	Total	85	100

Table 3.6. The distribution of the learners according to their proficiency level in the pilot study

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	pre-int.	62	72.9
	int.	23	27.1
	Total	85	100

3.5. PROCEDURES FOR DATA COLLECTION

The questionnaire and interview were used as research instruments to collect data from the English language learners studying at School of Foreign Languages, Pamukkale University to investigate their achievement attributions for success or failure in learning English.

3.5.1. Instruments

3.5.1.1. Questionnaire

In order to design the questionnaire in the main study, initially an open-ended questionnaire was applied to 345 learners from both pre-intermediate and intermediate groups in the fall term. The learners were asked to give their comments to such questions as “Do you find yourself successful or unsuccessful in learning English, why or why not?”; “Think about the most successful student in English in the class, what makes him/her successful?; “Think about the least successful student in English in the class, what makes him/her unsuccessful? and “What do you have to do to be successful in learning English?”. The questionnaire was written in Turkish in order to allow learners to feel free and express themselves clearly (see Appendix 5).

In the process of analyzing the response data, similar comments were grouped and coded under the same category by the researcher with the help of some experts in ELT. Labels of the categories were assigned only when agreement had been reached. For instance; among the reasons cited for success, many of the responses were concerned with the expression “study hard”. This category included statements such as: I study regularly, do my homework, work hard, make effort, revise my notes, make use of different sources, pay attention, and take time. In other words, it involved a sense of trying hard. Likewise, among the reasons mentioned for failure, “lack of ability” emerged as one of the highly referred categories. This category included statements such as: I have poor memory, I am not good at memorizing, I do not have verbal intelligence, I cannot understand, remember and learn English.

With the comments of these learners, learners’ attributions for their success or failure in learning English were identified, and these attributions guided the preparation of the questionnaire in the current study. According to the objectives of the study and the data gathered from learners, the items of the questionnaire were identified. Then, the items were analyzed by experts in the ELT department to ensure its face and content validity. After agreement was reached on the items, the questionnaire was piloted with 85 prep class learners of pre-intermediate and intermediate groups at the end of the fall term.

The aim of the pilot study was to find out the problems that are likely to emerge with the data collecting instruments of this study, find solutions to them, and make necessary changes in advance. After applying the questionnaire, it was found out that some revision on the items of the questionnaire was necessary. When the reliability of the questionnaire of the pilot study was calculated, the Cronbach-alpha coefficient was found as $\alpha = 0.68$ for the second part of the questionnaire that is assigned to the successful learners.

Table 3.7. Reliability evaluation criteria for α value

α value	Reliability of the instrument
$0.00 \leq \alpha < 0.40$	No reliability
$0.40 \leq \alpha < 0.60$	Low reliability
$0.60 \leq \alpha < 0.80$	Quite reliability
$0.80 \leq \alpha < 1.00$	High reliability

As to the third part of the questionnaire designed for the unsuccessful learners, the Cronbach-alpha coefficient was found as $\alpha = 0.77$ in the pilot study, so no revision was needed. The reliability evaluation criteria according to Cronbach-alpha values are given in Table 3.8 (Özdamar, 2004:633).

In order to increase the internal reliability of the questionnaire for successful learners, reliability analysis was carried out through SPSS. Some items such as Item 7 (exams are easy for me) and Item 17 (I take extra courses) were excluded from the questionnaire when “if items deleted” function was used in the SPSS program. As a result of these alterations, the Cronbach-alpha value of the part related to successful learners changed into $\alpha = 0.71$, and the Cronbach-alpha value of the part related to unsuccessful learners was $\alpha = 0.77$. The Cronbach-alpha values of both sections of the

questionnaire indicate that the instrument is quite reliable for data collection (see Table 3.8).

The final version of the questionnaire in the present study called “Achievement Attributions Questionnaire” consists of three parts (see Appendix 1). The language of the questionnaire was in Turkish so that the participants could appropriately reflect their perceptions on the scale. The first part of the questionnaire was about the demographic information of the learners such as gender, proficiency level, three midterm grades in that term, background education and whether or not they perceive themselves successful or unsuccessful in learning English.

The second part of the questionnaire was divided into two parts in itself. The first part included 15 items (achievement attributions) concerning the learners who perceive themselves successful, and the second part involved 22 items (achievement attributions) regarding those who perceive themselves unsuccessful in learning English. Participants answer the questions on a five-point Likert scale:

(1) completely disagree (2) disagree (3) neutral (4) agree (5) completely agree

In the questionnaire, we aimed to elicit learners’ perceived success rather than outside resource such as marks or grades. In this sense, the application in this study was also parallel with the basics of Attribution Theory, which focuses on the notion of perception (Williams, Burden, Poulet, and Maun, 2004).

The final version of the questionnaire was administered in regular class time to 250 participants during the last week of March, 2010-2011 academic year. By this way, the students who started preparatory school in September and who completed about six months of intensive language schedule would have a chance to reflect on their achievements more clearly. Before meeting the learners, the researcher of the study informed the teachers of the participants about the content, objectives, and procedures of the study. Similarly, before handing out the questionnaires to the learners, the researcher explained the aim of the research to the participants of the study and reminded that the data obtained from the questionnaire would be kept confidential and they would not be used for any other purposes other than this research solely. All participants accepted to contribute. After that, the instructions were read to the

participants by the researcher. The participants were not given any time limitation, but for all groups, answering the questions took approximately 15 minutes. The participants were told not to write their names on the questionnaires so that they would feel more comfortable while answering the questions, however, students' numbers were required so that it would be possible to call some of the participants for the interview.

After the administration of the questionnaire, the reliability of the questionnaire was computed again. The Cronbach-alpha value of the part related to successful learners was $\alpha = 0.71$, and the Cronbach-alpha value of the part related to unsuccessful learners was $\alpha = 0.69$ (see Table 3.9.).

Table 3.8. Reliability statistics for the first part of the questionnaire in the main study

Reliability Statistics of the questionnaire for “successful” learners		Reliability Statistics of the questionnaire for “unsuccessful” learners	
Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items	Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.714	15	.698	22

3.5.1.2. Interview

In order to back up the quantitative data with qualitative data, follow up interview sessions were conducted. As indicated earlier, interviews serve as useful tools to acquire meaningful and explanatory data rich in nature. According to Patton (2002), there are three basic approaches to collecting qualitative data through open-ended interviews and each serves somewhat different purpose. These are;

- (a) informal conversational interview,
- (b) general interview guide approach,
- (c) standardized open-ended interview.

The informal conversational interview depends entirely on the spontaneous generation of questions in the natural flow of an interaction, often as part of ongoing participant observation fieldwork (Patton, 2002:342). Fontana and Frey (2000 cited in Patton, 2000:652) also called it “unstructured interviewing”. In this approach, the researcher does not ask any specific types of questions, but rather relies on the interaction with the participants to guide the interview process (McNamara, 2009). Therefore, these “open” interviews that lack a pre-planned agenda of what will be asked provide the interviewee with broad freedom of expression and elaboration and often resemble informal talks. The general interview guide approach is more structured than the informal conversational interview although there is still quite a bit of flexibility in its application. It involves outlining a set of issues that are to be explored with each respondent before interviewing begins. The guide serves as a basic checklist during the interview to guarantee that all relevant topics are covered (Gall, et.al., 2003 cited in Patton, 2002:342). In this type of interview, questions may not be consistently posed in the same way by the interviewer. The interviewer is able to probe and ask follow-up questions based on their responses to pre-constructed questions.

According to McNamara (2009), the strength of the general interview guide approach is the ability of the researcher “...to ensure that the same general areas of information are collected from each interviewee; this provides more focus than the conversational approach, but still allows a degree of freedom and adaptability in getting information from the interviewee” (Types of Interviews section, para. 1).

The standardized open-ended interview is, on the other hand, structured because questions to be asked are carefully worded and arranged beforehand, and participants are always asked identical questions (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2003). Since questions are open-ended, participants are able to convey as much detailed information as they wish about their experiences. In this type of interview, it also depends on the researcher’s skill to ask probing questions as a means of follow-up.

In this study, the standardized open-ended interview approach was preferred. The questions included in the interview were formulated according to the questionnaire results. These questions were about the items that were most and least frequently cited by the participants in the questionnaire. A set of questions were specified for both those

who perceive themselves as successful and unsuccessful in learning English (see Appendix 2).

Interviews were conducted with 50 participants. 25 of the participants for the interviews were selected randomly from the group considering themselves successful and 25 of them from the group perceiving themselves unsuccessful in learning English. The researcher e-mailed a letter to each of 50 participants to invite them to be the participants for the interviews. Before the interviews, the participants were informed about the aim and the content of the interview by the researcher.

Interviews were administered in Turkish to make learners feel comfortable and to allow them to explain the underlying reasons for their attributions clearly. A suitable environment was also provided by the researcher in order to prevent problems such as noise. During the sessions, interviewees were asked whether they perceive themselves successful or unsuccessful in learning English and to what factors they attribute their success or failure as a warm-up. Although interviewees were asked pre-determined questions, the researcher was able to adopt them according to the responses given by the interviewees, and was flexible to probe initial participant responses by asking why or how questions to encourage them to elaborate on their answers. The interviews took nearly ten minutes per one participant and they were tape-recorded and later transcribed by the researcher. As mentioned earlier, some of the direct quotations from the interviews were also included in data analysis to increase credibility.

3.6. Data Analysis

The data collected through the questionnaire in this study were analyzed with Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) 16.0 data editor. First of all, the data were categorized into two groups as successful and unsuccessful learners, and the mean values, frequencies and percentages of the items were separately calculated to analyze the learners' attributions about their perceived success or failure. Then, the findings have been interpreted according to *locus of control*, *stability* and *controllability* dimensions in attribution theory (Weiner, 1979, 1980, 1986). For this purpose, our questionnaire items have been categorized as locus of causality, stability, and controllability dimensions in Table 3.10. and Table 3.11. In addition, independent

sample t-tests were used in order to find out whether there is a significant difference between learners' attribution and variables such as gender and proficiency level.

Table 3.9. Classification of the items related to perceived success in English in the questionnaire according to the three dimensions of attribution theory

	Locus of Control	Stability	Controllability
1. I study enough	<i>internal</i>	<i>unstable</i>	<i>controllable</i>
2. I know how to study	<i>internal</i>	<i>stable</i>	<i>controllable</i>
3. I have some background education	<i>external</i>	<i>stable</i>	<i>uncontrollable</i>
4. I enjoy learning English	<i>internal</i>	<i>stable</i>	<i>uncontrollable</i>
5. I'm interested in English	<i>internal</i>	<i>stable</i>	<i>uncontrollable</i>
6. I have ability in learning English	<i>internal</i>	<i>stable</i>	<i>uncontrollable</i>
7. Learning English is easy	<i>external</i>	<i>stable</i>	<i>uncontrollable</i>
8. I have rich source of vocabulary	<i>internal</i>	<i>unstable</i>	<i>controllable</i>
9. I'm lucky in exams	<i>external</i>	<i>unstable</i>	<i>uncontrollable</i>
10. I listen to the teacher carefully in class	<i>internal</i>	<i>unstable</i>	<i>controllable</i>
11. I have a successful teacher	<i>external</i>	<i>stable</i>	<i>uncontrollable</i>
12. I watch movies in English out of school	<i>internal</i>	<i>unstable</i>	<i>controllable</i>
13. I read books in English out of school	<i>internal</i>	<i>unstable</i>	<i>controllable</i>
14. I get help from my teacher or friends if necessary	<i>external</i>	<i>unstable</i>	<i>controllable</i>
15. I have self confidence in learning English	<i>internal</i>	<i>stable</i>	<i>uncontrollable</i>

Table 3.10. Classification of the items related to perceived failure in English in the questionnaire according to the three dimensions of attribution theory

Items	Locus of Control	Stability	Controllability
1. I don't study enough	<i>internal</i>	<i>unstable</i>	<i>controllable</i>
2. I don't have enough background education	<i>external</i>	<i>stable</i>	<i>uncontrollable</i>
3. I do not like learning English	<i>internal</i>	<i>stable</i>	<i>uncontrollable</i>
4. Learning English is difficult	<i>external</i>	<i>stable</i>	<i>uncontrollable</i>
5. I do not want to learn English	<i>internal</i>	<i>stable</i>	<i>uncontrollable</i>
6. Exams are difficult for me	<i>external</i>	<i>stable</i>	<i>uncontrollable</i>
7. I don't have ability to learn English	<i>internal</i>	<i>stable</i>	<i>uncontrollable</i>
8. I don't attend classes regularly	<i>internal</i>	<i>unstable</i>	<i>controllable</i>

9. I don't listen to my teacher carefully in class	<i>internal</i>	<i>unstable</i>	<i>controllable</i>
10. My teacher is not successful	<i>external</i>	<i>stable</i>	<i>uncontrollable</i>
11. Classes are boring	<i>external</i>	<i>unstable</i>	<i>uncontrollable</i>
12. I don't know how to study	<i>internal</i>	<i>stable</i>	<i>controllable</i>
13. I'm unlucky in exams	<i>external</i>	<i>unstable</i>	<i>uncontrollable</i>
14. Social activities take much of my time (friends, clubs, etc.)	<i>external</i>	<i>unstable</i>	<i>controllable</i>
15. I don't watch movies or read books in English enough).	<i>internal</i>	<i>unstable</i>	<i>controllable</i>
16. One-year prep class education is not enough to learn English	<i>external</i>	<i>stable</i>	<i>uncontrollable</i>
17. I get nervous during exams	<i>internal</i>	<i>stable</i>	<i>uncontrollable</i>
18. I'm anxious about failing the prep class	<i>internal</i>	<i>stable</i>	<i>uncontrollable</i>
19. I have some private problems (family, money, health, etc.)	<i>external</i>	<i>unstable</i>	<i>uncontrollable</i>
20. I don't have enough confidence in learning English	<i>internal</i>	<i>stable</i>	<i>controllable</i>
21. I have difficulty in Understanding and following the topics in classes	<i>internal</i>	<i>stable</i>	<i>controllable</i>
22. I don't have enough vocabulary	<i>internal</i>	<i>unstable</i>	<i>controllable</i>

In the achievement attribution questionnaire, learners were asked to select one of the statements among “CA (Completely Agree), A (Agree), N (Neutral), D (Disagree), CD (Completely Disagree) for each attribution item to reflect their opinions, beliefs and feelings towards their perceived success or failure. In order to interpret the attitudes of the learners in choosing the right slot properly in the Likert scale, the participation level intervals have been found using $n-1/n$ formula. As a result of computation, the interval scale is $5-1/5= 0.80$. The interval scales in the study is shown in Table 3.12 below.

Table 3.11. Interval Scale of the Options in the Questionnaire

Participation Level	Mean
Completely Agree	4.21 – 5.00
Agree	3.41 – 4.20
Neutral	2.61 – 3.40
Disagree	1.81 – 2.60
Completely Disagree	1.00 - 1.80

For the fourth research question in the study, in order to find the relationship between learners' perceived success and the achievement scores of them, the averages of the achievement scores of the learners was calculated, and then have been categorized as successful, average and unsuccessful according to the regulations of the School of Foreign Languages. In the regulations, the success level of learners is calculated out of 100 marks. Those who have 70 general average point and above are considered successful.

Table 3.12. The categorization of the averages of learners' achievement scores

Successful	69.50 – 100
Average	49.50 – 69.49
Unsuccessful	0 - 49.49

Finally, the data from the interviews have been analyzed through the content analysis. The repeated themes in the interviews were noted, and the general theme units were categorized based on the questions under the guidance of ELT experts.

CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

4.1. INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, the results and findings of each research question are presented along with the statistical analysis of the data obtained from the main study. The results and findings of the analyses are presented in the light of the research questions.

4.2. FINDINGS OF THE MAIN STUDY

The aim of the study is to describe the achievement attributions of English language learners for their success or failure at preparatory class. Besides this, another aim of the study is to examine the differences in achievement attributions of English language learners with regard to their gender and proficiency level, and to see the relationship between learners' perceived success and their achievement scores in the midterm exams. The data have been analyzed by means of descriptive statistics and independent sample t-test on SPSS.

4.2.1. Learners' attributions for their success or failure in learning English

The first research question is: *To what factors do Turkish prep class EFL learners at School of Foreign Languages, Pamukkale University attribute their success or failure in learning English?* As seen in Table 4.1, our data reveal that among 223 learners 53.4% perceived themselves successful and 46.6% perceived themselves unsuccessful in learning English process.

Table 4.1. The distribution of learners according to their perceived success

Perception of success	Frequency	Percent
Successful	119	53.4
Unsuccessful	104	46.6
Total	223	100.0

To find out the achievement attributions of the English language learners participated in the study, descriptive statistics of the achievement attributions were carried out and means were calculated (see Appendix 3 and 4 for the frequencies and percentages of the items). The following data in Table 4.2 shows the mean values for the preparatory learners' achievement attributions related to their success.

Table 4.2. Descriptive statistics of the preparatory learners' achievement attributions related to their success

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation	Participation Level
Item11	119	1	5	4.32	1.039	Completely Agree
Item15	119	1	5	4.13	.953	Agree
Item4	119	1	5	4.03	.882	Agree
Item5	119	1	5	4.00	.883	Agree
Item10	119	2	5	3.89	.862	Agree
Item14	119	1	5	3.75	1.051	Agree
Item6	119	1	5	3.59	.877	Agree
Item12	119	1	5	3.55	1.260	Agree
Item2	119	1	5	3.35	1.036	Neutral
Item3	119	1	5	3.33	1.236	Neutral
Item7	119	1	5	3.03	1.057	Neutral
Item1	119	1	5	3.03	.965	Neutral
Item13	119	1	5	2.90	1.210	Neutral
Item8	119	1	5	2.89	.881	Neutral
Item9	119	1	5	2.50	1.088	Disagree

When the mean values of the items are compared, the most striking reasons that learners attributed for their success are found out. The mean values of the items reveal that prep-class learners mostly attribute their success to Item 11 (I have a successful teacher) (\bar{X} =4.32). In addition to this, according to the results, it is clear that Item 15 (having self confidence) (\bar{X} =4.13), Item 4 (enjoying learning English) (\bar{X} =4.03) and Item 5 (being interested in English) (\bar{X} =4.00) are among the most outstanding attributions mentioned by learners to account for their success. On the other hand, another group of attributions referred at reasonably high level include Item 10 (I listen

to the teacher carefully) ($\bar{X}=3.89$), Item 14 (I get help from my teacher or friends if necessary) ($\bar{X}=3.75$), Item 6 (I have ability in learning English) ($\bar{X}=3.59$), Item 12 (I watch movies in English out of school) ($\bar{X}=3.55$). Additionally, Item 2 (I know how to study) ($\bar{X}=3.35$), Item 3 (I have some background education in English) ($\bar{X}=3.33$), Item 7 (Learning English is easy) ($\bar{X}=3.03$), Item 1 (I study enough) ($\bar{X}=3.03$) are the items that are referred at average level by the successful learners. In addition, Item 13 (I read books in English out of school) ($\bar{X}=2.90$), Item 8 (I have rich source of vocabulary) ($\bar{X}=2.89$) are rated by the learners at lower frequency level. Finally, Item 9 (I'm lucky in exams) ($\bar{X}=2.50$) is the least preferred item as a cause by the learners for their success.

When the mean values of items are considered, it is obvious that among pre-class learners, an external, uncontrollable cause (having a successful teacher) emerged as the most rated factor to achieve success, but still these learners attribute their success to internal and uncontrollable causes such as having self confidence, enjoying learning English and being interested in English at high level. These findings suggest that learners believe success is something that is related to the teacher as the main driving force in their learning English. Thus, it seems that these learners are not autonomous yet, but are still teacher dependent as they were in their primary and secondary education. Another factor may be that they spend 25 hours a week mostly with their class teacher at the beginner and pre- intermediate levels. Learners might have been affected a lot by the performance of their class teacher. The ninth participant in the interviews stated that “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 sources, so I get more motivated to learn”. The twenty-third participant emphasized that

“My teacher has a good sense of humour, so we have fun while learning English. Also, she is able to relate the topics in the book to our own experiences, which increases my interest to the class”.

The fifth participant in the interviews also expressed that

“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 make us believe we can achieve success, which motivates me a lot”.

Thus, it is possible to state that teachers have an important role in engaging learners in the language learning process for these learners. In parallel with the results, it can be stated that 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 display that Item 11 (I have a successful teacher) ($\bar{X}=4.32$) is followed by Item 15 (I have a self confidence) ($\bar{X}=4.13$), Item 4 (I enjoy learning English) ($\bar{X}=4.03$) and Item 5 (I am interested in English) ($\bar{X}=4.00$). These items are internal, stable and uncontrollable and referred at high frequency by successful learners. Thus, these internal items are recognized as significant factors which contribute to their success by the learners. The tenth and fourteenth and participants in the interviews stated that:

“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 to native speakers on the internet and improve my English”.

“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”.

The statements signify that self-confidence contributes to learner's willingness to communicate in English (MacIntyre, Dörnyei, Clement, and Noels, 1998). The second participant emphasized that “The more I do the tasks in the class successfully, the more I gain confidence in learning English and I study. 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 Watkins (1991), Brodkey and Shore (1976), and Gardner and Lambert (1972) self-esteem was found to be an important variable in second language acquisition (Brown, 1994:137). Besides, it is considered critical to subsequent successful academic performance (Bandura, 1986; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2004a; Akama, 2006 cited in Cheng and Chiou, 2010). In addition, according to the results, it is obvious that successful

learners consider being interested in English and enjoying learning English as important factors that serve their success. Here are the statements quoted from the twenty-second and eighteenth participants in the interviews on this topic:

“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”.

“I want to go on my education and study abroad when I graduate. Therefore, I want to learn English a lot”.

These quotations indicate that successful learners are aware of the advantages of knowing English, thus they have instrumental motivation (Gardner and Lambert, 1972) to be competent enough. The following quotations from the eleventh, eighteenth and the twentieth participants reveal that these learners are intrinsically motivated to learn English, and this raises their curiosity and interest, which in turn, promotes learning.

“Loving English keeps me motivated about learning English and it makes it easier for me to concentrate on what we are learning and it stops me from giving up”.

“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”.

“I love the process of learning English. It is different from learning and studying other subjects like maths or history. I am having interaction with my class-mates 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”.

According to Pintrich and 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. Dornyei (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 and Schmidt, 1991; Deci, 1995).

On the other hand, our data reveal that the first group of attribution which are rated at high levels by the learners are followed by Item 10 (I listen to the teacher

carefully) ($\bar{X}=3.89$), Item 14 (I get help from my teacher or friends if necessary) ($\bar{X}=3.75$), Item 6 (I have ability in learning English) ($\bar{X}=3.59$), Item 12 (I watch movies in English out of school) ($\bar{X}=3.55$), Item 2 (I know how to study) ($\bar{X}=3.35$). Among these Items, Item 10 (I listen to the teacher carefully), Item 12 (I watch movies in English out of school) and Item 2 (I know how to study) are parallel attributions for success. All of these are internal, unstable and controllable causes. As Weiner (1992) put forward internal causes originate within the person and attributing results to internal and controllable factors gives people feelings of control and stimulates them to try hard and succeed. In that sense, these attributions are adaptive (helpful). The mean value of Item 10 ($\bar{X}=3.89$) implies that many of the learners (73.9%) believe in the importance of listening to the teacher carefully and think it as a significant contributor to their success. This finding is in line with Item 11 (I have a successful teacher). Besides, the mean value of Item 12 (I watch movies in English out of school) ($\bar{X}=3.55$) shows that more than half of the learners (61%) approved the importance of watching movies in English as a factor in improving their English. The mean values of these two items suggest that learners perceiving themselves successful recognize the necessity of making effort on their part to be successful. During the interviews, the sixteenth participant stated that

“In my opinion, to be successful in English, listening to the teacher is vital because almost in each class, we learn new things about grammar, learn new vocabulary or how to write a certain type of paragraph. That is why I try to attend the classes regularly and to learn everything in the class”.

The fourth and ninth participants commented on the benefits of watching movies with English subtitles:

“I like watching films with English subtitles because this is a fun and enjoyable way to learn. While watching movies sometimes, I rewind the movie and listen to a sentence several times. I try to match the spoken phrase with the subtitles. In that way, my pronunciation improves a lot, and I learn a lot of new vocabulary”.

“I always watch movies with English subtitles to improve my English. This way, I come across the words or phrases I have learned in the class, and see how they are used in daily speech. Also, I feel that since I started watching movies in English with subtitles, I have performed better in listening sections of the exams”.

On the other hand, Item 14 (I get help from my teacher or friends if necessary) ($\bar{X}=3.75$) which is external, unstable and controllable appears as a significant factor for the learners. It can be suggested that getting help from others is a strategy that is used by the successful learners. In accordance with the items mentioned previously, it can be proposed that since these learners are self-confident and intrinsically motivated to learn, they do not hesitate to ask for help or persist when they encounter obstacles. In addition to this, the table indicates that Item 6 (I have ability in learning English) ($\bar{X}=3.59$) which is internal, stable and uncontrollable is perceived significant by learners as a reason to explain their success. Most of the learners (73%) completely agree or agree with this item. Thus, the finding suggests that most of the learners believe in their capabilities to be able to successful 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).

On the other hand, learners preferred to ascribe their success to Item 2 (I know how to study) ($\bar{X}=3.35$) at average level. Half of the learners (51%) agreed that knowing how to study plays a role in their being successful. The sixteenth participant in the interviews expressed that:

“I do not study very much but I study regularly. I revise the things I have learned in the class and do some exercises. I often try to write down my ideas about a topic by using grammatical structures or vocabulary I have recently learned and have my teacher check it. I try to read daily English newspapers on the internet and guess the meaning of words which I have no idea about”.

Furthermore, learners referred to Item 3 (I have some background education) ($\bar{X}=3.33$) at average level. More than half of the learners (64%) think that having background education contributes to their success to some extent. The twelfth participant in the interviews stated that “Having some background education in English helped me a lot, however in time I understood that I should not just rely on what I had already known, I also needed to make effort and study to be more successful”. Besides, Item 7 (Learning English is easy) ($\bar{X}=3.03$) is preferred by the learners at lower level.

The finding reveals that learners do not tend to account for their success in terms of the easiness of learning English. Both Item 3 and Item 7 are external, stable and uncontrollable causes, and they are not stated at high frequency by the learners. In addition, Item 1 (I study enough) ($\bar{X}=3.03$) which is internal, unstable and controllable is referred at average level by the learners. The twenty-first participant in the interviews pointed out that “I study regularly and spare at least 2,5 hour for English everyday. During that time, I make revisions, study vocabulary or do reading comprehension exercises.” It seems that some learners do their best to study on their own. On the other hand, The first participant stated that “My grades are high, but it is not because I study much, I just try to listen to the teacher carefully in the class, and sometimes do my homework. I know much of the things we are learning anyway. ” This remarks suggest that having background education helps learners in the English learning process and may sometimes compensate for some of their insufficient study.

On the other hand, as it can be seen in Table 4.2, the learners attribute their success to Item 13 (I read books in English out of school) ($\bar{X}=2.90$) and Item 8 (I have rich source of vocabulary) ($\bar{X}=2.89$) which are internal, unstable and controllable at lower level to explain their success. Here are the quotations cited by the twenty-first and thirteenth participants in the interviews on reading books in English:

“Whenever I started reading books in English, I unfortunately stopped after a while. While reading a book, I do not want to look up unknown words in the dictionary. It is really boring and a waste of time. While doing so, I always miss the content of the book. That’s why I prefer reading short texts now”.

“I try to read stage books in English. I try to pay attention to the grammar, how sentences are structured, and the vocabulary while reading. It takes time and I sometimes miss the content, but it improves my English a lot”.

Lower frequency of rate for Item 13 (I read books in English out of school) might indicate that although these learners are aware that reading something in English is beneficial to achieve success, they see reading books as one of the ways of improving English, not the way to be successful in English. When the language level of the learners is taken into consideration, it is feasible to suggest that reading books in English becomes more fun and meaningful for these learners after having reached a certain level of competence in English. Also, Item 8 (I have rich source of vocabulary)

($\bar{X}=2.89$) is not considered so significant by the learners for their success. The sixteenth participant in the interviews stated that “in my opinion, having rich vocabulary is not the most necessary element in succeeding in learning English. I mean; I do not have rich vocabulary, but I am able to guess the meaning of the words I don’t know from the context in reading passages”. The seventh participant emphasized that “if I do not know the English form of the word I want to use in writing or speaking, I try to convey the meaning in some other ways; for example, by paraphrasing.”

On the other hand, as it can be seen in Table 4.2, the learners attribute their success to being lucky which is an external, unstable and uncontrollable cause ($\bar{X}=2.50$) at the least frequently level. In addition, other external and uncontrollable causes such as Item 3 (I have some background education in English) ($\bar{X}=3.33$), Item 7 (Learning English is easy) ($\bar{X}=3.03$) are among the causes that were rated at average or lower levels by the learners. Hence, it is possible to suggest that prep-class learners attribute their success to task difficulty ($\bar{X}=3.03$) or luck ($\bar{X}=2.50$) in a lower level and that they do not prefer to attribute their success to *external, uncontrollable* causes over which they have no control except for the teacher factor.

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 (Stevenson & Lee, 1990; Christenson et. al. 1992; O’Sullivan & Howe, 1996; Williams and Burden, 1999) learners made internal attributions and explained their success in terms of effort and ability. In other studies (Graham, 2004; McQuillan, 2000; Niles, 1984; Park & Kim, 1998; Watkins & Regmi, 2001; Williams & Burden, 1999; Williams, Burden & Al-Baharna, 2001; Williams, Burden, Poulet & Maun, 2005) 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 is “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, according to the findings, it is clear that learners believe ability is an important factor in their success, however, ability attribution is 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 administered by Tse (2000). In her study in which she investigated learners' self-perception on FLL through the autobiography approach, it was found out that most of the students attributed FLL success to teacher or classroom environment, family and personal drive to learn. Other studies (O'Sullivan & Howe, 1996; Park & Kim, 1998; Qin, 1998, 2002; Qin & Wen, 2002; Williams & Burden, 1999 cited in Lei & Qui, 2009) also concluded that learners tend to attribute FLL and EFL success and failure to the teacher or classroom environment factors. Lei and Qui (2009:45) reasoned that "in comparison with other academic tasks such as mathematics and reading, FLL is more practice- and communication-oriented with teachers and peer learners".

As for the learners who perceive themselves unsuccessful, Table 4.3 presents the descriptive statistics of their achievement attributions to their failure.

Table 4.3 Descriptive statistics of prep-class learners' achievement attributions to failure in English

Items	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation	Participation Level
Item22	104	1	5	3.96	1.148	Agree
Item18	104	1	5	3.81	1.521	Agree
Item6	104	1	5	3.78	1.190	Agree
Item15	104	1	5	3.54	1.114	Agree
Item16	104	1	5	3.53	1.351	Agree
Item1	104	1	5	3.50	1.166	Agree
Item2	104	1	5	3.50	1.468	Agree
Item13	101	1	5	3.48	1.213	Agree
Item12	103	1	5	3.46	1.203	Agree
Item4	103	1	5	3.38	1.238	Neutral
Item17	103	1	5	3.18	1.319	Neutral
Item11	104	1	5	3.03	1.092	Neutral
Item7	103	1	5	2.93	1.131	Neutral
Item21	104	1	5	2.73	1.151	Neutral

Item14	104	1	5	2.71	1.244	Neutral
Item8	102	1	5	2.65	1.310	Neutral
Item20	104	1	5	2.55	1.245	Disagree
Item3	103	1	5	2.45	1.178	Disagree
Item9	100	1	5	2.29	1.076	Disagree
Item19	104	1	5	2.23	1.232	Disagree
Item5	103	1	5	2.18	1.250	Disagree
Item10	104	1	5	1.71	1.058	Completely disagree

The most prominent causes to which prep-class learners mostly attribute their failure are Item 22 (I don't have enough vocabulary) ($\bar{X}=3.96$), Item 18 (I'm anxious about failing the prep class) ($\bar{X}=3.81$), and Item 6 (Exams are difficult for me) ($\bar{X}=3.78$) (see Table 4.3). Among these attributions, Item 22 is internal, unstable, controllable, Item 18 is internal, stable, uncontrollable, and Item 6 is external, stable, uncontrollable. These results indicate that learners who perceive themselves unsuccessful in learning English tend to believe that enough vocabulary (internal, unstable, controllable) is the key elements 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) ($\bar{X}=3.54$) and Item 1 (I don't study enough) ($\bar{X}=3.50$) that are internal, unstable, controllable follow the most striking attributions. During the interviewees the thirty-first participant 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". These statements reveal that that particular learner's language competence is not enough to watch a film or read a book in English due to lack of enough vocabulary. The statements also suggest that having enough vocabulary is necessary to encourage and appreciate practice of English out of the school for these learners. On the other hand, the twenty-ninth interviewee perceiving herself unsuccessful indicated that "I think that watching movies or reading books in English help us improve our English because while doing so, we have the chance to encounter words over and over, especially in different contexts. This allows us to learn new words more easily". The statements suggest that these learners are aware of the

importance of watching movies or reading books in English to improve their language competence. During the interviews, the forty-eighth participant pointed out that “I know that I do not put forward enough effort and study. If I take more time for English I believe that I will be able to succeed”. These findings indicate that the learners believe it will be possible for them to be more successful provided that they can enrich their vocabulary by making enough effort and watching movies or reading books in English appropriate to their language level.

Furthermore, learners have rated Item 18 (I’m anxious about failing the prep class) ($\bar{X}=3.81$), and Item 6 (Exams are difficult for me) ($\bar{X}=3.78$) at high level (see Table 4.3). It may be claimed that since unsuccessful learners do not make enough effort in studying English ($\bar{X}=3.50$) 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, it is Item 6 (Exams are difficult for me) 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 may cause these learners to be more anxious about failing the class. On the other hand, Item 16 (One-year prep class education is not enough to learn English) ($\bar{X}=3.53$) and Item 2 (I don’t have enough background education) ($\bar{X}=3.50$) are parallel causes and are among the reasons that are rated at high level by the learners. Both of these factors are external, stable and uncontrollable in which learners put the blame on causes external to them, thus holding no hope for a change or no expectation for a different outcome in the future. This finding 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, the thirty-sixth yinterviewee pointed out that:

“I graduated from state high school, so I did not know anything about English when I started the prep class at the beginning of the term this year. Also, I had not had any English class for two years at high school, so I started from zero.”

The forty- third 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”. 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, although learners state Item 12 (I don’t know how to study) ($\bar{X}=3.46$) less frequently than other items mentioned previously, still it receives adequate attention by them. This result indicates the fact that since learning a foreign language has not been a part of learners’ previous academic years as much as other domains like science and maths, 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. Furthermore, it is important to underline that the English classes these learners had at high school is based mostly on behaviorist 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 prep-class, which mainly focuses on four language skills. Thus, they may think one-year prep class education is not enough and exams are difficult for them. Table 4.3 also displays that Item 1 (I don’t study enough) and Item 12 (I don’t know how to study) are referred to at similar frequency level by the learners. This result suggests that learners’ not taking enough time for studying English may deprive them of the opportunity to be able to find out appropriate strategies for themselves in learning English. Like Item 1 (I don’t study enough), Item 12 (I don’t know how to study) is an adaptive (helpful) attribution which is internal and controllable because if students attribute failure to factors that are internal and controllable, they do not have an excuse for failure except themselves. In that case, they may be more apt to change future behaviors, thus having more control over their academic performance (Forsyth & McMillan, 1981). Because of this reason, as Peter and Burden (2003) stated, just forcing learners to try harder is insufficient, instead it is significant to provide them with concrete ideas about how to reach learning goals through strategy training. When learners are equipped with proper learning strategies, they may be more motivated to study English.

In addition to these, Item 12 (I don't know how to study) ($\bar{X}=3.46$) is followed by Item 4 (Learning English is difficult) ($\bar{X}=3.38$) 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. The thirty-fifth interviewee 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.”

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) ($\bar{X}=3.48$) 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 contrasts 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 the forty-first participant 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.”

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 and 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 cited in Sweeton and Deerrose, 2010).

Moreover, our data reveal that learners seem to ascribe their failure to Item 17 (I get nervous during exams) ($\bar{X}=3.18$) at average level. This finding suggests that 45.2% of the learners consider getting nervous, which is internal, stable and uncontrollable, as a factor contributing to their being unsuccessful. Getting nervous in an exam may be interpreted as a personal trait, but this might also be connected to learners' not studying enough and regarding exams as difficult for them.

Besides, Item 11 (Classes are boring) ($\bar{X}=3.03$) that is external, stable and uncontrollable is referred by the learners at average level. Some learners might think that receiving 25 hours of English education mostly with the same teacher is monotonous and dull. Especially for pre-intermediate learners who follow the same course book for 25 hours a week in the first two months of the academic term, this situation may be more tedious. Moreover, it is probable that learners have difficulty in keeping up with the intensive schedule, so lose their motivation and interest to continue the tasks at hand.

On the other hand, Item 7 (I do not have ability to learn English) ($\bar{X}=2.93$) and Item 20 (I do not have enough confidence in learning English) ($\bar{X}=2.55$) 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 and Ferrara, 2010). 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 and Ferrara (2010) revealed that neither the Chinese nor Turks endorsed lack of ability as a cause of failure.

Moreover, the findings show that Item 21 (I have difficulty in understanding and following the topics in classes) ($\bar{X}=2.73$), Item 14 (Social activities take much of my time friends, clubs, etc.) ($\bar{X}=2.71$), and Item 8 (I don't attend classes regularly) ($\bar{X}=2.65$) are referred less frequently than average level. This finding indicates that unsuccessful learners do not relate their failure to the difficulty of following the tasks in the classes. Hence, it can be pointed out that according to these learners, they receive instruction appropriate for their own language level. In addition, the mean values of Item 14 ($\bar{X}=2.71$), and Item 8 ($\bar{X}=2.65$) show that unsuccessful learners do not associate their failure with an external and controllable cause like social activities or with an internal and controllable cause such as not attending classes regularly.

Furthermore, according to the Table 4.3, Item 3 (I do not like learning English) ($\bar{X}=2.45$), Item 9 (I do not listen to my teacher carefully in class) ($\bar{X}=2.29$), Item 19 (I have some private problems like family, money, health, etc.) ($\bar{X}=2.23$), and Item 5 (I do not want to learn English) ($\bar{X}=2.18$) 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 and Lambert, 1972; Dörnyei, 1994; Williams and Burden, 1997). Here are the quotations by the interviewees on motivation, the twenty-seventh, twenty-ninth and fiftieth participants emphasized that:

“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.”

“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.

“It is not possible to learn English successfully just because it is obligatory without enjoying it”.

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. Besides this, learners’ reference to Item 9 (I do not listen to my teacher carefully in class) that 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 have a desire to learn English and enjoy learning English, it seems that they try to listen to their teacher carefully in class. Therefore, they prefer not to agree with the statement that their being unsuccessful is linked to not listening to their teacher carefully. Hence, these learners do not consider Item 9 as an important factor influencing their failure.

Additionally, Item 10 (My teacher is not successful) ($\bar{X}=1.71$) is the least frequently rated item by the learners considering themselves unsuccessful. This finding reveals that these learners do not attribute their failure to an external, stable and uncontrollable cause like having an unsuccessful teacher. The forty-sixth participant 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.”

The thirty-second participant pointed out that “I am unsuccessful in learning English since I do not study regularly, but I would be even worse if I did not have such a qualified teacher.” 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 (My teacher is not successful) with the least frequently level hints that these learners tend to hold themselves responsible for their failure rather than an external cause.

It is important to point out that successful learners relate their success to the successful teacher mostly. In addition, unsuccessful learners do not associate their failure with an unsuccessful teacher, so they referred to that attribution the least frequently level. This finding indicates that both groups of learners confirm their teacher is well-equipped, and successful. Therefore, there must be other factors that are effective, which makes the difference between these groups.

The second most frequently referred cause by successful learners is having self-confidence in learning English. Similarly, when the mean value of Item 20 (I don't have enough confidence in learning English) ($\bar{X}=2.55$) is considered, unsuccessful learners do not agree that lack of self-confidence in learning English is a significant cause influencing their failure. Therefore, it is possible to suggest that both groups possess adaptive attributions in terms of their capabilities. That is, both groups trust in themselves, so other causes might be more influential in the emergence of failure for the "unsuccessful" learners.

Furthermore, successful learners link their success to enjoying learning English and being interested in English to a high extent. This finding is parallel with the one with unsuccessful learners. Unsuccessful learners do not agree that lack of interest or not enjoying learning English are among the causes that lead to their failure.

In addition, the results reveal that most of the successful learners agree that having ability in learning English ($\bar{X}=3.59$) is one of the significant elements playing role in their success. For success outcomes, ability attribution is thought to be helpful for motivation and endeavor for the future success. Horwitz (1988) found that many language learners made pre-assumptions of who can succeed in language learning, and when they assumed that they were not likely to find learning a language easy, their expectations for success was low, leading to a lack of motivation to learn. In Graham's (2004) study, it was found out that ability attributions are positively related to actual, expected, and perceived academic achievement. Also, according to the findings, it is obvious that the second group finding themselves unsuccessful do not seem to agree with the idea that their lack of ability ($\bar{X}=2.93$) is an important factor leading to their failure in learning English. In that sense, it is reasonable to claim that most of the

participants in both groups; learners perceiving themselves successful and unsuccessful believe that they are capable of learning English. Thus, they have high self-efficacy level, which facilitates motivation (Bandura, 1986). When learners attribute failure to lack of ability, they actually block their own potential. They are likely to believe that putting forward much effort is futile, it does not result in any success. Therefore, they are less likely to strive for future tasks. To a great extent, this situation may lead to maladaptive behavior, namely learned helplessness (Brophy, 1998). In the present study, most of the unsuccessful learners do not ascribe their failures to lack of ability. This signifies that they might still have higher expectancy for future success. This finding is consistent with the finding of the study conducted by Park and Kim (1998). In their study with Korean and Chinese learners, it was concluded that in case of failure, “the honor students were less likely to attribute their failure to lack of ability” (Park and Kim, 1998:191).

Furthermore, the results about ability attribution are not in agreement with the ones in the study of Altan (2006) on perception of learning English and sources of foreign language classroom anxiety. In Altan’s study a great number of learners agreed with the statement: “some people are born with a special ability to learn a foreign language” (2006:48). However, in this study, the learners who perceive themselves unsuccessful in learning English do not think that lack of ability plays an important role in language learning, which is promising for expectations for future success.

On the other hand, it is striking that even though successful learners rank having rich source of vocabulary as the second least frequently referred cause for their success, learners in unsuccessful group view lack of vocabulary as the most significant cause for their failure. This may be because “successful” learners are better in using some strategies such as skimming, scanning, guessing the meaning from context, inferencing and referencing.

Moreover, unlike successful learners who rate being lucky in exams the least frequently level, thereby considering luck as an unimportant cause for their success, unsuccessful learners agree that being unlucky is one of the reasons resulting in their failure ($\bar{X}=3.48$). In addition, the results show that unsuccessful learners ascribe their

failure to other external, stable and uncontrollable causes such as the difficulty of exams, short education term to learn English, and lack of background education at high level. As Tremblay & Gardner (1995) emphasized, attributions to the context, task difficulty or to luck would be maladaptive because they signify external factors that are beyond learners' control. Also, stable beliefs about the causes of failure are important obstacles to motivation Weiner (2010). In that case, learners believe the cause as unchangeable and give up expecting a different outcome in the future. Additionally, failure attributed to uncontrollable factors hinders achievement. According to Dörnyei (2001), if learners associate their failure with stable-uncontrollable causes, they will not be eager to make effort for their future performance; as a result, their motivation to learning the language is likely to lessen completely. Arnold (1999:13) points out that "what we see as the causes for our past successes or failures will affect our expectations, and through them, our performance".

Besides, it is quite noteworthy that the same group of unsuccessful learners attributes their failure to lack of enough vocabulary at the highest level. This is an adaptive attribution because it is internal, unstable and controllable. If a cause is thought to be internal and within one's own control, a person is likely to be persistent in his efforts so that he can control his future performance (Weiner, 1986, 1992). According to the results, it is also possible to suggest that other internal, unstable and controllable causes such as not watching movies or reading books in English enough, not studying hard, and not knowing how to study are among the reasons referred by the learners at a considerable level to account for their failure. Hence, the result of the study implies that the participants of the study who find themselves unsuccessful attribute their failure in English to not only external and uncontrollable causes but also, internal controllable ones such as lack of effort. In other words, they still feel that they are responsible for their failure in English to a certain extent. However, according to most attribution studies (Stevenson & Lee, 1990; Christenson et.al., 1992; O'Sullivan and Howe, 1996; Georgiou, 1999), learners have an ego-serving bias by which they explain success in terms of internal factors, such as effort, ability, and failure in terms of external factors, such as task difficulty, luck. However, in this particular study, the results indicate that learners attribute their failure not only to external factors but also, to internal ones. This situation may be explained by a number of different interpretations. One of the most probable one is differences in personality.

4.2.2. The relationship between the achievement attributions of English language learners and their gender

After determining the main attributions of the learners for their success or failure, Independent Samples t-tests were applied to find out whether there is a significant difference between the achievement attributions of English language learners and their gender. Table 4.4 presents the results of gender differences in prep class learners' achievement attributions to success and failure in English.

Table 4.4 Gender differences in prep class learners' achievement attributions to success and failure in English.

	Gender	N	Mean	SD	t	df.	Sig.
Achievement attributions to success	Male	65	3.44	.52	-.973	117	.332
	Female	54	3.53	.35			
Achievement attributions to failure	Male	52	3.06	.51	.867	102	.388
	Female	52	2.98	.37			

According to the test results, there is no significant difference between male and female learners in terms of their attributions to success in English ($t = -0.973$, $p > .05$), and to failure in English ($t = 0.867$, $p > .05$). However, when we computed the items individually, there is a significant difference in the following items in terms of gender. Table 4.5 presents the results of gender differences in learners' achievement attributions to success in English on item level.

Table 4.5 : Independent Samples t-tests results of gender differences in learners' achievement attributions to success

Items	Gender	N	Mean	SD	t	df.	f	Sig.
1	Male	65	2.85	1.019	-2.370	117	.614	.019
	Female	54	3.26	.851				
7	Male	65	3.25	1.104	2.454	117	2.064	.016
	Female	54	2.78	.945				
10	Male	65	3.71	.914	-2.605	117	5.309	.010
	Female	54	4.11	.744				
13	Male	65	2.69	1.298	-2.074	117	4.137	.040
	Female	54	3.15	1.053				
14	Male	65	3.50	1.146	-2.836	117	10.138	.002
	Female	54	4.04	.846				

According to Table 4.5, there is a significant difference between males and females in terms of Item 1 (I study enough) ($t = -2.370$, $p < .05$). The result displays that females attribute success in English to studying enough ($\bar{X} = 3.26$) more than males do ($\bar{X} = 2.85$). In addition, the difference between males and females in terms of Item 10 (I listen to the teacher carefully in class) ($t = -2.605$, $p < .05$) is significant. In other words, female learners attribute success in English to listening to the teacher carefully ($\bar{X} = 4.11$) more than male learners do ($\bar{X} = 3.71$). Furthermore, a significant difference is seen between gender differences and Item 13 (I read books in English out of school) ($t = -2.074$, $p < .05$). The table shows that female learners attribute success to reading books in English ($\bar{X} = 3.15$) more than male learners ($\bar{X} = 2.69$). Moreover, the significance ($t = -2.836$, $p < .05$) shows that there is an important difference between gender factor and Item 14 (I get help from my teacher or friends if necessary). In other words, female learners ascribe their success to getting help from others if necessary

($\bar{X}=4.04$) more than male learners do ($\bar{X}=3.50$). The only item that is referred more frequently by male learners is Item 7 (Learning English is easy) and the significance ($t = 2.454, p < .05$) indicates a statistically significant difference between males ($\bar{X}=3.25$) and females ($\bar{X}=2.78$).

The results of the Independent Samples t-tests for gender differences reveal that female learners tend 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) are all internal, unstable and controllable attributions, and these attributions are all related to making effort to attain success in language learning process. Thus, it is also feasible to claim that females tend to attribute their perceived success to effort more frequently than male learners do. Although Item 14 (I get help from my teacher or friends if necessary) is an external attribution, it is still unstable and controllable by the learner. In other words, female learners believe that their success in English is based on their effort and they can control their performance. Hence, female learners hold themselves responsible for their success. On the other hand, according to the results, Item 7 (Learning English is easy) which is an external, stable and uncontrollable cause is attributed more frequently by male learners. These findings are in agreement with the results of the studies of Power and Wagner (1984), Lightbody et. al. (1996), Georgiou (1999), Peacock (2009). 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 (Csizér and Dörnyei, 2005; Bacon and Finneman, 1992; Gardner and Lambert, 1972). Moreover, studying a foreign language is traditionally perceived as feminine or a girly subject (Birenbaum & Kraemer, 1995).

Table 4.6 Independent Samples t-tests results of gender differences in learners' achievement attributions to failure

Item	Gender	N	Mean	SD	t	df.	f	Sig.
3	Male	52	2.67	1.200	2.000	101	.787	.048
	Female	52	2.22	1.119				
9	Male	52	2.52	1.111	2.178	98	3.028	.032
	Female	52	2.06	.998				
11	Male	52	3.31	1.164	2.680	102	2.726	.009
	Female	52	2.75	.947				
17	Male	52	2.92	1.234	-.945	102	1.313	.042
	Female	52	3.45	1.361				

According to Table 4.6, there is a significant difference between males and females in terms of Item 3 (I do not like learning English) ($t = 2.000$, $p < .05$) which is internal, stable, uncontrollable, Item 9 (I don't listen to my teacher carefully in class) ($t = 2.178$, $p < .05$) which is internal, unstable and controllable, Item 11 (Classes are boring) ($t = 2.680$, $p < .05$) which is external, unstable and uncontrollable, and Item 17 (I get nervous during exams) ($t = -.945$, $p < .05$) which is internal, stable and uncontrollable. Our data reveal that except Item 17 (I get nervous during exams), male learners attribute 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. 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 have 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 and Pintrich (1998) also yielded into findings that support this claim. According to its finding, 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 is most significant in both success and failure attributions are compared, it is noticed that while female learners are more dominant than males across five items for success, male learners turn out to be more prominent for failure among four items.

Although there are items that depict significant differences between male and female learners, when both genders are taken into account, some similarities are 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 tend to attribute their failure to effort than to attribute their success to effort, and they are both more likely to choose ability attribution for success in learning English than for failure. Table 4.7 depicts the mean values of effort and ability attributions for male and female learners.

Table 4.7. The mean values of effort and ability attributions for male and female learners.

	Effort		Ability	
	Success	Failure	Success	Failure
Male	2.85	3.56	3.57	2.92
Female	3.26	3.44	3.61	2.94

These findings replicate those of the study which examined the differences in attributions for success and failure situations across subject areas carried out by Ryckman and Peckham (1987), and for language art, the same findings were obtained in that study. Ryckman and Peckham (1987:124) emphasized that attributing success to a stable, internal cause and failure to an internal, unstable cause is consistent with a mastery orientation.

4.2.3. The relationship between the achievement attributions of English language learners and their proficiency level

Our third research question is whether there is a significant relationship between the achievement attributions of English language learners and their proficiency level. In order to analyze and compare the relationship between pre-intermediate and intermediate learners' achievement attributions to success and failure, Independent Samples t-tests were carried out. The following table indicates the Independent Samples t-test results of pre-intermediate and intermediate level learners' achievement attributions to success in English.

Table 4.8. Independent Samples t-test results of pre-intermediate and intermediate level learners' achievement attributions to success in English

Item	Proficiency level	N	Mean	SD	t	df.	f	Sig.
3	Pre-int.	45	3.02	1.390	-2.134	117	4.386	.035
	Int.	74	3.51	1.101				
7	Pre-int.	45	2.76	1.004	-2.279	117	.001	.024
	Int.	74	3.20	1.060				
11	Pre-int	45	4.69	.900	3.166	117	2.626	.002
	Int.	74	4.09	1.057				
15	Pre-int	45	4.38	.715	2.305	117	1.512	.023
	int	74	3.97	1.046				

According to the results of Table 4.7, there is 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) ($t= 2.134$, $p< .05$), Item 7 (Learning English is easy) ($t= -2.279$, $p<.05$), Item 11 (I have a successful teacher) ($t= 3.166$, $p<.05$), and Item 15 (I have self confidence in learning English) ($t= 2.305$, $p<.05$). Learners of intermediate level attribute their success to both Item 3 (I have some background education) and Item 7 (Learning English is easy) more than learners of pre-

intermediate level. On the other hand, learners of pre-intermediate level attribute their success to both Item 11 (I have a successful teacher) and Item 15 (I have self confidence in learning English) more than learners of intermediate level.

With regard to the findings, it is probable to claim that due to some background education in English, learners of intermediate level are more likely to view learning English as an easy task. On the other hand, it is possible that learners of pre-intermediate level depend more on their teacher especially in the first term of the academic year when they first start being exposed to English intensively. The findings about the relation between proficiency level of learners and their attributions for success are not compatible with the ones found in the study of Peacock (2010). Peacock investigated whether there is 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, in the present study, the findings suggest the opposite. This difference might be linked to some cultural or situational factors.

The following Table indicates the Independent Samples t-test results of pre-intermediate and intermediate level learners' achievement attributions to failure in English.

Table 4.9. Independent Samples t-test results of pre-intermediate and intermediate level learners' achievement attributions to failure in English

Item	Proficiency level	N	Mean	SD	t	df.	f	Sig.
2	Pre-int.	70	3.96	1.338	5.074	102	.508	.000
	Int.	34	2.56	1.160				
9	Pre-int.	70	2.14	.991	-2.020	98	2.952	.046
	Int.	34	2.59	1.184				
10	Pre-int	70	1.49	1.004	-3.266	102	.465	.001
	Int.	34	2.18	1.029				
11	Pre-int	70	2.77	1.106	-3.648	102	2.113	.000
	int	34	3.56	.860				
16	Pre-int.	70	3.71	1.331	2.040	102	.064	.044
	Int.	34	3.15	1.329				

The results in Table 4.9 display that there is a significant difference between pre-intermediate and intermediate level of learners' achievement attributions to failure in terms of Item 2 (I don't have enough background education) ($t= 5.074$, $p<.05$), Item 9 (I don't listen to my teacher carefully in class) ($t= -2.020$, $p<.05$), Item 10 (My teacher is not successful) ($t= -3.266$, $p<.05$), Item 11 (Classes are boring) ($t= -3.648$, $p<.05$) and Item 16 (One-year prep class education is not enough to learn English) ($t= . 2.040$, $p<.05$). According to the findings, out of five Items, learners of pre-intermediate level ascribed their failure to both Item 2 (I don't have enough background education) and Item 16 (One-year prep class education is not enough to learn English) more than learners of intermediate level. Since pre-intermediate learners lack 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 in accordance with the one obtained with less proficient students in the study conducted by Peacock

(2010). In Peacock's study, it was discovered that less proficient learners tend to attribute failure to other factors outside their control.

4.2.4. The relationship between the learners' perceived success or failure and the average of their achievement scores

In order to analyze whether there is a significant relationship between learners' perceived success or failure and their achievement scores in the midterm exams, first of all, the average of learners' three midterm scores was calculated. Then, the achievement levels of the learners were divided into three categories as successful (69.50-100), average (49.50- 69.49) and unsuccessful (0-49.49).

As it can be seen in Table 4.10, among the learners perceiving themselves successful 42.9% is in the successful group, 53.8% of the learners is in the average group, and 3.4% of the learners falls into the unsuccessful group. It is noteworthy to state that although almost 54% of the successful learners in learning English has not achieved real success yet, these learners seem to be potential candidates to be successful.

Table 4.10. The distribution of successful learners across three categories

	Frequency	Percent
Unsuccessful	4	3,4
Average	64	53,8
Successful	51	42,9
Total	119	100,0

Having considered that the questionnaire was administered to these learners at the end of the fall term, it can be suggested that these learners are still in the process of learning and are in progress. It is probable that some of them will have become successful at the end of the spring term. In addition, 42.9% of the learners is successful and naturally, they perceive themselves successful. However, it is remarkable that even though 3.4% of the learners is indeed unsuccessful, they perceive themselves

successful. Maybe, although they have low marks in the midterm exams, they are very optimistic about their success in learning English.

On the other hand, when we analyze the situation of the learners perceiving themselves unsuccessful, 56.7% of the learners is in the average group, 29.8% is in the unsuccessful group, and 10.6% of the learners falls into the successful group (see Table 4.11).

Table 4.11. The distribution of unsuccessful learners across three categories

	Frequency	Percent
Unsuccessful	31	29,8
Average	59	56,7
Successful	11	10,6
Total	101	97,1

The results reveal that 56.7% of the learners are successful in learning English at average level, however, they still perceive themselves as unsuccessful learners. This may be linked to some individual factors such as previous failure in their English courses, lack of self-confidence, not having been adapted to prep-school program, or not having developed four language skills adequately in line with their proficiency levels yet. Additionally, 29.8% of the learners is unsuccessful in terms of their achievement scores, and naturally, they perceive themselves unsuccessful. Furthermore, it is noticeable that even though 10.6% of the learners is actually successful, they still perceive themselves unsuccessful. This may be because they are perfectionist as a person, or they may not have developed their language skills such as listening, speaking, reading and writing properly yet. Moreover, some students may consider themselves unsuccessful when they are unable to communicate in English.

In order to find out whether there is a significant relationship between proficiency level of learners and their average achievement scores, independent sample t-tests were carried out. The following table presents independent sample t-test result of

the proficiency level of the learners and their average of achievement scores in the midterm exams.

Table 4.12. Independent sample t-test result for the learners perceiving themselves successful in terms of their proficiency level and the average of their achievement scores

	Proficiency level	N	Mean	SD	t	df.	Sig.
Midterm Average	Pre-int.	45	66,9037	8,09621	-.869	117	.387
	Int.	74	68,2928	8,66420			

According to the independent sample t-test result, there is no significant difference between the proficiency level of learners perceiving themselves successful and the average of their achievement scores ($t = -.869, p > .05$) (see Table 4.12). The data reveal that both groups are homogeneous in terms of their proficiency level and the average of achievement scores.

On the other hand, there is a significant difference between the proficiency level of learners perceiving themselves unsuccessful and the average of their achievement scores ($t = -6.083, p < .05$) (see Table 4.13).

Table 4.13. Independent Sample t-test result for the learners perceiving themselves unsuccessful in terms of their proficiency level and the average of their achievement scores

	Proficiency level	N	Mean	SD	t	df.	Sig.
Midterm Average	Pre-int.	68	52,0588	10,40011	-6.083	99	.000
	Int.	33	64,5960	8,09182			

It means that there is more discrepancy between the average of achievement scores of intermediate learners who perceives themselves unsuccessful and their proficiency level compared to pre-intermediate learners perceiving themselves unsuccessful. In other words, there is a parallelism between real success of pre-intermediate learners with their proficiency level.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

5.1. INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents a brief summary of the study with its aims and findings. Then, the implications of the study are discussed. Finally, a set of suggestions have been presented for further research.

5.2. OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY

This study aimed to identify the factors to which prep-class learners studying at School of Foreign Languages, Pamukkale University attribute their perceived success or failure in learning English. Another aim of this study is to investigate whether there is a significant relationship between achievement attributions of learners and their gender and level of language proficiency. Lastly, whether there is a significant relationship between learners' perception of success for themselves as language learners and their achievement scores in the midterm exams is analyzed. Therefore, the research was designed as a descriptive study consisting of both quantitative and qualitative research instruments. As a quantitative instrument, a questionnaire based on a 5-point Likert scale was constructed in order to be able to make generalizations about the findings and administered to 223 pre-class learners. In this way, attributional categories were let to emerge from the data, and this allowed the formulation of items that would be included in the questionnaire. As a qualitative research instruments, a semi-structured interview technique is used in order to gain a deeper understanding of learners' achievement attributions for their success or failure.

In the analysis of the data, the data collected from the achievement attributions scale were analyzed by using descriptive statistics and independent samples t-test on SPSS program. In addition, the data collected from the interview were analyzed and used to back up and enrich the findings of the qualitative data.

The way in which learners explain their success or failure is so crucial because it has a profound impact on their subsequent actions, emotional reactions, and motivation (Williams, Burden, Poulet, and Maun, 2004). For this reason, learners' attributions were also examined and interpreted in the light of Weiner's (1986) three-dimensional taxonomy of achievement attributions (internal/ external, stable/ unstable, controllable/ uncontrollable).

Moreover, in language classes, it is not unusual to find out that many language learners find themselves in situations in which they experience repeated failure, and in turn they lose their motivation to learn. According to Weiner's attribution theory, attributing results to internal and controllable factors (effort) gives people a feeling of control and stimulates them to try hard and succeed, while attributing them to uncontrollable factors discourages them totally, which results in less effort for future tasks. Some of these learners may even experience learned helplessness because they start to believe that the causes underlying their failure are internal, stable, and uncontrollable. This is another reason why the present study on learners' achievement attributions was conducted. Having equipped with such knowledge, it is anticipated that teachers will understand EFL learners and learning process better and interfere to avoid undesirable attributions.

The literature review pointed out that the causes individuals attribute to events have an impact on the way they cognitively, affectively, and behaviorally respond on future occasions, and, therefore attributions have been acknowledged by a number of researchers as one of the most significant factors affecting learners' persistence, expectancy of future success, motivation, and in return, academic achievement (Bandura, 1977; Pintrich & Schunk, 1996; Brophy, 1998; Weiner, 1985, 2000; Dörnyei, 2001). In addition, it is emphasized that many researchers (Weiner, 1986, 1994; Schell, Bruning, & Colvin; 1995) underlined the significance of understanding learner attributions in language learning and teaching. Moreover, in the literature review section, the history of how attribution theory developed from social psychology, its relation to and significance in educational context, main attributions in attribution theory and causal dimensionality pattern, adaptive/ maladaptive attributions and attribution retraining, the relation between some individual factors such as gender, age,

motivation, self-efficacy, culture and attributions, and finally, studies on attribution research on EFL/ESL context were explained in detail.

The results of the study revealed that having a successful teacher which is an external, uncontrollable attribution is the main attribution to which learners perceiving themselves successful ascribed their success most. However, the important point is that internal and uncontrollable attributions such as having self confidence, enjoying learning English and being interested in English are referred at high level by the learners following the main attribution. The results indicate that these learners mostly have adaptive attributions. It seems that they have high self-efficacy level and believe in their ability. Moreover, 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. On the other hand, 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.

As to 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 with reasonable amount of effort, it is possible to get the desired outcome.

In addition, the relationship between attributions and factors such as gender and proficiency level in terms of items, and the relationship between learners' perceived success and achievement scores were examined in detail. The results display that 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 boring classes more than female learners. The dominance of male learners on these attributions to explain their failure might be interpreted in that female learners have more positive attitudes toward language learning (Gardner, 1985; Wright, 1999).

With respect to proficiency level of learners, it was concluded that learners of intermediate level tended to attribute their success to external factors such as having background education and the easiness of learning English more than learners of pre-intermediate level. 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 learners of intermediate level. In the case of failure, learners of pre-intermediate level ascribed their failure to not having enough background education and short education program to learn English more than learners of intermediate level.

When the relationship between the learners' perceived success and the average of their achievement scores was examined, it was found out that among learners, although almost 54% of them have not achieved real success totally yet, they still perceive themselves successful in learning English. Besides, it was concluded that 42.9% of the learners' perception of success for themselves as language learners is parallel with the average of their achievement scores. Thus, these learners have attained real success in the learning English process. Concerning the learners who perceive themselves unsuccessful, the results revealed that 56.7% of the learners are successful in

learning English at average level, however, they still perceive themselves as unsuccessful learners. It is also noticeable that even though 10.6% of the learners is actually successful, they still perceive themselves unsuccessful. This may be linked to different interpretations of success by learners themselves or some individual factors such as previous failure in their English courses, lack of self-confidence etc.

The results of the study also seem to indicate that both finding out exact reasons lying behind perceived success or failure and using “dimensions” approach provides more information about students’ attributions for their perceived success and failure in their language class. Merely assessing learners’ attributions using the dimension scale (locus of control, stability and controllability) would not have explained their beliefs for success and failure as accurately or comprehensively as the actual reasons for the outcome.

5.3. IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY

There are many implications of this study that are related to both learners and teachers. The way in which learners explain their academic performance is considered crucial because there is a close relationship between the causes to which learners attribute their successes or failures and their subsequent feelings, expectations and behaviours. Thus, the awareness of to what factors learners attribute their success or failure will enable them both to evaluate their present performance and gain an understanding of their future performance. Thus, learners will be able to comprehend cognitive reasons underlying their achievement and their affective reactions to those outcomes. This is because as Weiner (1985) emphasized, each causal dimension is considered to be linked to particular affective states. Hence, if learners gain insight about their own attributions for success or failure, and how they influence their future expectations and strivings, they may create new attitudes concerning achievement results and learn to take responsibility for the outcomes.

As to English teachers, gaining a perspective about how learners view second language learning and their performance outcomes will provide them with valuable information about the profile of learners’ perceptions. As (Weiner, 1979, 1984) 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. 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. To achieve this, teachers should 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 should be able to make learners 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 this respect, the teacher's role is so crucial that the teacher-dependent learners will be cared and modeled with communicative tasks and activities towards being independent learners. In this process, the understanding, appreciation, encouragement and constructive feedback of teachers are vitally important factors.

Moreover, 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) has 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 should be taught to ascribe all language learning failure to a lack of effort not to a lack of ability. By doing so, teachers could 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: 120-1) 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 suggests giving effort feedback 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.

5.4. SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

This study described the achievement attributions of English language learners with regard to attribution theory and underlined the importance of attributional dimensions in terms of subsequent motivation, actions and future expectations. Further research may investigate attributions on the basis of language skills such as speaking, reading, writing, and listening.

Moreover, further research may look into the effect of achievement attributions on learners' achievement outcomes with longitudinal studies. Additionally, further research may involve attribution retraining programs in which learners' maladaptive attributions related to their success or failure are modified through efficient feedback and techniques. Finally, this study could be replicated within wider context with more participants.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1

ACHIEVEMENT ATTRIBUTION QUESTIONNAIRE

Dear Participants,

This questionnaire is designed as a part of the master dissertation at English Language Teaching department to determine the attributions of students related to their success or failure in learning English process. Your answers will be used only for academic purposes and they will be kept confidential. Please read the statements carefully and mark the most suitable choice for you with (X). If you have any questions about the study, please contact the following e-mail address: alevozk@hotmail.com

Thank you for your participation.

PART- 1

Please answer the questions

Personal Information

School Number:

Gender: Male () Female ()

Class: Pre-intermediate () Intermediate ()

Midterm results: 1. midterm: 2. midterm: 3.
midterm:

High School:

 Science High School () Anatolian High School ()

 Super High School () State High School () Others:

Do you perceive yourself successful in learning English?

(Please choose one of the options below)

Yes () No ()

IF YOU HAVE CHOSEN “YES”, PLEASE CONTINUE PART-2, IF YOU HAVE CHOSEN “NO”, PLEASE CONTINUE PART-3.

PART- 2

***** **If you have chosen “YES”, please answer the questionnaire below ONLY.**

I' m successful in learning English because ...	Completely disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Completely Agree
1. I study enough					
2. I know how to study					
3. I have some background education					
4. I enjoy learning English					
5. I'm interested in English					
6. I have ability in learning English					
7. Learning English is easy					
8. I have rich source of vocabulary					
9. I'm lucky in exams					
10. I listen to the teacher carefully in class					
11. I have a successful teacher					
12. I watch movies in English out of school					
13. I read books in English out of school					
14. I get help from my teacher or friends if necessary					
15. I have self confidence in learning English					
Others:					
,					

PART-3

***** If you have chosen “NO”, please answer the questionnaire below ONLY.

I' m unsuccessful in learning English because ...	Completely disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Completely Agree
1. I don't study enough					
2. I don't have enough background education					
3. I do not like learning English					
4. Learning English is difficult					
5. I do not want to learn English					
6. Exams are difficult for me					
7. I don't have ability to learn English					
8. I don't attend classes regularly					
9. I don't listen to my teacher carefully in class					
10. My teacher is not successful					
11. Classes are boring					
12. I don't know how to study					
13. I'm unlucky in exams					
14. Social activities take much of my time (friends, clubs, etc.)					
15. I don't watch movies or read books in English enough).					
16. One-year prep class education is not enough to learn English					
17. I get nervous during exams					
18. I'm anxious about failing the prep class					
19. I have some private problems (family, money, health, etc.)					
20. I don't have enough confidence in learning English					
21. I have difficulty in understanding and following the topics in classes					
22. I don't have enough vocabulary					
Others:					

APPENDIX 2
INTERVIEW QUESTIONS CHECKLIST

Questions asked to learners perceiving themselves successful in learning English process.
<p>1. Do you think your teacher is a successful teacher? Why do you think so?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How does having a successful teacher influence your success?
<p>1. Do you enjoy learning English? In what aspects does enjoying English contribute to your success?</p>
<p>2. Are you interested in English? What makes you interested in English?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How does being interested in English affect your success?
<p>3. Do you have confidence in yourself in learning English? What is the difference between a student who has confidence in himself and who lacks confidence in himself in learning English?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How does having self confidence influence your success?
<p>5. Do you think that rich vocabulary is necessary to achieve success in English?</p>
<p>6. Do you think that luck is an important factor to achieve success in English?</p>
<p>7. Do you think that reading English books is necessary to be successful in English? If so, in what aspects does it contribute to your success?</p>
Questions asked to learners perceiving themselves unsuccessful in learning English process.
<p>1. Do you have enough vocabulary of English? How does lack of enough vocabulary influence your success in English?</p>
<p>2. Do you watch movies in English or read books in English enough?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Why don't you watch movies in English or read books in English? • Do you think it contributes to one's success?
<p>3. Are you anxious about failing the prep class? How does being anxious affect your success in English?</p>
<p>4. Are you willing to learn English?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If yes, how does willingness to learn English affect your success? • If no, although you want to learn English, why do you think you are unsuccessful?

5. Do you think your teacher is successful?

- If yes, what makes a teacher successful?
- If no, why do you think so? and Is your teacher a reason for your failure?

6. Do you have any private problems?

- If yes, to what extent does having private problems influence your success?

APPENDIX 3

The frequencies and percentages of achievement attributions of successful learners

		Completely Agree		Agree		Neutral		Disagree		Completely Disagree	
		frequency	%	frequency	%	frequency	%	frequency	%	frequency	%
1	I study enough	5	4.2	36	30.3	42	35.3	30	25.2	6	5.0
2	I know how to study	11	9.2	50	42.0	34	28.6	15	12.6	8	6.7
3	I have some background education	20	16.8	44	37.0	22	18.5	21	17.6	12	10.1
4	I enjoy learning English	37	31.1	57	47.9	17	14.3	5	4.2	2	1.7
5	I'm interested in English	35	29.4	58	48.7	19	16.0	5	4.2	2	1.7
6	I have ability in learning English	13	10.9	60	50.4	32	26.9	12	10.1	2	1.7
7	Learning English is easy	10	8.9	28	23.5	46	38.7	24	20.2	10	8.4
8	I have rich source of vocabulary	4	3.4	23	19.3	52	43.7	34	28.6	5	4.2
9	I'm lucky in exams	3	2.5	24	20.2	25	21.0	45	37.8	22	18.5
10	I listen to the teacher carefully in class	28	23.5	60	50.4	21	17.6	10	8.4	0	0
11	I have a successful teacher	68	57.1	32	26.9	9	7.6	2	1.7	6	5.0
12	I watch movies in English out of school	32	26.9	41	34.5	12	10.1	26	21.8	7	5.9
13	I read books in English out of school	9	7.6	36	30.3	26	21.8	30	25.2	18	15.1
14	I get help from my teacher or friends if necessary	27	22.2	56	47.1	18	15.1	12	10.1	5	4.2
15	I have self confidence in learning English	50	42.0	43	36.1	17	14.3	6	5.0	2	1.7

APPENDIX 4

The frequencies and percentages of achievement attributions of unsuccessful learners

I am unsuccessful in learning English because		Completely Agree		Agree		Neutral		Disagree		Completely Disagree	
		frequency	%	frequency	%	frequency	%	frequency	%	frequency	%
1	I don't study enough	22	21.2	37	35.6	22	21.2	17	16.3	6	5.8
2	I don't have enough background education	38	36.5	23	22.1	9	8.7	21	20.2	13	12.5
3	I do not like learning English	8	7.7	10	9.6	26	25.0	35	33.7	24	23.1
4	Learning English is difficult	21	20.2	33	31.7	22	21.2	18	17.3	9	8.7
5	I do not want to learn English	10	9.6	6	5.8	13	12.5	38	36.5	36	34.6
6	Exams are difficult for me	37	35.6	28	26.9	24	23.1	9	8.7	6	5.8
7	I don't have ability to learn English	12	11.5	17	16.3	35	33.7	30	28.8	9	8.7
8	I don't attend classes regularly	11	10.6	20	19.2	15	14.4	34	32.7	22	21.2
9	I don't listen to my teacher carefully in class	5	4.8	8	7.7	22	21.2	41	39.4	24	23.1
10	My teacher is not successful	4	3.8	3	2.9	14	13.5	21	20.2	62	59.6
11	Classes are boring	8	7.7	29	27.9	35	33.7	22	21.2	10	9.6
12	I don't know how to study	24	23.1	27	26.0	33	31.7	10	9.6	9	8.7
13	I'm unlucky in exams	23	22.1	32	30.8	24	23.1	14	13.5	8	7.7
14	Social activities take much of my time (friends, clubs, etc.)	9	8.7	24	23.1	17	16.3	36	34.6	18	17.3
15	I don't watch movies or read books in English (enough).	15	14.4	54	51.9	15	14.4	12	11.5	8	7.7
16	One-year prep class education is not enough to learn English	31	29.8	31	29.8	16	15.4	14	13.5	12	11.5
17	I get nervous during exams	21	20.2	26	25.0	18	17.3	27	26.0	11	10.6
18	I'm anxious about failing the prep class	54	51.9	17	16.3	8	7.7	9	8.7	16	15.4
19	I have some private problems (family, money)	7	6.7	14	13.5	9	8.7	40	38.5	34	32.7
20	I don't have enough confidence in learning English	10	9.6	12	11.5	28	26.9	29	27.9	25	24.0
21	I have difficulty in understanding and following the topics in classes	9	8.7	19	18.3	23	22.1	41	39.4	12	11.5
22	I don't have enough vocabulary	41	39.4	37	35.6	13	12.5	7	6.7	6	5.8

APPENDIX 5
OPEN-ENDED QUESTIONNAIRE

Female Male

1. Do you like learning English?

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2. Do you find yourself successful or unsuccessful in learning English, why or why not?

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3. Think about the most successful student in English in the class, what makes him/her successful?

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4. Think about the least successful student in English in the class, what makes him/her unsuccessful?

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4. What do you have to do to be successful in learning English?

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