World Applied Sciences Journal 32 (3): 386-391, 2014
ISSN 1818-4952

DOI: 10.5829/idosi.wasj.2014.32.03.1010

Relationship Between Causal Attributions and Self-Esteem*

[1]Muhammad Faisal Farid, [2]Mumtaz Akhtar and [3]Sabeen Qamar

[1]Institute of Education & Research, University of the Punjab, Lahore, Pakistan
[2]IER, University of the Punjab, Lahore, Pakistan
[3]The City School, Ravi Campus, Lahore, Pakistan

Abstract: Causal attributions of students were measured in university population of Pakistan. Taxonomy of eight causal attributions (four internal and four external attributions) was provided to students to explain their causal attributions beliefs of success and failure. The sample of the study comprised of 161 students enrolled in four different classes with subjects of Language Development & Children Literature, Teaching of English & Teaching of Math. The students strongly endorsed all causes as possible causes of their success. Similar patterns of failure/success attributions were found in students studying in different classes. Self-esteem was measured through translated version of Rosenberg self-esteem scale with a range of 0-50. The range of self-esteem level of male students was (33-42) and that of female students was (24-49). Relationship was found in failure/success attributions and self-esteem.

Key words: Causal attributions · Internal · External · Self-esteem · Pakistan

INTRODUCTION

Attribution theory [1], [2], [3], [4] describes humans busy in constructing explanations for the events taking place in their domain of interest. These explanations are behavior dependent. The wide range of internal explanations including ability & effort are used to attribute successful outcomes in one's own life; while explaining failure outcomes external attributes like luck or task difficulty are quoted [5], [4], [6].

Attribution theory is a thorough research paradigm in almost all settings of human life but when it comes to education, it becomes more critical where success and failure are two possible outcomes in life of a student [5], [4]. These causal beliefs of students about success and failure have very important effects on students' motivation, academic strivings and achievements. There are students who are engaged in persistent efforts to achieve success even in worst of times. On the other hand, there are individuals who give up quickly on similar tasks even when they have more ability to perform better and more suitable environment available to them. Over the years, researchers have conducted a variety of research studies to answer these and similar questions and are still in pursuit to respond the emerging quires in achievement motivation of the students [7].

Motivation is a key concept in students' academic life. With the passage of time, when learner grows in years physically and academically in school days, motivational level changes within the child himself and in his environment like in instructional environment. These two have a direct influence on life of a learner throughout his academic life. Children's motivation changes throughout school years. The levels of motivation changes as children mature. There is a key role of home and school environment that play its due part in motivation as it is not a characteristics of an individual. Rather it is a combination of an individual encountering home and school environment where he grows [7].

With the passage of time spent in school, many children's academic motivation decreases due to continuous changes taking place both in them and in the school environment in which they are growing. Some students enjoy the period of change but for others it

Corresponding Author: Muhammad Faisal Farid, Institute of Education & Research, University of the Punjab, Lahore, Pakistan.

becomes problematic. It may become a major cause in later days when students do not join the higher classes and drop-out rate increases. According to Wigfield & Eccles (2002), when children grow older, their beliefs, values and choices are related to their performances and in this way motivation is linked closely with behavior. As children grow older they are evaluated by their parents, peers and teachers and they are at a better position to understand and evaluate this feedback.

When they are in competitive situation, like in academics they are continuously judged by people around them. With the advent of some success or failure event, causal search begins and students give their behavioral reaction [8]. The interpersonal and intrapersonal theories of attributions given by [8] elaborate the process of instigating causal attribution. The behavioral reaction that comes after attribution of any success/failure event is very important as it leads to the future expectations and motivation.

Emotional reactions give birth to human behavior that is associated with self-esteem. When students provide causal attributions to failure events they try to maintain their esteem levels. Self-esteem is defined as an overall evaluation of oneself. Human children have same needs at the time of birth and they grow in diverse direction with the passage of time. Love and safety needs are prime needs of a newly born baby and it grows throughout his life span [9].

The earlier study about causal attributions in Pakistan [5] revealed that internal attributions are quoted when success attributions are described and external attributes are cited in case of failure attributions. Similarly [9] studied self-esteem level of secondary school students and found gender difference in self-esteem level of the students. Male students showed higher self-esteem level than female students. Further, it was found that urban students had higher self-esteem level than their rural counter parts. The same study also described that students who were studying science subjects had higher self-esteem level than those students who were enrolled in humanities (arts) subjects.

The present study was designed to measure the causal attributions and self-esteem level of university population in Pakistan. Another purpose of the study at hand was to find out relationship, if any, between causal attributions of success and failure and self-esteem level of the students enrolled in various subjects at university level.

Table 1: Class Wise Strength of the Students Who Responded To the Questionnaires

Class	Respondents
MA(ECE_SS)	31
MA(ECE_M)	34
B.Ed (SS)	51
B.Ed (M)	45
Total	161

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Sample: The sample of the study comprised of 161 students enrolled in four different classes of Institute of Education & Research, University of the Punjab, Lahore with subjects of Language Development & Children Literature, Teaching of English & Teaching of Math. Table 1 describes the detail of the sample. Sample size was 161. There were only 18 male students enrolled in the four classes whereas female students were 143.

Instruments: Two instruments were used in the study to collect data from the students. *Causal Attributions Beliefs Scale* (*CABS*) was developed by the researcher after an in-depth review of literature. The initial draft was sent to experts in the area of attribution research (Weiner, Russell and Forsyth) for their expert opinion. It was modified according to their suggestions and later on translated into the national language of Pakistan. Its reliability was measured through pilot study and then was administered at secondary school population. Same instrument was used in the university population to collect causal attributions of the students.

Similarly to measure self-esteem level of the students, *Rosenberg Self Esteem Scale (RSES)* revised edition, developed by [10] was used. Farid & Akhtar (2013a, b) already used it in another study for secondary school population (for detail about instrumentation, [5, 9].

RESULTS

Causal Attribution Beliefs Scale was used to measure causal attributions of students. Table 2 describes students' failure attributions in Children Literature & Mathematics.

Students of MA ECE-SS ranked their failure attributions in Children Literature as most to least as effort, task difficulty, strategy, teacher influence, ability, interest, luck and parent influence.

Table 2: Mean Scores of Failure Attributions in Children Literature & Mathematics

Failure Scale	MAECE-SS (31)		MAECE-M(34)		B.Ed-SS (51)		B.Ed-M(45)	
Attributions	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
Ability	2.54	1.45	2.29	0.97	2.29	1.28	2.08	1.08
Effort	3.54	1.15	3.29	1.05	3.54	1.22	3.04	1.24
Strategy	3.22	1.14	3.55	1.02	3.49	1.17	2.88	1.22
Interest	2.51	1.33	2.85	1.25	3.17	1.22	2.84	1.62
Luck	2.35	1.22	2.32	1.12	2.66	1.05	2.44	1.25
Task difficulty	3.25	1.56	3.61	1.30	3.86	1.09	2.91	1.14
Parent influence	1.93	1.34	1.85	1.13	2.58	1.32	2.06	1.05
Teacher influence	3.09	1.53	2.82	1.38	3.54	1.23	3.20	1.19
Internal	11.81		11.98		12.49		10.84	
External	10.62		10.6		12.64		10.61	

Table 3: Mean Scores of Failure Attributions in Language Development & English

Failure Scale	MAECE-SS (31)		MAECE-M(34)		B.Ed-SS (51)		B.Ed-M(45)	
Attributions	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
Ability	2.22	1.11	2.55	0.99	2.74	1.41	2.06	1.09
Effort	3.25	1.31	3.02	1.19	3.54	1.11	3.06	1.35
Strategy	3.25	1.21	3.70	0.79	3.15	1.40	2.95	1.16
Interest	2.87	1.25	2.35	1.04	2.94	1.40	2.28	1.35
Luck	2.22	1.23	2.26	0.99	2.45	1.34	2.46	1.30
Task difficulty	3.51	1.52	3.38	1.07	3.50	1.13	3.11	1.11
Parent influence	2.29	1.39	1.94	1.01	2.70	1.41	1.97	0.98
Teacher influence	5.45	12.80	2.76	1.32	2.86	1.53	2.64	1.35
Internal	11.59		11.62		12.37		10.35	
External	13.47		10.34		11.51		10.18	

Students of MA ECE-M ranked their failure attributions in Children Literature as most to least as task difficulty, strategy, effort, interest, teacher influence, luck, ability and parent influence.

Students of B. Ed-SS ranked their failure attributions in teaching of mathematics as most to least as task difficulty, teacher influence, effort, strategy, interest, luck, parent influence and ability.

Students of B. Ed-M ranked their failure attributions in teaching of mathematics as most to least as teacher influence, effort, task difficulty, strategy, interest, luck, ability and parent influence.

The table further describes that students at master level were more inclined to the internal causes of failure than the external causes of failure. While students of B. Ed (SS) quoted external causes of their failure.

Table 3 explains failure attributions of the students in Language Development and English. The students of MA (SS) quoted external attributions while the remaining three classes quoted internal attributions as causes of their failure.

Students of MA ECE-SS ranked their failure attributions in Language Development as most to least as teacher influence, task difficulty, strategy, effort, interest, parent influence, luck and ability.

Students of MA ECE-M ranked their failure attributions in Language Development as most to least as strategy, task difficulty, effort, teacher influence, ability, interest, luck and parent influence.

Students of B. Ed-SS ranked their failure attributions in English as most to least as effort, task difficulty, strategy, interest, teacher influence, ability, parent influence and luck.

Students of B. Ed-M ranked their failure attributions in English as most to least as task difficulty, effort, strategy, teacher influence, luck, interest, ability and parent influence.

Table 4 describes the success attributions of the students. Students of MA (SS), B. Ed (SS) and B. Ed (M) describes internal attributions for their success whereas, students of MA (M) quoted external success attributions.

Students of MA ECE-SS ranked their success attributions in Children Literature as most to least as ability, effort, strategy, teacher influence, parent influence, interest, luck and task difficulty.

Students of MA ECE-M ranked their success attributions in Children Literature as most to least as parent influence, teacher influence, effort, strategy, luck, ability, task difficulty and interest.

Table 4: Mean Scores of Success Attributions in Children Literature &Mathematics

Success Scale	MAECE-SS (31)		MAECE-M(34)		B.Ed-SS (51)		B.Ed-M(45)	
Attributions	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
Ability	4.35	0.83	3.82	0.75	4.00	0.87	3.88	0.85
Effort	4.32	0.70	4.05	0.60	4.76	0.42	4.22	0.79
Strategy	4.00	0.93	4.00	0.98	4.23	0.78	4.20	0.78
Interest	3.90	1.04	3.61	0.98	4.25	0.95	3.64	1.43
Luck	3.61	1.33	3.91	1.11	4.00	1.11	3.44	1.30
Task difficulty	3.58	1.31	3.79	1.12	4.09	1.01	3.35	1.13
Parent influence	3.96	1.40	4.17	1.08	4.45	0.78	3.66	1.04
Teacher influence	3.96	1.19	4.14	0.78	4.64	0.68	4.13	1.14
Internal	16.57		15.48		17.24		15.94	
External	15.11		16.01		17.18		14.58	

Table 5: Mean Scores of Failure Attributions in Language Development & English

Success Scale	MAECE-SS (31)		MAECE-M(34)		B.ED-SS (51)		B.ED-M(45)	
Attributions	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
Ability	4.25	1.03	4.02	0.62	4.15	0.90	4.28	0.75
Effort	4.51	0.72	4.20	0.59	4.50	0.75	4.37	0.49
Strategy	3.67	1.01	4.11	0.87	4.35	0.84	4.17	0.64
Interest	4.25	0.92	4.05	0.42	4.27	1.00	4.04	1.16
Luck	3.74	1.12	3.97	0.93	4.01	1.01	3.35	1.17
Task difficulty	3.54	1.38	3.91	0.75	3.90	1.06	3.37	1.13
Parent influence	4.03	1.22	4.23	1.12	4.37	0.87	4.04	1.06
Teacher influence	4.16	0.96	4.32	0.63	4.80	0.44	4.48	0.75
Internal	16.68		16.38		17.27		16.86	
External	15.47		16.43		17.08		15.24	

Students of B. Ed-SS ranked their success attributions in teaching of mathematics as most to least as effort, teacher influence, parent influence, interest, strategy, task difficulty, luck and ability.

Students of B. Ed-M ranked their success attributions in teaching of mathematics as most to least as effort, strategy, teacher influence, ability, parent influence, interest, luck and task difficulty.

Table 5 describes success attributions of students in Language development and English. Students of MA (SS), B. Ed (SS) and B. Ed (M) quoted internal success attributions while students of MA (M) quoted external success attributions.

Students of MA ECE-SS ranked their success attributions in Language Development as most to least as effort, interest, ability, teacher influence, parent influence, luck, strategy and task difficulty.

Students of MA ECE-M ranked their success attributions in Language Development as most to least as teacher influence, parent influence, effort, strategy, interest, ability, luck and task difficulty.

Students of B. Ed-SS ranked their success attributions in English as most to least as teacher influence, effort, parent influence, strategy, interest, ability, luck and task difficulty.

Students of B. Ed-M ranked their success attributions in English as most to least as teacher influence, effort, ability, strategy, parent influence, interest, task difficulty and luck.

Self-esteem was measured through translated version of 5-point rating Rosenberg self-esteem scale with a range of 0-50. The range of self-esteem level of male students was (33-42) and that of female students was (24-49).

Table 6 describes self-esteem level of the male and female students. The table shows that there is no significant difference between the self-esteem level of male and female students.

Table 7 describes the relationship between causal attribution beliefs of success and failure and self-esteem of the students, computed through Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient.

The guidelines suggested by [11] to interpret the value of "r" are as follows:

Small, r = .10 to .29, or -.10 to -.29
Moderate r = .30 to .49, or -.30 to -.49,
High r = .50 to 1, or -.50 to -1.

Remember the negative sign only refers to the direction of the relationship, not the strength.

Table 6: Self-Esteem Level of Male & Female Students

Gender	N	M	SD	df	t	p
Male	18	37.55	2.87	159	-0.09	0.928
Female	143	37.48	5.26			

p<0.05

Table 7: Correlations between Causal Attribution Beliefs and Self-esteem

Attributions	Ability	Effort	Strategy	Interest	Luck	Task Difficulty	Parent's influence	Teacher's influence
Failure in CL & Math	-.214**	-.011	.068	-.180*	-.239**	-.052	.014	-.014
Failure in LD & Eng	-.182*	.114	.139	-.036	-.150	.103	-.046	.197*
Success in CL & Math	.218**	.202*	.119	.122	.011	-.059	.006	.193*
Success in LD & Eng	.207**	.235**	.072	.075	.107	.017	.213**	.085

**p<0.01, *p <0.05

In Table 7, the correlation coefficient showed that relationship between failure attributions in CL & Math and self-esteem existed in only two attributions out of eight, i.e. ability ($r = -.214^{**}$, $p < .01$), luck ($r = -.239^{**}$, $p < .01$). This relationship is small and indicates negative correlation.

In Table 7, the correlation coefficient showed that relationship between failure attributions in LD & Eng and self-esteem existed in only two attributions out of eight, i.e. ability ($r = -.182^{*}$, $p < .05$), teacher's influence ($r = -.197^{*}$, $p < .05$). This relationship is small and indicates negative correlation.

As far as relationship between success attributions in CL & Math and self-esteem was concerned, it was found that relationship existed in three attributions out of eight, i.e. ability (r = .218**, p < .01), effort ($r = .202^{*}$, $p < .05$) and teacher's influence ($r = .193^{*}$, $p < .05$). This relationship is small and indicates positive correlation.

Similarly, as far as relationship between success attributions in LD & Eng and self-esteem was concerned, it was found that relationship existed in three attributions out of eight, i.e. ability (r = .207**, p < .01), effort ($r = .235^{**}$, $p < .01$) and parent's influence ($r = .213^{**}$, $p < .01$). This relationship is small and indicates positive correlation.

DISCUSSION

Causal attributions are important as they influence future expectations of students and mostly students attribute keeping in mind their esteem levels. There are more than two hundred definitions of self-esteem [12].

In the present study attributions of success and failure were measured in four different classes at university population. The morning and self-support classes of MA and B. Ed (H) were used to collect data. Causal attributions were measured through causal attributions beliefs scale, a scale made by researcher to measure attributions in secondary school population and self-esteem was measured through translated version of Rosenberg self-esteem scale.

The results were encouraging in the sense that all attributions were strongly endorsed by the students as possible causes of success and failure. A similar pattern of failure attributions as well as success attributions was observed among the students of all classes. The students at MA level were more inclined to the internal causes of failure as well as success. The differences in the pattern of students regarding success or failure attributions may be due to the age differences between students of MA level and B. Ed (H). The students of MA were of the third semester while B. Ed (H) students were enrolled in second semester of their program.

There was no significant difference in self-esteem level of male and female students. The relationship between causal attributions and self-esteem was found in some success and failure attributions. The study describes that three failure attributions i.e. ability, luck and teacher's influence have negative correlation with self-esteem. It was also found that success attributions of ability, effort, parent's influence and teacher's influence have positive correlation with self-esteem.

The results of the present study are similar to the earlier study conducted by [5], [9] at secondary population in Pakistan. Similar patterns of success attributions as well as failure attributions were found in that study. There was significant mean difference found in self-esteem level of male and female students which is quite different from the study at hand.

REFERENCES

1. Kelley, H.H., 1973. The process of causal attribution. American Psychologist, 28: 107-128. doi:10.1037/h0034225.

2. Weiner, B., 1976. An attributional approach for educational psychology. Review of Research in Education, 4: 179-209. Doi:10.3102/00917322X004001179.
3. Weiner, B., 1985. An attributional theory of achievement motivation and emotion. Psychological Review, 92(4): 548-573.
4. Vispoel, W.P. and J.R. Austin, 1995. Success and failure in junior high school: a critical incident approach to understanding students' attributional beliefs. American Educational Research Journal, 32(2): 377-412. doi: 10.31022/00028312032002377.
5. Farid, M.F., 2013a. Relationship between causal attribution beliefs of students about success and failure and their self esteem (Un-published doctoral dissertation). Institute of Education & Research, University of the Punjab, Lahore.
6. Ringer, M.M. and R.J. Short, 1991. Consultant attributions revisited: the relationship to teaching experience to consultant attributions. Psychology in the Schools, 28: 353-360.
7. Wigfield, A. and J.S. Eccles, 2002. Development of achievement motivation. California: Academic Press.
8. Weiner, B., 2000. Intrapersonal and interpersonal theories of motivation from an attributional perspective. Educational Psychology Review, 12(1): 1-14.
9. Farid, M.F. and M. Akhtar, 2013b. Self-Esteem of Secondary School Students in Pakistan Middle-East Journal of Scientific Research, 13(2): 207-212. DOI: 10.5829/idosi.mejsr.2013.13.2.2502.
10. Rosenberg, M., 1989. Society and the adolescent self-Image. (Revised ed.). Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press.
11. Cohen, J.W., 1988. Statistical power analysis for the behavioral sciences (2nd ed.). Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
12. London, T.P., 1997. The case against self-esteem: alternative philosophies toward self that would raise the probability of pleasurable and productive livening. Journal of Relational- Emotive & Cognitive-Behavior Therapy, 15(1): 19-29.