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Research Paper

Students' attribution of performance in learning English language: A case of Adama Town high schools in Ethiopia

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Abstract. The study examined students' explanation of performance in learning English language at Adama town government high schools and to see into its pedagogical implications. The perceived reasons for success and failure of ability groups were investigated using cross-sectional study design. Based on the total number of grade nine students in the setting of the study, that is, from the total population of 237, the required sample size for the study with 5% margin of error and 95% confidence level was 147 grade nine students. The data were gathered through testing and questionnaire from randomly selected sample population, that is, 147 grade nine students. Descriptive statistics, principal component analysis, mean, and T-test were carried out to find out the difference between high and low achievers attribution of performance. High achievers and low achievers formed different attribution patterns of the success and failure of their performance in learning the targeted language. High achievers ascribed that their success effort and luck; whereas, low achievers attributed their performance to task simplicity, teacher's predisposition, availability of instructional materials, luck, and teacher's good behavior. From the finding of the study, teacher's awareness of the attributions of students to the success and failure of their performances has received the pedagogical implications.

Keywords: Students' attribution, English language learning (ELL), students' performance, success, failure.

ABBREVIATIONS: ELL, English Language Learning; **ELIP,** English Language Improvement Program; **ESDP,** Education Sector Development Programs; **KMO,** Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin; **MOE,** Ministry of Education; **PCA,** principal component analysis; **PCF,** perceived causes of failure; **PCS,** perceived causes of success.

INTRODUCTION

The English Language has raised importance in Ethiopia since the 1940s (Abera, 1993; Italo, 1999). The need for the language arose from the desire to establish contacts with the outside world and the introduction of modern education to the country (Abera, 1993; Italo, 1999; Leta, 1990). Its status in modern education, English language has played a significant role in the educational system of the country ever since. It has been offered to students as a subject beginning from nursery or elementary to high school and preparatory levels (Ministry of Education, 2010). Also, the English language has been used as a medium of instruction from general secondary school to university level. In recognition of this, the language has received due attention in that more time (five periods per week) is given to the language as is to Mathematics than any other subjects (Mekasha, 2007; The Institute of International Education, 2012).

However, nowadays, there is a common complaint among English language teachers, trainers and other stakeholders that many students, even at the completion of university education, are far from the standard in their English language ability (Haregewoin, 2003; Mekasha,

2007; Tulu, 2013). This inefficiency in linguistic competence and communicative ability in English language. It is a medium of instruction at high school level, is likely to negatively affect students' performance in other subject areas (Haregewoin, 2003; Mekasha, 2007; Tulu, 2013). In line with this, Admassu (2008) found out that "educational quality has been declined in the last three decades …." in the country (Admassu, 2008:5). Thus, it appears that the claim is real and it is worth investigating the factors responsible for this state of affairs.

In order to approach the problem, the Ministry of Education of Ethiopia introduced and implemented Education Sector Development Programs (ESDP I - V) to improve the quality of education in general and English language teaching in particular (Ministry of Education, 1998, 2002, 2005, 2010, 2015). New textbooks and learning materials have also been produced following the syllabus revision (Ministry of Education, 2010). In line with this program, Ministry of Education (2005) launched a new program, that is, English Language Improvement Program (ELIP) and devised the strategy to improve public teachers' level of English competency. Despite all these endeavors, the performance of students in English has been kept on declining (Geberew and Demoze, 2014; Haregewoin, 2003; Mekasha, 2007; Ministry of Education, 2011).

Several challenges could influence teaching and learning environment among which students' lack of motivation and the rapid increase of the student enrollment in the primary schools, secondary schools through university with commensurate challenges in infrastructures and other resources are some (Abera, 1993; Leta, 1990). Stevick (1980) claims that "success depends less on materials, techniques and linguistic analyses, and more on what goes on inside and between the people in the classroom"(p. 4). Stevick's claim is worth noted to explore how learners perceive themselves in foreign language teaching, and learning environment, especially learners' perception on their learning and performance setting as students' personality is one of the factors impeding language learning environment (Weiner, 1985). Fraser (1994) also clearly states the importance of student perception in classroom learning:

> Two lines of research well support the importance of students' perception. Because, research in numerous country has revealed that consistency difference between students' and teachers' perception, a focus on the student rather than teachers' perception is likely to be more productive in an attempt to improve and understand classroom learning. Second, students' perceptions help to explain students' outcomes beyond the effects of students' abilities, instructional methods, and curricular materials (Fraser, 1994:5772).

The author further argued that student perceptions could be thought of as mediators between instruction and their outcomes. Hence, the researcher wants to introduce attribution theory to investigate learners' perception of performance in learning English as a foreign language. In line with this thought, Williams and Burden (1997) also stressed that "…attribution theory is an extremely promising area for research into language learning" (Williams and Burden, 1997:108). Little has been done on attribution theory in foreign language contexts. The majority of the studies investigating causal explanation of success or failure in achievement-related contexts were based on samples of children from developed nations (Boruchovitch, 2004; Burden, 2003; Weiner, 2005; Williams and Burden, 1997, 2004). Indeed, in Africa, a few have been done about attribution theory (Anteneh, 2004; Asonibare, 1986). Asonibare (1986) further claimed that the importance and popularity of attribution among social scientists had got much attention. However, "only a few research studies have been reported in Africa" (Asonibare, 1986:33). In addition, Peacock (2007) depicted that "Learner attributions, perceived causes of success and failure have received little attention in English as a foreign language (EFL) research" (Peacock, 2007:1). Gray (2005) also argued that "Little has been written on the topic of attribution theory and second language acquisition" (Gray, 2005:14). Considering this research gap, in this study, an attempt has been made to look into what goes on inside the learners, that is, how the students (high achievers and low achievers) themselves perceive their performance in learning English language using attribution theory.

Attribution theory

Attribution theory is concerned with people's explanations of behavior, event, or outcome that has occurred. To be precise, people's perception of why an event or behavior happened. Hence, attributions of explanations are made for a wide variety of outcomes, including success or failure, social acceptance or rejection, physical conditions, such as death or disease, or behaviors such as aggressive actions or requests for help (Weiner, 1974, 1985). Weiner's theory of attribution is predominantly explanatory in research on student learning in school settings. A fundamental hypothesis of Weiner's model of attributions is that learners are influenced by environmental influences (e.g., nature of the students' home or school) and by personal challenges (e.g., previous experiences and knowledge). He pointed out, in a learning environment, for instance, when a student fails an examination, particularly if the outcome was

unexpected, learners undertake an attribution search. The students are always trying to know what happened toward their results. In this regard, student's perceived cause of the event is important regardless of any sensible explanation because anything students see as being the cause of their failure will affect their future motivation toward the subsequent effort and achievement (Weiner, 1985).

One important feature of Weiner's theory is that the specific attribution is being made (luck, effort, etc.) is less important than the dimension of the attributions. He classified them along three causal dimensions: locus, stability, and controllability (Graham and Weiner, 1996; Weiner, 1974, 1992, 2005). For instance, Weiner (1992) suggests that it was not only the reasons that people constructed for their successes or failures that are important but whether they see these as due to internal or external factors, changeable or unchangeable, and uncontrollable or controllable. Thus, if an attribution is seen as external and outside of the individual's control, it will be likely to have a more consistent consequence than one which is perceived as internal, changeable and within the person(Chan, 1992; Johnson and Johnson, 1994; Johnson, 1989; Peacock, 2010). Therefore, in this study, attribution theory has been used to explain the difference in motivation between high and low achievers (Weiner, 1992). Within this conceptual framework, in this study, an attempt has been made to answer the following research questions.

1. Is there attribution difference between high and low achievers in their performance in learning English language?
2. To what factors do high achievers and low achievers attribute the success and failure of their performance in learning the English language?
3. What are the pedagogical implications of the explanations to which the students attribute the successes and failures of their performance in learning English language?

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Study site

This study was conducted at Adama town, Oromia Regional State, Ethiopia. Three public secondary schools were purposively selected for some reasons. First, it was felt that the government schools were the more convenient setting for study because variables related to economic status would be controlled, as students who go to public schools are usually from a similar financial background in Ethiopian context (Admassu, 2008; Getahun, 2002; Mekasha, 2007). Secondly, it is agreed among the scholars that students at private schools have better academic performance than their counterparts at public schools (Win and Miller, 2005). Thirdly, students' achievement-related beliefs undergo a developmental change from elementary to secondary education and are most pronounced during late (Shell and Husman, 2001). Hence, the researcher believed that studying students' attribution of performance more appropriate as students are news for the environment and students from government high school perform little when seen in the light of the students from private schools (Getahun, 2002; Mekasha, 2007).

Data sources

Grade nine students were grouped into high and low achievers based on their English subject first semester results and chosen from three schools for the following reasons. First, since all subjects are taught in English starting from grade nine, much attention is needed to improve students' English language performance at an early stage of their secondary education (Harmer, 2001; Ur, 1999) by paying more attention to their perception in learning English as a foreign language. Second, grade ten students were making preparation for the national level examination. Therefore, grade ten was intentionally excluded from this research. Hence, grade nine students were chosen as representative of the general high school students for this study. Selection of the students was made by applying random sampling techniques. Also, all the schools were using the national English language textbook for grade nine.

Sampling

Three public secondary schools were purposefully selected. The underlying evidence of the selection of the schools was the proximity of the research site and similar background of the student population as the students of public schools are from families of relatively the same economic background (Getahun, 2002). In order to get a representative sample of students from the sample schools, from a total population of 237, the required sample size for the study with 5% margin of error and 95% confidence level was 147 grade nine students. Specifically, the selection of sample students was randomly made and a total 147 students in eight sections, that is, four sections from Goro Public Secondary School, three from Adama Public Secondary School and one section from Dambela Public Secondary School were considered. Cultivating students' perception and their English performance at this stage is essential as students are admitted to the new environment, that is, general secondary school (grade nine) (Lepper et al., 2005).

Data collection instruments and procedures

The test and questionnaires were employed to collect relevant data. Some of the items were adapted from

Table 1. High achievers and low achievers according to the perception they share in common.

Perception of students by ability	Ability group		
	High achievers	Low achievers	Total
PCF	32	42	74
PCS	42	31	73
Total 147			

Table 2. Total variance explained for perceived causes of success items.

Components	Initial eigenvalues			Rotation sums of squared loadings		
	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %
1	5.600	18.666	18.666	3.335	11.116	11.116
2	3.677	12.256	30.922	3.221	10.738	21.854
3	2.925	9.750	40.672	2.969	9.897	31.752
4	1.814	6.045	46.717	2.143	7.142	38.893
5	1.631	5.437	52.155	2.102	7.006	45.899
6	1.438	4.794	56.949	2.019	6.730	52.630
7	1.143	3.810	60.759	1.933	6.442	59.072
8	1.065	3.549	64.31	1.571	5.236	64.31

Note. Extraction method: Principal component analysis.

Anteneh (2004) and McAuley et al. (1992) questionnaire on Language Achievement Attribution Scale (LAAS) in such a way that they suit the purpose of the study. Two types of questionnaires were prepared. The perceived explanations of success and failure which consisted of thirty items on 5-point Likert- scale, ranging from not important to very important each. The attribution survey was designed in two parts: Part-I for those who felt that they were happy with their test score and hence, successful. Students who perceived that their score of the test was a failing one completed Part-II. In addition, a test consisting of fifty items were prepared and administered to the students. The present study followed Basturk and Yavuz (2010) order of collecting information: test and survey questionnaire. The order was adopted thinking that it would provide the study with a more reliable data.

The pilot study

The questionnaire and test items were piloted to one of the non-sample class of 45 students. Students were asked to fill in the questionnaires by their English teacher during her class and took about 30 min of her period. The reliability of the test for perceived causes of success and failure measures was found to be .76 and .93 Cronbach alpha respectively. An overview of the piloted questionnaires helped the researcher to make some improvements on the items as well as the format of the survey. In addition, the internal consistencies of the test items were also checked, and the reliability of the test was found to be .80 Cronbach alpha. Therefore, it was believed that the test was more reliable and valid.

Data analysis

At first, students' responses were categorized according to the perceptions they share in common. That is, the responses of ability groups (high and low achievers) were classified according to the perceived causes of success (PCS) and perceived causes of failures (PCF) (Table 1). Following the classification in Table 1, data were organized, analyzed and interpreted systematically through some scientific research methods. Descriptive statistics, t-tests, and principal component analysis were used to analyze the data through SPSS (22 version) software. In order to select the major causes/factors for attribution of performance, principal component analysis with an Eigen cutoff value one and Varimax rotation was used (Tables 2 and 3).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In this study, students' perceived explanations of success and failure of performance in English language learning were identified using principal component analysis at Eigenvalue cut off one. Hence, the thirty items measuring student perceived causes of success and thirty items measuring perceived causes of failure were reduced into

Table 3. Total variance explained for perceived causes of failure items.

Components	Initial Eigenvalues			Rotation sums of squared loadings		
	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %
1	10.04	33.45	33.45	3.62	12.08	12.08
2	1.80	5.99	39.44	3.43	11.43	23.51
3	1.73	5.78	45.22	2.83	9.44	32.95
4	1.36	4.52	49.74	2.70	9.01	41.96
5	1.31	4.35	54.09	2.60	8.68	50.64
6	1.23	4.09	58.18	1.95	6.51	57.15
7	1.02	3.41	61.59	1.33	4.44	61.59

Note. Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

eight and seven factors respectively as shown in Tables 4 and 5.

The 30 items of the perceived causes of success (PCS) and the 30 items of perceived causes of failure (PCF) were subjected to principal component analysis (PCA) using SPSS version 17. Before performing PCA, the suitability of data for factor analysis was assessed. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin value was .82 for PCS and .73 for PCF, exceeding the recommended value of .6 as Leech, Barrett, and Morgan (2005) pointed out. Bartlett's test of sphericity reached statistically significant, that is, Bartlett's test of sphericity (435) = 1667.89, p = .000 for PCS and Bartlett's test of sphericity (435) = 1076.64, p= .000 for PCF supporting factorability of the correlation matrix. Principal component analysis revealed the presence of 8 components (Table 2) for PCS items with Eigenvalues exceeding 1, explaining 5.6, 3.68, 2.93, 1.81, 1.63, 1.44, 1.14 and 1.07% of variance respectively (Table 3). In the same way, 7 components (Table 4) of PCF were identified with eigenvalues more than one explaining 10.04, 1.80, 1.73, 1.36, 1.31, 1.23 and 1.02% of variance consecutively (Table 4). The 8 components of PCS explain a total of 64.31% variance while the 7 components of PCF explain a total of 61.59% of variances (see the cumulative % columns in Tables 2 and 3). Following the guidelines recommended by different scholars such as Hair et al. (1992), and Leech et al. (2005) that is, factor loadings (correlations) greater than *.30* are considered significant; loadings of *.40* are considered more important; and if the loadings are *.50* or greater, they are considered to be very significant.

As can be seen from Table 4, the principal component analysis reduced the thirty items measuring the perceived causes of failure to 7 factors such as *lack of ability, lack of effort, poor teaching practices, teacher's bad behavior, unluckiness, task difficulty, and bad mood.* Following the guidelines recommended by Hair et al. (1992), factor loading greater than .30 is taken as cut off, and hence, factor loading of .39 was also maintained.

The first causal factor, labeled 'lack of effort,' consisted of seven items, all dealing with issues related to student's learning activities such as poor study plan, unable to complete homework, lack of patience and failure to seek assistance from friends and parents due to lack of effort. The second causal factor, 'teacher's bad behavior,' was composed of six items related to the characteristics of teacher, that is, teacher's negative attitudes towards students and irresponsibility of the teacher. The third factor, 'unluckiness' which is referred to bad luck to join the school with the scarce of instructional materials and bad luck due to being assigned to an irrational teacher who is not fair enough and the teacher who is biased toward students from his/her ethnic, religious and cultural background. The fourth causal factor was "poor teaching practices." This factor was related to teacher's poor methods of teaching and low competence in the subject matter. The fifth factor labeled as "lack of ability" was resulted from three items which dealt with student's low competence in the English language. Similarly, the six-factor, "task difficulty "was composed of three items. All the items were related to the level of task difficulties such as the difficulty of the test, activities, homework and instruction. The last factor, which was "bad mood," referred to the situation which affected student's psychological readiness during the test like frustration and health problem. These factors are consistent with the perceived causes of failure previously reported by Weiner (1974) though the two causal factors, namely poor teaching practices and teacher's bad behavior were loaded as independent causal factors.

As shown in Table 5, the principal component analysis reduced the thirty items measuring the perceived explanation of success into eight causal constructs or factors. These are: making an effort, having the ability, task simplicity, good teaching practices, teacher's good behavior, teacher's predisposition, chance and availability of instructional materials. All the factors except teacher's predisposition and availability of instructional materials are the positive counterpart of the perceived causes of failure which have been discussed in Table 4. The factor labeled as "teacher predisposition" composed of three items. The items related to the underlying perception or belief that teacher had before he/she came to the classroom. The issues tied up with identity, being generous and being in a good mood and hence were labeled as a predisposition. The other causal factor was "availability of instructional materials" for both teaching and learning processes. Considering the above failure

Table 4. Principal component analysis of Perceived Causes of Failure items.

Items	Factor loading	Causal components
Q6 Bad study habit	.76	
Q11 Having no strategies or plan of study	.68	
Q12 Study rarely	.61	1. Lack of effort
Q5 Lack of hard work and constant attempt	.57	
Q7 Rushing while working on the test	.55	
Q16 Having no help and encouragement from parents and friends	.43	
Q14 Giving no attention to English language activities and home works	.40	
Q27 Teacher's negative attitude	.73	
Q26 Having no interest in English language learning	.72	
Q28 Teacher's bad behavior toward students' response and effort	.67	2. Teacher's bad behavior
Q25 Teacher's bad mood	.63	
Q13 Teacher's absenteeism	.48	
Q15 Unluckiness	.39	
Q19 Scarcity of appropriate materials for teaching English language for teacher's	.74	
Q18 Scarcity of appropriate materials in learning English language	.67	
Q17 Teacher's bad marking system	.64	3. Unluckiness
Q20 Teacher's ethnicity	.50	
Q8 Teachers non-flexible methods of teaching	.77	
Q10 Teacher's low commitment in teaching and making English lesson interesting	.75	4. Poor teaching practices
Q9 Teacher's poor teaching methods	.78	
Q4 Teacher's low competence in teaching English language	.46	
Q2 Having low ability in understanding English language	.73	
Q1 Lack of Self-confidence	.70	
Q3 Having poor language command	.67	5. Lack of ability
Q21 Difficulty of the test	.81	
Q22 Unclear instructions and questions for the test	.68	6. Task difficulty
Q23 Difficulty of English Subject	.59	
Q24 Difficulty of class room activities and home work	. 50	
Q30 Frustration while working on the test	.73	7. Bad mood
Q29 Health problem	.71	

Factor Loadings > .30, Extraction Method: Principal Axis Factoring, Rotation, Method: Varimax.

and success factors, a t-test was employed to test whether statistically there was a significant difference between high and low achievers in the attribution of performance in learning English as a foreign language or not. The details have presented in proceeding sections.

Attribution difference between high and low achievers

Hitherto, an attempt has been made to analyze and interpret the high and low achievers perceived causal explanations of failure or success in their English performance. This section devoted to look into high and low achievers on the topics, that is, attribution difference and causal dimension of failure or success of their performance.

As can be observed from Table 6, the result of the study indicated that there was a significant difference in *perceived causes of failure* between high achievers and low achievers, t (65) = -3.05, p = .003, α = .05. That is, the mean score of high achievers' perceived *causes of failure* (M = 3.28, SD = 0.26) was significantly different from that of low achievers (M = 3.55, SD = 0.48).

The result showed that there was a significant difference in *perceived causes of failure* between high achievers and low achievers, t (65) = -3.05, p = .003 α = .05. The mean score of high achievers' perceived *causes of failure* (M = 3.28, SD = 0.26) was significantly different from that of low achievers (M = 3.55, SD = 0.48). Similarly, it was found out that there was significant difference in *perceived causes of success* between high achievers and low achievers, t (62) = 7.29, p = .000, α = .05. That is, the mean score of high achievers' perceived

Table 5. Principal component analysis of Perceived Causes of Success items.

Items	Factor loading	Causal factors
Q8 Good study habit	.83	
Q7 Hard work and constant attempt	.80	
Q12 Having strategies or plan of study	.72	
Q13 Study regularly	.69	1. Effort
Q14 Giving attention to English language activities and home works	.60	
Q2 Having good language command	.82	
Q6 Ability to understand English language	.71	2. Ability
Q4 Fastness in understanding the content	.68	
Q1 Self-confidence	.68	
Q5 Sharp-mindedness	.57	
Q23 Clear instructions and questions for the test	.64	3. Good teaching
Q11 Teacher's high commitment to teaching and making English lesson interesting	.60	Practices
Q3 Teacher's competence in teaching the English language	.44	
Q10 Teacher's good teaching methods	.44	
Q24 Easiness of English Subject	.86	
Q25 Easiness of activities and homework	.76	4. Task simplicity
Q22 Easiness of the test	.64	
Q30 Teacher’s friendly approach towards students	.82	
Q27 Having interest in the English language	.76	5. Teacher’s good
Q29 Teacher's good behavior toward students' response and effort	.76	Behavior
Q28 Teacher's positive attitude	.75	
Q17 Teacher's generosity while marking	.81	
Q20 Teacher's ethnicity	.77	6. Teacher’s
Q26 Good mood	.48	predisposition
Q16 Parents and friends help and encouragement	.77	7. Luck/chance
Q21 God's help	.75	
Q15 Luckiness	.68	
Q19 Availability of appropriate materials for teaching the English language	.79	8. Availability of
Q18 Availability of instructional materials in learning the English language	.76	instructional materials

Factor Loadings > 0.3, Extraction Method: Principal Axis Factoring, Rotation Method: Varimax

Table 6. Group statistics on PCF of high and low achievers.

	Ability group	N	Mean	Std. deviation
PCF	High Achievers	32	3.28	0.26
	Low Achievers	42	3.55	0.48

causes of success (*M* = 3.85, *SD* = 0.59) was significantly different from that of low achievers (*M* = 2.024, *SD* = 0.36). The detail is indicated in Tables 8 and 9.

High and low achievers’ perceived causes of success

As shown in Table 10, luck, available instructional material, and teacher’s good behavior were the causal attributions that both high and low achievers rated as the most important causes in explaining their successes. However, high achievers rated effort and ability as being other causes of their success while only low achievers rated teacher predisposition. Mean, standard deviations and independent sample test of high and low achievers about the perceived causes success have been presented in Tables 10 and 11 for worth discussing causal attributions further.

Independent sample test was computed to find out the significant attribution that student’s rated as the important causes of their success. It was found out that high achievers rated effort (*M* = 4.29), luck (*M* = 4.05), teacher’s good behavior (*M* = 3.98), good teaching practices (*M* = 3.93), available instructional material (*M* = 3.90), ability (*M* = 3.70), and lastly task simplicity (*M*= 3.01)

Table 7. Independent samples test on PCF of high and low achievers.

		Levene's test for equality of variances		T-test for equality of means						
		F	Sig.	T	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean difference	Std. error difference	95% confidence interval of the difference	
									Lower	Upper
PCF	Equal variances assumed	18.983	.000	-2.826	72	.006	-.26655	.09432	-.45458	-.07852
	Equal variances not assumed			-3.051	65.243	.003	-.26655	.08737	-.44103	-.09207

Table 8. Group statistics on PCS of high and low achievers.

	Ability group	N	Mean	Std. deviation
PCS	High achievers	42	3.77	0.48
	Low achievers	31	3.15	0.23

Table 9. Independent Samples Test on PCS of high and low achievers.

		Levene's test for equality of variances		t-test for equality of means						
		F	Sig.	t	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean difference	Std. error difference	95% confidence interval of the difference	
									Lower	Upper
PCS	Equal variances assumed	13.929	.000	28.644	71	.000	21.759	.760	20.244	23.274
	Equal variances not assumed			31.240	64.987	.000	21.759	.696	20.368	23.150

to explain their success. From low achievers point of view, luck (*M* = 4.37), task simplicity (*M* = 4.29), teacher's predisposition (*M* = 4.23) and teacher's good behavior (*M* =3.88) were rated as important causes of their success. A significant difference was also observed in ability, effort, good teaching practices, teacher's predispositions and task simplicity between the two groups (high and low achievers). Although high and low achievers were not significantly different in luck, available instructional material and teacher's good behavior attributions in explaining their success, both groups rated those factors as important causes of their success. The independent sample test of all the causal attribution is presented in Table 11.

High and low achievers' perceived causes of failure

Both high and low achievers who were not satisfied with their performance attributed their failure to the following factors: task difficulty, teacher's bad behavior, bad luck, and bad mood. Low achievers believed that lack of effort and lack of ability were very important causes of their failure. As can be seen from the group statistics of Table 12, high achievers rated bad mood (*M* = 4.21), teacher's bad behavior (*M* = 4.09), task difficulty (*M* = 3.66) and unluckiness (*M* = 3.59) in explaining their academic failure. On the other hand, low achievers attributed the failure to task difficulty (*M* = 3.75), teacher's bad behavior

Table 10. High and low achievers' group statistics on PCS.

Causes	Ability group	N	Mean	Std. deviation
Ability	High achievers	42	3.70	0.98
	Low achievers	31	1.70	0.41
Effort	High achievers	42	4.29	0.66
	Low achievers	31	2.38	0.49
Good teaching practices	High achievers	42	3.93	0.80
	Low achievers	31	2.30	0.51
Luck	High achievers	42	4.05	0.89
	Low achievers	31	4.37	0.55
Available instructional material	High achievers	42	3.90	1.01
	Low achievers	31	4.23	0.77
Teacher predisposition	High achievers	42	2.76	1.23
	Low achievers	31	4.24	0.63
Task simplicity	High achievers	42	3.01	0.95
	Low achievers	31	4.29	0.62
Teacher good behavior	High achievers	42	3.98	0.96
	Low achievers	31	3.88	0.59

(*M* = 3.75), unluckiness (*M* = 3.60), lack of effort (*M* = 3.47), bad mood (*M* = 3.46) and poor teaching practice (*M* = 3.32). Statistically, a significant difference was also found between high achievers and low achievers on the causal attributions of the failure. That is, the mean score of high achievers was higher than that of low achievers. For instance, the mean score of high achievers in bad mood (*M* = 4.21, *SD* = 0.63) and teacher's bad behavior (*M* = 4.09, *SD* = 0.51) was greater than the mean scores of low achievers (*M* = 3.45, *SD* = 0.93) and (*M* = 3.75, *SD* = 0.64). The difference was also significant at *t* (72) = 3.93, *p*= .000, α = .05 in bad mood and *t* (72) = 2.43, *p* = .018, α = .05 in teacher's bad behavior.

On the other hand, the mean scores of low achievers in lack of effort (*M* = 3. 48, *SD* = 0.80), lack of ability (*M* = 3.30, *SD* = 1.12) and poor teaching practices (*M* = 3.32, *SD* = 1.10) were greater than that of high achievers (*M* = 2.75, *SD* = 0.35), (*M* = 2.66, *SD* = 0.91) and (*M* = 1.91, *SD* = 0.73) in the same order. The difference between high and low achievers was significant on those causal attributions. To be specific, the difference was significant at *t* (59) = - 5.31, *p*= .000, α = .05, *t*(72)= -2.65, *p*=.010, α = .05 and *t(*70.9)= -6.64, *p* = .000, α = .05 (Table 13) in lack of effort, lack of ability, and poor teaching practices, respectively.

The researcher compared the importance that high and low achievers gave to task difficulty and unluckiness in explaining their academic failures. Although both groups did not differ significantly for these measures, low achievers were more apt to attribute their failures to task difficulty as important reasons for their failure than high achievers. The importance both high and low achievers gave to unluckiness as the explanation of their failure was approximately the same, that is, *M* = 3.59 and 3.60 for high and low achievers, respectively.

As we can see from the result of the analysis in Tables 12 and 13, both high achievers and low achievers cited causes related to teachers (like teacher's bad behavior and task difficulty) to explain their failure. In addition, low achievers additionally rated poor teaching practice for their failure. Interestingly, low achievers were not only blaming teacher as the causes of their failure, but they also blamed themselves (lack of effort) for their failure. As Nunan (1989) states if teachers do not recognize students' subjective needs and perceptions related to the learning process, there can be a mismatch of ideas. Hence, this study showed that there was a perception gap between students and teacher in the classroom as both high achievers and low achievers were pointing out some causes related to teachers and their low commitment in their failure.

Dimension of causal attributions

From the discussion above, we have seen that high and

Table 11. Independent samples test on PCS of high and low achievers.

		Levene's test for equality of variances		t-test for equality of means						
		F	Sig.	T	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean difference	Std. error difference	95% confidence interval of the difference	
									Lower	Upper
Ability	Equal variances assumed	25.587	.000	10.672	71	.000	1.99846	.18727	1.62506	2.37186
	Equal variances not assumed			11.893	57.983	.000	1.99846	.16804	1.66210	2.33483
Effort	Equal variances assumed	1.556	.216	13.626	71	.000	1.91753	.14072	1.63693	2.19812
	Equal variances not assumed			14.239	70.991	.000	1.91753	.13466	1.64902	2.18604
Good teaching practices	Equal variances assumed	7.834	.007	9.940	71	.000	1.63614	.16460	1.30793	1.96434
	Equal variances not assumed			10.596	69.790	.000	1.63614	.15442	1.32814	1.94413
Luck	Equal variances assumed	9.301	.003	-1.763	71	.082	-.31859	.18069	-.67889	.04170
	Equal variances not assumed			-1.885	69.366	.064	-.31859	.16901	-.65574	.01855
Available instructional material	Equal variances assumed	1.332	.252	-1.481	71	.143	-.32104	.21683	-.75340	.11131
	Equal variances not assumed			-1.540	70.871	.128	-.32104	.20842	-.73663	.09454
Teacher predisposition	Equal variances assumed	18.845	.000	-6.103	71	.000	-1.47472	.24165	-1.95655	-.99288
	Equal variances not assumed			-6.669	64.437	.000	-1.47472	.22113	-1.91642	-1.03301
Task simplicity	Equal variances assumed	2.897	.093	-6.569	71	.000	-1.28303	.19532	-1.67248	-.89357
	Equal variances not assumed			-6.984	70.111	.000	-1.28303	.18371	-1.64942	-.91663
Teacher good behavior	Equal variances assumed	12.984	.001	.530	71	.598	.10311	.19450	-.28472	.49094
	Equal variances not assumed			.568	68.985	.572	.10311	.18151	-.25898	.46520

low achievers exhibited different causes of failure and success in their performance. As Weiner (1992) pointed out, it is not only the cause that people give to their success or failure what matters more; it is the dimension of the explanation which is worth investigated in the sphere of learners' future expectancy of success and performance striving. That is, whether the cause is internal or external to the person, whether the cause is under the control of the learner or not, and whether the cause is long-lived or short-lived within the person. So, it is imperative to weigh the dimension of the causal attributions in order to investigate whether high and low achievers attribute their success or failure to internal or external, controllable or uncontrollable and stable or unstable attributions.

Independent sample test was used to test the dimensions of attribution. The two dimensions of attributions (locus of causes and controllability of the causes) were also examined.

Table 12. High and low achievers' group statistics on PCF.

Causes	Ability group	N	Mean	Std. deviation
Lack of effort	High achievers	32	2.75	0.35
	Low achievers	42	3.48	0.80
Lack of ability	High achievers	32	2.66	0.91
	Low achievers	42	3.30	1.12
Poor teaching practices	High achievers	32	1.91	0.73
	Low achievers	42	3.32	1.10
Task difficulty	High achievers	32	3.66	0.67
	Low achievers	42	3.87	0.65
Teacher's bad behavior	High achievers	32	4.09	0.51
	Low achievers	42	3.75	0.64
Unluckiness	High achievers	32	3.59	0.96
	Low achievers	42	3.60	1.07
Bad mood	High achievers	32	4.21	0.63
	Low achievers	42	3.46	0.93

Means, standard deviations and independent sample test were computed for both groups within each category of the dimensions such as internal or external, controllable or uncontrollable, and stable or unstable. Thus, the proceeding sections give detail analysis of causal dimensions of high and low achievers about the success or failure of their performance in learning English.

Locus of causes dimension of high and low achievers' attribution

In Table 15, the group statistics indicated that both high and low achievers slightly tended to attribute their failure more to external causes (M = 3.40, M = 3.65) than to internal causes (M= 3.15, M= 3. 44) respectively. The study indicated that both high and low achievers more slightly tended to attribute their failure to External cause (*M* = 3.40, *M* = 3.65) than to internal cause (*M* = 3.15, *M* = 3. 44) respectively. But when we compare the two groups, low achievers are more internal *(M*= 3.44) than high achievers (*M* = 3.15). At the same time, low achievers are inclined to an external cause (*M* = 3. 65) than high achievers (*M* = 3.40). The difference was also significant at *t* (69) = -2.62, *p* = .011, *α = .05 for* internal cause and *t* (72) = -2.39, p= .02, α = .05 for the external cause.

Conversely, low achievers attributed their success to the external cause instead of internal (*M* = 3.78 *vs. M* = 2.07). Whereas, high achievers are more of internal (*M* = 4.02) and less external (*M = 3.63).* Both groups are different in their internal cause. As we can see from Table 14 high achievers attributed their success to internal causes (*M* = 4.02) while low achievers rated external cause *(M = 3.78).* To be specific, high achievers are more internal than low achievers. The difference was also significant at *t (61.8)* = 16.35, *p* = .000*, α* = .05 with higher mean score *(M = 4.02, SD = 0. 68)* against low achievers *(M* = 2.06*, SD* = 0.32*).* One distinctive aspect of this result is the fact that low achievers attributed their success to internal causes which showed that they are not in self-defending condition.

As several scholars pointed out (Lundh and Wångby, 2002; MacGeorge et al., 2003; Weiner, 1974; Yan and Li, 2009), when learners attribute their failure to internal factor (like effort) than external causes (like luck, task difficulty, and so on), the more likely they make effort and are persistent to their future success expectancy and performance striving. Hence, if a teacher is given attribution training on how to assist the learners to have the right attribution of their success or failure, he/she can effortlessly push low achievers forward as they are already on the right track according to the principle of the locus of the cause. The result indicated that they attributed their failure more to lack of effort which could lead them to have a feeling of regret.

Controllability dimension of high and low achievers' attribution

When we come to the controllability dimension of

Table 13. Independent samples test on PCF of high and low achievers.

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
									95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Lower	Upper
Lack of Effort	Equal variances assumed	24.975	.000	-4.842	72	.000	-.72967	.15070	-1.03009	-.42925
	Equal variances not assumed			-5.314	59.245	.000	-.72967	.13730	-1.00439	-.45496
Lack of ability	Equal variances assumed	3.089	.083	-2.650	72	.010	-.64393	.24297	-1.12829	-.15957
	Equal variances not assumed			-2.724	71.617	.008	-.64393	.23641	-1.11525	-.17261
Poor teaching practice	Equal variances assumed	6.818	.011	-6.305	72	.000	-1.41518	.22445	-1.86262	-.96774
	Equal variances not assumed			-6.642	70.980	.000	-1.41518	.21308	-1.84005	-.99031
Task difficulty	Equal variances assumed	.468	.496	-1.347	72	.182	-.20961	.15562	-.51983	.10060
	Equal variances not assumed			-1.341	65.822	.184	-.20961	.15626	-.52161	.10238
Teacher bad behaviour	Equal variances assumed	.407	.525	2.431	72	.018	.33305	.13702	.05990	.60620
	Equal variances not assumed			2.505	71.797	.015	.33305	.13298	.06795	.59815
Unluckiness	Equal variances assumed	1.412	.239	-.006	72	.995	-.00149	.24002	-.47997	.47699
	Equal variances not assumed			-.006	69.882	.995	-.00149	.23669	-.47357	.47059
Bad mood	Equal variances assumed	6.488	.013	3.933	72	.000	.75260	.19135	.37116	1.13405
	Equal variances not assumed			4.140	71.077	.000	.75260	.18178	.39015	1.11506

attributions, the results indicated no significant difference was found on uncontrollable attribution of failure between high achiever (*M* = 3.44, *SD* = 0.30) and low achievers(*M*= 3.57, *SD*= 0.46) at *t*(70.47)= -1.43, *p* = 158, *α* = *.05*. There was, however, a significant difference at *t* (59.23) = -5.314, *p* = .000, *α* = *.05* on controllable attributions with the mean score of (*M* = 2.75. *SD* = 0.35) and (*M* = 3.48, *SD* = 0.80) for high and low achievers respectively as indicated in Tables 16 and 17. On the contrary, significant difference is observed on both controllable and uncontrollable attribution of success for both high and low achievers at *t* (71) = 13.63, *p* = .000, *α* = *.05* and *t* (60.13) = *3.06, p =.* 003, *α* = .05, respectively. That is, the mean score of controllable attribution (High achievers = *M* = 4.29, low achievers, *M* = 2.38) while that of uncontrollable attribution for high and low achievers was *M* = 3.64 and *M* = 3.35, respectively.

As we can see from the mean difference between both groups, high achievers are more likely to control over their causes than low achievers. Surprisingly, low achievers attributed

Table 14. Group Statistics on locus of cause dimension of success for high and low achievers.

	Ability group	N	Mean	Std. deviation
Internal factor	High achievers	42	4.02	0.68
	Low achievers	31	2.07	0.32
External factor	High achievers	42	3.63	0.59
	Low achievers	31	3.78	0.30

Table 15. Group statistics on locus of cause dimension of failure for high and low achievers.

Parameter	Ability group	N	Mean	Std. deviation
Internal factor	High achievers	32	3.15	0.36
	Low achievers	42	3.44	0.58
External factor	High achievers	32	3.40	0.35
	Low achievers	42	3.65	0.50

Table 16. Group statistics of on controllability dimension of success attribution for high and low achievers.

	Ability group	N	Mean	Std. deviation
Controllable	High achievers	42	4.29	0.66
	Low achievers	31	2.38	0.50
Uncontrollable	High achievers	42	3.64	0.55
	Low achievers	31	3.35	0.25

Table 17. Group statistics on controllability dimension of failure attribution for high and low achievers.

	Ability group	N	Mean	Std. deviation
Controllable	High achievers	32	2.75	0.35
	Low achievers	42	3.48	0.80
Uncontrollable	High achievers	32	3.44	0.30
	Low achievers	42	3.57	0.46

their success to uncontrollable causes rather than to controllable attribution (like effort). Hence, attribution training is needed to shape the perception of those who ascribe their success to uncontrollable causes (Graham, 1991; Jones et al., 2004; Lundh and Wångby, 2002; Weiner, 1992) which are linked to less pride and more other esteem-related effects
than high self-esteem affect.

CONCLUSION

The result of the study showed that high and low achievers attributed their English language performance to task difficulty and unluckiness in explaining their academic failures. Although both groups did not differ significantly for these measures, low achievers were more apt to attribute their failures to task difficulty as important reasons for their failure than high achievers. In addition, both high achievers and low achievers cited causes related to teachers (teacher's bad behavior and task difficulty) to explain their failure. Low achievers rated poor teaching practice for their failure. Interestingly, low achievers were not only blaming teacher as the causes of their failure, but they also blamed themselves (Lack of effort) for their failure. Hence, this study showed that there was a perception gap between students and subject teacher in the classroom as both high achievers and low achievers were pointing out some causes related to teachers and their low commitment for their failure.

Taking Weiner (1992) theory into account, that is, it was not only the reasons that people constructed for their successes or failures that were important but whether they saw these as due to internal or external factors, as changeable or unchangeable, controllable or uncontrollable, and hence, an attempt has been made to see students' attributions pattern from causal dimension attribution perspective. With regard to causal dimension, Weiner (1992) in his causal dimension of attributions states that uncontrollable attributions such as lack of ability, unluckiness, and task difficulty are linked to low perceptions of responsibility, feelings of shame, decreased motivation, ultimately resulting in diminished academic performance.

When we come to the controllability dimension of attributions, the results indicated that no significant difference was found on the uncontrollable attribution of failure between high achievers and low achievers. On the contrary, a significant difference was observed on both controllable (effort) and uncontrollable (ability, teacher's good behavior, task simplicity, etc) attribution of success for both high and low achievers. The study also revealed that high achievers were more likely to control over their causes than low achievers. Surprisingly, low achievers attributed their success to uncontrollable (task simplicity, teacher's predisposition, and teacher's good behavior) causes rather than controllable attribution (like effort). Hence, attribution training is needed to shape the perception of those who ascribe their success to uncontrollable causes (Graham, 1991; Jones et al., 2004; Lundh and Wångby, 2002; Weiner, 1992) which are linked to less pride and more other esteem-related effects than high self-esteem affect.

RECOMMENDATIONS

It was indicated in the conclusions that high and low achievers conceptualized different explanation of the success and failure of their English language learning performance.

It was also found out that there was a perception gap between students and subject teacher in the classroom as both high achievers and low achievers were pointing out some causes related to teachers and their own low commitment for their failure. Therefore, subject teachers need to possess the skills to identify and understand students' attribution as Strevens (1977) argued that teachers need to investigate their students' learning difficulties in order to aid their students and develop themselves as teachers too. In this regard, zonal and district education officers need to organize discussion forum on how attribution training will be given to subject teachers to capacitate them to shape students' maladaptive belief (lack of ability) they constructed to explain their failure and success. In addition, teacher awareness of the student's explanation for the performance has got the pedagogical implication. Teachers are expected to be alert enough to what is going on in the classroom, particularly, when they give feedback to their students. The expression they use when they give feedback could affect students present and future efforts of learning the lesson.

Finally, the researcher suggests that further researches of this kind need to be conducted in this area in the Ethiopian context and elsewhere for better understanding of the situations. As there are other external causes of explanations like teachers' perception which are thought to be related to students' perception of performance and also language learning, it would be best if teachers' understanding is included and the effect of attribution on student's achievement is studied longitudinally.

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