# Analysis of Causal Attributions Regarding High School Students' Perceptions of Success or Failure in English Class

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**Abstract**

The aim of this study is to examine high school students' causal attributions regarding their perceptions of success and failure in English class through various variables. A total of 369 students from different types of high schools in the central district of Çanakkale participated in the study. The research employed a descriptive survey model. The results revealed that high school students perceive themselves as unsuccessful in English class. They attribute their successes mainly to internal, stable, and uncontrollable factors. On the other hand, they attribute their failures to internal, stable, but controllable factors. Female students attributed their successes in English class to internal, temporary, and controllable factors. This tendency was stronger among female students than male students. Male students, on the other hand, attributed their failures in English to external and uncontrollable factors. This was more common among male students than female students. Additionally, 11th and 12th grade students were more inclined to explain their successes in English using internal factors compared to 10th grade students. Vocational and technical education students made external attributions for their failures more often than students in religious high schools. Finally, the study proposed several suggestions for teachers and researchers.

**Keywords:** Causal Attribution Theory, English, Success, Failure, Perception.

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## INTRODUCTION

People seek explanations for the causes of events in their lives by making causal attributions based on observed events, behaviors, or their own successes and failures. These explanations form the foundation of attribution theory, a key concept in social psychology that explores how people interpret success and failure and how these interpretations influence future motivation and behavior (Hsieh & Schallert, 2008; Bar-Tal, 1978). Attribution involves the causal explanations individuals make in response to new, unexpected, or negative situations (Barrowclough & Hooley, 2003; Eberly, Holley, Johnson, & Mitchell, 2011). For example, someone might attribute a friend's missed goal in a soccer game to a lack of skill.

The literature identifies four main attribution theories: Heider's commonsense psychology, Weiner's causal attribution model, Jones and Davis's correspondent inference theory, and Kelley's covariation theory (Tutar, 2018). Fritz Heider (1985), a pioneer in this field, described behavior causality as a dynamic interaction between individual factors (effort and ability) and environmental factors (task difficulty and luck) (Specht, Fichtel & Meyer, 2007). Individuals emphasizing internal control attribute behaviors to personal factors like effort and ability, while those favoring external control cite factors such as luck or task difficulty (Can, Aşan & Aydın, 2006). Heider also proposed that people seek a coherent worldview and a sense of environmental control, which helps reduce anxieties related to safety needs (Kağıtçıbaşı, 1999).

This study is based on Weiner's causal attribution theory, which expands on Heider's work. Weiner proposes that individuals interpret outcomes as successes or failures, and these interpretations trigger motivational processes with positive or negative effects. Central to his theory is how people perceive the causes of their successes or failures and how these perceptions influence their behaviors (Turunç & Turgut, 2017). Essentially, it involves understanding the reasons behind one's own behaviors and those of others (Can, Aşan & Aydın, 2006).

According to Weiner's theory, four main factors influence success or failure: ability, effort, task difficulty, and luck. These factors are evaluated across three dimensions: locus of control, stability, and controllability. Locus of control distinguishes between internal factors (ability, effort) and external factors (task difficulty, luck). Stability differentiates between stable factors (ability, task difficulty) and unstable factors (effort, luck), while controllability assesses whether the factors can be influenced by the individual (Weiner, as cited in Kızgın & Dalgın, 2012; Uslu, 2022). Outcomes attributed to internal, unstable, and controllable factors, such as effort, typically encourage individuals to invest more effort to improve future results. In contrast, attributing outcomes to external, stable, or uncontrollable factors, like luck or ability, may reduce motivation to change (Can, Aşan & Aydın, 2006; Yıldırım, 2012). The relationships between these factors and dimensions are presented in Table

1 in the appendix. Understanding how these attribution dimensions influence motivation is particularly important in educational contexts, such as foreign language learning, where students' beliefs about success and failure can significantly affect their learning behaviors and outcomes.

The most significant link between foreign language learning and attribution theory is the persistent difficulty many students face in language acquisition, despite improvements in materials and programs. This problem is also evident in Türkiye. According to the 2023 English Proficiency Index, Türkiye ranks 66th out of 113 countries globally and 33rd out of 34 European countries, placing it in the low proficiency category (Balçıkanlı, 2023). Understanding the psychological reasons behind these challenges can be a valuable starting point for improving language learning outcomes.

In recent years, researchers have increasingly examined the relationship between causal attributions and other factors in foreign language learning (Çağatay, 2018). Individual differences, such as students' motivation levels and their beliefs about the causes of their performance, play a significant role in shaping future learning outcomes (Erten & Burden, 2014). Attributions, alongside other individual differences, are critical in the language learning process. As a result, interest in attribution theory has grown among educational psychologists and other experts, although it remains limited.

In foreign language learning, recognizing the causal attributions by students brings certain advantages. In other words, when learners are aware of the cognitive reasons behind their successes, they tend to regulate their learning processes accordingly (Satıcılar, 2006, citing Williams & Burden). Similarly, it is also important for teachers to be aware of these attributions made by students. The reasons students attribute to their successes or failures shape the psychological framework of the current situation and guide the prediction of future performances. Therefore, to help students become effective language learners, it is essential to understand the psychological reasons underlying these successes or failures (Satıcılar, 2006).

Recent studies in education have examined students' causal attributions for success and failure in language learning, revealing consistent patterns. Research indicates that successful students often attribute their achievements to internal, controllable factors such as effort, strategy use, interest, and motivation (Besimoğlu, Serdar, & Yavuz, 2010; Semiz, 2011; Taşkıran & Aydın, 2017; Taşkıran, 2017). In contrast, failure is frequently linked to external or uncontrollable factors, including lack of interest, task difficulty, or systemic challenges (Besimoğlu et al., 2010; Taşkıran, 2017). Some studies also highlight the influence of individual differences. For example, while Özkardeş (2011) found that successful students surprisingly made more external attributions, gender differences emerged, with female students more likely to attribute success to internal, temporary, and controllable causes. However, Semiz (2011) reported no significant gender-based attribution differences but noted strong

links between attributions, self-efficacy, and language learning beliefs. These findings underline the central role of attribution patterns in shaping learners' motivation and future performance.

As can be understood from the literature, studies that examine language learning in conjunction with attribution theory are generally conducted with higher education students. In this study, the sample consists of high school students, and the attributions are examined according to various variables (gender, type of high school, grade level), which is expected to contribute to the literature and educational communities in this context. The purpose of this project is to examine high school students' causal attributions regarding their perceptions of success and failure in English classes. In line with this aim, the following sub-problems have been addressed:

1. Do high school students perceive themselves as successful in English class?
2. What are the attributions of success-oriented and failure-oriented students?
3. Do causal attributions related to success and failure differ by gender?
4. Do causal attributions related to success and failure differ by grade level?
5. Do causal attributions related to success and failure differ by type of high school?

## METHODOLOGY

In this study, the descriptive survey model was used. Since the aim was to examine high school students' causal attributions based on their perceptions of success and failure in English class, a descriptive method was deemed appropriate. Survey models aim to describe the current situation as it exists (Karasar, 1999; Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Additionally, such models enable researchers to capture the views or characteristics of relatively large populations (Büyüköztürk, Çakmak, Akgün, Karadeniz, & Demirel, 2020; Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2018). This approach was selected to provide a comprehensive understanding of students' attribution patterns across different variables.

### Study Group

The population of the study consists of high school students studying in the central district of Çanakkale during the 2023-2024 academic year. The sample of the study includes 369 students selected from various types of high schools within this population using the stratified sampling method. The demographic data of the students in the sample are presented in Table 1.

**Table 1.** Demographic Distribution of Students

|  |  | **f** | **%** |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Gender** | Female | 181 | 49 |
|  | Male | 188 | 51 |
| **Grade** | 9th Grade | 96 | 26 |
|  | 10th Grade | 89 | 24 |
|  | 11th Grade | 86 | 23 |
|  | 12th Grade | 98 | 27 |
| **Type of High School** | Science High School | 95 | 26 |
|  | Anatolian High School | 48 | 13 |
|  | Imam Hatip High School | 83 | 22 |
|  | Vocational and Technical High School | 143 | 39 |
| **Total** |  | 369 | 100 |

As seen in Table 1, the study group consists of a total of 369 students, with 181 female and 188 male students. In the study group, there are 96 students in 9th grade, 89 in 10th grade, 86 in 11th grade, and 98 in 12th grade. Among these students, 96 attend Science High School, 48 attend Anatolian High School, 83 attend Imam Hatip High School, and 143 attend Vocational and Technical High School.

**Data Collection and Analysis**

The study aimed to examine high school students' causal attributions for their success and failure in English class across various variables. For this purpose, the Success Attribution Questionnaire developed by Özkardeş (2011) was used. The questionnaire has two sections: students who perceived themselves as successful answered items related to success attributions, while those who considered themselves unsuccessful responded to failure attribution items. Instead of relying on grades or quantitative evaluations, students assessed themselves based on their personal perceptions, consistent with the emphasis on perception in attribution theory. The questionnaire's sub-dimensions align with the three attribution dimensions: locus of control (internal/external), stability (temporary/stable), and controllability (controllable/uncontrollable). Permission to use the questionnaire was obtained from the author via email.

Since the original instrument was in English, it was translated into Turkish by the researchers. A back translation process was not conducted; however, the Turkish version was reviewed by three field experts specializing in English language education and educational measurement. Based on the experts' feedback, minor revisions were made to enhance linguistic clarity and cultural appropriateness without altering the content or structure of the original items. The revised version was piloted with 10 students to ensure clarity and comprehension. Following the pilot study, the questionnaire was finalized. It consists of 15 items for success attributions and 22 items for failure

attributions. The reliability coefficients reported by Özkardeş (2011) were $\alpha = 0.71$ for the success section and $\alpha = 0.69$ for the failure section. Data were collected online using Web 2.0 tools. Expert evaluations and the pilot study supported the content validity of the Turkish version, confirming that the items were appropriate for measuring students' causal attributions in the new context.

The collected data were analyzed using the SPSS program. First, normality distribution and outliers in the questionnaires were tested. After removing some detected outliers from the data set, analyses were initiated. Since the skewness and kurtosis coefficients for both the success and failure attribution questionnaires were between +1.5 and -1.5 (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2013), it was determined that the data were normally distributed. Descriptive analyses were then conducted for demographic data, and frequencies and percentages were calculated. The data obtained from the success and failure attribution questionnaires were analyzed separately. An independent samples t-test and one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) were used to test the differences among variables in the study. Post hoc tests were applied to variables with statistically significant differences according to the ANOVA test.

**FINDINGS**

**Findings Regarding the First Sub-Problem**

The frequency and percentage values regarding whether high school students perceive themselves as successful in English class are presented in Table 2.

**Table 2.** Students' Perceptions of Success/Failure in English Class

| Students' Perception | f | % |
|---|---|---|
| Successful | 212 | 58 |
| Unsuccessful | 157 | 42 |
| Total | 369 | 100 |

As seen in Table 2, 58% of the students perceive themselves as successful in English class, while 42% perceive themselves as unsuccessful.

**Findings Regarding the Second Sub-Problem**

The descriptive statistics for the causal attributions of success-driven and failure-driven students are presented in Table 3 and Table 4, respectively.

**Table 3.** Descriptive Statistics of Attributions Related to Students' Perceived Success

| | f | X | S.d. | Level of Agreement |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 11. I have a successful teacher. | 215 | 4.29 | .991 | Strongly Agree |
| 4. I enjoy learning English. | 215 | 4.25 | .990 | Strongly Agree |
| 5. I am interested in English. | 215 | 4.23 | .987 | Strongly Agree |
| 15. I am confident in my ability to learn English. | 215 | 4.21 | .902 | Strongly Agree |
| 12. I watch English movies outside of school. | 215 | 4.08 | 1.267 | Agree |
| 6. I have a talent for learning English. | 215 | 4.05 | 1.008 | Agree |
| 14. I seek help from my teacher or friends when needed. | 215 | 3.83 | 1.232 | Agree |
| 10. I listen to my teacher carefully in class. | 215 | 3.71 | 1.108 | Agree |
| 7. Learning English is easy. | 215 | 3.67 | 1.110 | Agree |
| 3. I have prior training related to the lesson. | 215 | 3.61 | 1.379 | Agree |
| 2. I know how to study. | 215 | 3.59 | 1.124 | Agree |
| 8. I have a rich vocabulary. | 215 | 3.49 | 1.045 | Agree |
| 1. I study enough for the lesson. | 215 | 3.40 | 1.229 | Neutral |
| 9. I am lucky in exams. | 215 | 3.11 | 1.153 | Neutral |
| 13. I read English books outside of school. | 215 | 2.73 | 1.429 | Neutral |

Examining Table 3, it is observed that students most frequently attribute their success to Item 11 (having a successful teacher) with a mean score of $\bar{x}$=4.29. Additionally, Item 4 (enjoying learning English) with $\bar{x}$=4.25, Item 5 (interest in English) with $\bar{x}$=4.23, and Item 15 (confidence in learning English) with $\bar{x}$=4.21 are other prominent attributions. On the other hand, the items to which students least attribute their success are Item 13 (reading English books outside of school) with $\bar{x}$ =2.73and Item 9 (considering oneself lucky in exams) with $\bar{x}$ =3.11. Based on these findings, high school students predominantly attribute their perceived success to internal, stable, and uncontrollable factors.

**Table 4.** Descriptive Statistics of Attributions Related to Students' Perceived Failure

| | f | $\bar{X}$ | S.d. | Level of Agreement |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 22. I don't have enough vocabulary knowledge. | 158 | 3.80 | 1.154 | Agree |
| 12. I don't know how to study. | 158 | 3.70 | 1.149 | Agree |
| 17. I feel nervous during exams. | 158 | 3.69 | 1.256 | Agree |
| 1. I don't study enough. | 158 | 3.61 | 1.039 | Agree |
| 18. I fear failing in class. | 158 | 3.49 | 1.271 | Agree |
| 6. Exams are difficult for me. | 158 | 3.48 | 1.075 | Agree |
| 15. I don't watch/read enough films/books in English. | 158 | 3.41 | 1.321 | Agree |
| 16. Class hours are not sufficient for me to learn English. | 158 | 3.38 | 1.290 | Agree |
| 4. Learning English is difficult. | 158 | 3.26 | 1.146 | Neutral |
| 20. I don't have enough confidence in learning English. | 158 | 3.25 | 1.221 | Neutral |
| 13. I am unlucky in exams. | 158 | 3.25 | 1.257 | Neutral |
| 21. I struggle to understand and follow the topics in class. | 158 | 3.22 | 1.191 | Neutral |
| 11. Classes are boring. | 158 | 3.01 | 1.241 | Neutral |
| 7. I don't have a talent for learning English. | 158 | 2.85 | 1.194 | Neutral |
| 2. I have no prior training related to the lesson. | 158 | 2.79 | 1.405 | Neutral |
| 3. I don't enjoy learning English. | 158 | 2.75 | 1.315 | Neutral |
| 14. Social activities (friends, clubs, etc.) take up too much of my time. | 158 | 2.68 | 1.258 | Neutral |
| 9. I don't listen to my teacher carefully in class. | 158 | 2.64 | 1.212 | Neutral |
| 8. I don't attend classes regularly. | 158 | 2.60 | 1.267 | Disagree |
| 19. I have personal problems (family, financial, health, etc.). | 158 | 2.12 | 1.284 | Disagree |
| 5. I don't want to learn English. | 158 | 2.02 | 1.170 | Disagree |
| 10. My teacher is not successful. | 158 | 1.90 | 1.174 | Disagree |

When examining Table 4, it is observed that students most frequently attribute their failures to Item 22 (not having enough vocabulary knowledge) with a mean score of x̄ =3.80. Additionally, Item 12 (not knowing how to study) with x̄ =3.70, Item 17 (feeling nervous during exams) with x̄ =3.69, and Item 1 (not studying enough) with x̄ =3.61 are other prominent attributions. On the other hand, the items to which students least attribute their failures are Item 10 (teacher not being successful) with x̄ =1.90, Item 5 (not wanting to learn English) with x̄ =2.02, and Item 19 (having personal problems) with x̄ =2.12. Accordingly, high school students primarily attribute their perceived failure to internal, stable, and controllable factors.

**Findings Regarding the Third Sub-Problem**

The t-test analysis results regarding whether students' causal attributions for success and failure differ by gender are presented in Table 5 and Table 6, respectively.

**Table 5.** Comparison of Students' Causal Attributions for Success Based on Gender Variable

| | | Gender | f | X | S.d | t | Sd | p |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Locus of Control** | **Internal** | Female | 109 | 3.90 | 0.593 | 2.261 | 210 | 0.025 |
| | | Male | 103 | 3.71 | 0.630 | | | |
| | **External** | Female | 109 | 3.76 | 0.571 | 0.618 | 210 | 0.537 |
| | | Male | 103 | 3.70 | 0.712 | | | |
| **Stability** | **Unstable** | Female | 109 | 3.66 | 0.585 | 3.446 | 210 | 0.001 |
| | | Male | 103 | 3.35 | 0.713 | | | |
| | **Stable** | Female | 109 | 4.03 | 0.572 | 0.024 | 210 | 0.981 |
| | | Male | 103 | 4.02 | 0.647 | | | |
| **Controllability** | **Controllable** | Female | 109 | 3.72 | 0.611 | 3.190 | 210 | 0.002 |
| | | Male | 103 | 3.42 | 0.731 | | | |
| | **Uncontrollable** | Female | 109 | 3.97 | 0.558 | 0.163 | 210 | 0.871 |
| | | Male | 103 | 3.95 | 0.665 | | | |

Table 5 shows the comparison of students' perceptions of success across the dimensions of attribution theory based on gender. Accordingly, there is a statistically significant difference between female students' internal attributions in the locus of control dimension (X=3.90) and male students' internal attributions in the same dimension (X=3.71) [t(210)=2.261; p<0.05]. Similarly, there is a statistically significant difference between female students' unstable attributions in the stability dimension (X=3.66) and male students' unstable attributions in the same dimension (X=3.35) [t(210)=3.446; p<0.05]. Finally, a significant difference is observed between female students' controllable attributions in the controllability dimension (X=3.72) and male students' controllable attributions in the same dimension (X=3.42) [t(210)=3.190; p<0.05].

When examining Table 5, it is evident that female students attribute their success in English to more internal, unstable, and controllable factors compared to male students. No statistically significant differences were found between male and female students' causal attributions for success in other dimensions.

**Table 6.** Comparison of Students' Causal Attributions for Failure Based on Gender Variable

|  |  | Gender | f | X. | S.d | t | Sd | p |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Locus of Control** | **Internal** | Female | 72 | 3.15 | 0.556 | -0.282 | 155 | 0.778 |
|  |  | Male | 85 | 3.18 | 0.622 |  |  |  |
|  | **External** | Female | 72 | 2.75 | 0.519 | -2.766 | 155 | 0.006 |
|  |  | Male | 85 | 2.99 | 0.554 |  |  |  |
| **Stability** | **Unstable** | Female | 72 | 3.01 | 0.493 | -0.157 | 155 | 0.876 |
|  |  | Male | 85 | 3.03 | 0.543 |  |  |  |
|  | **Stable** | Female | 72 | 2.97 | 0.591 | -1.902 | 155 | 0.059 |
|  |  | Male | 85 | 3.15 | 0.609 |  |  |  |
| **Controllability** | **Controllable** | Female | 72 | 3.24 | 0.535 | 0.341 | 155 | 0.733 |
|  |  | Male | 85 | 3.21 | 0.666 |  |  |  |
|  | **Uncontrollable** | Female | 72 | 2.81 | 0.531 | -2.398 | 155 | 0.018 |
|  |  | Male | 85 | 3.03 | 0.583 |  |  |  |

Table 6 shows the comparison of students' perceptions of failure across the dimensions of attribution theory based on gender. Accordingly, there is a statistically significant difference between female students' external attributions in the locus of control dimension (X=2.75) and male students' external attributions in the same dimension (X=2.99) [t(155) = -2.766; p<0.05]. Similarly, a significant difference is observed between female students' uncontrollable attributions in the controllability dimension (X=2.81) and male students' uncontrollable attributions in the same dimension (X=3.03) [t(155) = -2.398; p<0.05].

When examining Table 6, it is evident that male students attribute their failure in English to more external and uncontrollable factors compared to female students. No statistically significant differences were found between male and female students' causal attributions for failure in other dimensions.

### Findings Regarding the Fourth Sub-Problem

The results of the one-way ANOVA, which examines whether students' causal attributions for success and failure differ according to grade level, are presented in Table 7 and Table 8, respectively.

**Table 7.** Comparison of Students' Causal Attributions for Success by Grade Level

| | | Source of Variation | Sums of Squares | df | Mean of Squares | F | p | Diff.* (Tukey) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Locus of Control** | **Internal** | Between Groups | 10.643 | 3 | 3.548 | 10.564 | .000 | 2-3 |
| | | Within Groups | 69.850 | 208 | 0.336 | | | 2-4 |
| | | Total | 80.493 | 211 | | | | |
| | **External** | Between Groups | 6.649 | 3 | 2.216 | 5.727 | 0.000 | |
| | | Within Groups | 80.493 | 208 | 0.387 | | | 1-2 |
| | | Total | 87.142 | 211 | | | | 2-3 |
| **Stability** | **Unstable** | Between Groups | 10.249 | 3 | 3.416 | 8.481 | 0.001 | 2-3 |
| | | Within Groups | 83.788 | 208 | 0.403 | | | |
| | | Total | 94.037 | 211 | | | | |
| | **Stable** | Between Groups | 8.856 | 3 | 2.952 | 8.858 | 0.000 | 1-2 |
| | | Within Groups | 69.323 | 208 | 0.333 | | | 2-3 |
| | | Total | 78.179 | 211 | | | | 2-4 |
| **Controllability** | **Controllable** | Between Groups | 10.961 | 3 | 3.654 | 8.570 | 0.000 | |
| | | Within Groups | 88.676 | 208 | 0.426 | | | 2-3 |
| | | Total | 99.637 | 211 | | | | |
| | **Uncontrollable** | Between Groups | 8.127 | 3 | 2.709 | 7.957 | 0.000 | |
| | | Within Groups | 70.813 | 208 | 0.340 | | | 1-2 |
| | | Total | 78.940 | 211 | | | | 2-3 |

*1: 9th Grade, 2: 10th Grade, 3: 11th Grade, 4: 12th Grade

Students' causal attributions related to their success perceptions demonstrate significant differences based on grade level. In terms of locus of control, internal ($F_{(3-208)}= 10.564$; $p<.05$) and external ($F_{(3-208)}= 5.727$; $p<.05$) factors, as well as in terms of stability, unstable ($F_{(3-208)}= 8.481$; $p<.05$) and stable ($F_{(3-208)}= 8.858$; $p<.05$) attributions, and in terms of controllability, controllable ($F_{(3-208)}= 8.570$; $p<.05$) and uncontrollable ($F_{(3-208)}= 7.957$; $p<.05$) types, all sub-dimensions show significant differences across grade levels.

To identify the source of these differences, the Tukey post hoc test was employed. In interpreting the test results, the alpha level was adjusted using Bonferroni correction, dividing the 0.05 value by the number of comparisons. Thus, an alpha level of 0.008 was set as the criterion for interpreting Tukey test results.

In pairwise comparisons conducted through the Tukey test, in terms of the locus of control dimension, 11th grade students (M=4.10, SD=0.51) attribute their English success more to internal factors compared to 10th grade students (M=3.48, SD=0.63), and 12th grade students (M=3.87, SD=0.55) also show more internal attributions compared to 10th grade students (M=3.48, SD=0.63). Regarding external attributions, 10th grade students (M=3.44, SD=0.59) make fewer external attributions than both 9th grade (M=3.83, SD=0.61) and 11th grade students (M=3.89, SD=0.59). In

terms of stability, 10th grade students (M=3.21, SD=0.64) make fewer unstable attributions than students in all other grades. For controllability, 11th grade students (M=3.89, SD=0.56) have higher controllable attributions than 10th grade students (M=3.26, SD=0.71). In terms of uncontrollable attributions, there is a significant difference between 9th grade (M=4.05, SD=0.53) and 10th grade (M=3.64, SD=0.65) students, as well as between 11th grade (M=4.15, SD=0.52) and 10th grade (M=3.64, SD=0.65) students (p<.008).

**Table 8.** Comparison of Students' Causal Attributions for Perceived Failure by Grade Level

| | | Source of Variation | Sums of Squares | df | Mean of Squares | F | p |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Locus of Control** | **Internal** | Between Groups | 0.733 | 3 | 0.244 | 0.695 | 0.557 |
| | | Within Groups | 53.815 | 153 | 0.352 | | |
| | | Total | 54.548 | 156 | | | |
| | **External** | Between Groups | 0.347 | 3 | 0.116 | 0.377 | 0.770 |
| | | Within Groups | 46.921 | 153 | 0.307 | | |
| | | Total | 47.268 | 156 | | | |
| **Stability** | **Unstable** | Between Groups | 0.472 | 3 | 0.157 | 0.579 | 0.630 |
| | | Within Groups | 41.610 | 153 | 0.272 | | |
| | | Total | 42.082 | 156 | | | |
| | **Stable** | Between Groups | 1.990 | 3 | 0.663 | 1.834 | 0.143 |
| | | Within Groups | 55.340 | 153 | 0.362 | | |
| | | Total | 57.330 | 156 | | | |
| **Controllability** | **Controllable** | Between Groups | 1.900 | 3 | 0.633 | 1.734 | 0.162 |
| | | Within Groups | 55.888 | 153 | 0.365 | | |
| | | Total | 57.788 | 156 | | | |
| | **Uncontrollable** | Between Groups | 2.275 | 3 | 0.758 | 2.407 | 0.069 |
| | | Within Groups | 48.203 | 153 | 0.315 | | |
| | | Total | 50.479 | 156 | | | |

When examining Table 8, it is observed that students' causal attributions for perceived failure in English class do not differ by grade level in terms of internal (F(3-153) = 0.695; p>.05) and external (F(3-153) = 0.377; p>.05) attributions for the locus of control. Similarly, no differences by grade level were found in the stability dimension for unstable (F(3-153) = 0.579; p>.05) and stable (F(3-153) = 1.834; p>.05) attributions. Likewise, in the controllability dimension, controllable attributions (F(3-153) = 1.734; p>.05) and uncontrollable attributions (F(3-153) = 2.407; p>.05) do not show differences by grade level.

### Findings Regarding the Fifth Sub-Problem

The results of the one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) examining whether students' causal attributions for success and failure differ according to school type are presented in Tables 9 and 10, respectively.

**Table 9.** Comparison of Students' Causal Attributions for Success Based on the Type of High School

| | | Source of Variation | Sums of Squares | df | Mean of Squares | F | p |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Locus of Control** | **Internal** | Between Groups | 2.592 | 3 | 0.864 | 2.307 | 0.078 |
| | | Within Groups | 77.901 | 208 | 0.375 | | |
| | | Total | 80.493 | 211 | | | |
| | **External** | Between Groups | 2.092 | 3 | 0.697 | 1.706 | 0.167 |
| | | Within Groups | 85.050 | 208 | 0.409 | | |
| | | Total | 87.142 | 211 | | | |
| **Stability** | **Unstable** | Between Groups | 2.538 | 3 | 0.846 | 1.923 | 0.127 |
| | | Within Groups | 91.499 | 208 | 0.440 | | |
| | | Total | 94.037 | 211 | | | |
| | **Stable** | Between Groups | 0.254 | 3 | 0.085 | 0.226 | 0.878 |
| | | Within Groups | 77.925 | 208 | 0.375 | | |
| | | Total | 78.179 | 211 | | | |
| **Controllability** | **Controllable** | Between Groups | 2.705 | 3 | 0.902 | 1.935 | 0.125 |
| | | Within Groups | 96.931 | 208 | 0.466 | | |
| | | Total | 99.637 | 211 | | | |
| | **Uncontrollable** | Between Groups | 0.232 | 3 | 0.077 | 0.205 | 0.893 |
| | | Within Groups | 78.707 | 208 | 0.378 | | |
| | | Total | 78.940 | 211 | | | |

When Table 9 is examined, it is observed that students' causal attributions for success in English classes do not differ based on school type in terms of the locus of control, whether internal $(F(3,208) = 2.307; p>.05)$ or external $(F(3,208) = 1.706; p>.05)$. Similarly, there are no significant differences by school type in the dimension of stability, with neither unstable $(F(3,208) = 1.923; p>.05)$ nor stable $(F(3,208) = 0.226; p>.05)$ attributions showing variance. In terms of controllability, both controllable $(F(3,208) = 1.935; p>.05)$ and uncontrollable $(F(3,208) = 0.205; p>.05)$ attributions do not vary according to school type.

**Table 10.** Comparison of Students' Causal Attributions for Failure Based on the Type of High School

| | | Source of Variation | Sums of Squar | df | Mean of Square | F | p | Diff.* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Locus of Control** | **Internal** | Between Groups | 0.868 | 3 | 0.289 | 0.825 | 0.482 | |
| | | Within Groups | 53.68 | 153 | 0.351 | | | |
| | | Total | 54.54 | 156 | | | | |
| | **External** | Between Groups | 2.606 | 3 | 0.869 | 2.976 | 0.033 | 3-4 |
| | | Within Groups | 44.66 | 153 | 0.292 | | | |
| | | Total | 47.26 | 156 | | | | |
| **Stability** | **Unstable** | Between Groups | 1.329 | 3 | 0.443 | 1.663 | 0.177 | |
| | | Within Groups | 40.75 | 153 | 0.266 | | | |
| | | Total | 42.08 | 156 | | | | |
| | **Stable** | Between Groups | 0.531 | 3 | 0.177 | 0.477 | 0.699 | |
| | | Within Groups | 56.79 | 153 | 0.371 | | | |
| | | Total | 57.33 | 156 | | | | |
| **Controllability** | **Controllable** | Between Groups | 0.436 | 3 | 0.145 | 0.388 | 0.762 | |
| | | Within Groups | 57.35 | 153 | 0.375 | | | |
| | | Total | 57.78 | 156 | | | | |
| | **Uncontrollable** | Between Groups | 0.838 | 3 | 0.279 | 0.861 | 0.463 | |
| | | Within Groups | 49.64 | 153 | 0.324 | | | |
| | | Total | 50.47 | 156 | | | | |

1: Science High School, 2: Anatolian High School, 3: Imam Hatip High School, 4: Vocational and Technical High School

When Table 10 is examined, it is found that students' causal attributions regarding their perceptions of failure in English class show a statistically significant difference in the sub-dimension of external attributions according to the type of high school ($F_{(3-153)} = 2.976$; $p<.05$).

In the pairwise comparisons conducted using the Games-Howell test, the difference between Imam Hatip High School (mean = 2.65, SD = 0.57) and Vocational and Technical Anatolian High School (mean = 2.96, SD = 0.49) was found to be statistically significant ($p<0.05$). Accordingly, it can be said that students in vocational and technical education attribute their failures in English class to external factors at a higher level compared to Imam Hatip High School students.

**CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION**

In this study, which examined the causal attributions of high school students' perceived success and failure in English class through various variables, the findings are discussed here in relation to existing literature.

According to the research results, the first finding was whether high school students perceive themselves as successful in English class. It was found that the number of students who perceive themselves as successful is greater than those who perceive themselves as unsuccessful (See Table 2).

In the literature, there are studies with university students that show the opposite finding, where more students see themselves as unsuccessful (Taşkıran and Aydın, 2017; Özkardeş, 2011). According to Weiner (1986), individuals' beliefs about success or failure are the most critical factor affecting their success or failure, and learned helplessness is an obstacle to their success. Senemoğlu (2020) mentions that when an organism believes that conditions remain unchanged despite numerous efforts, it tends to generalize this belief to other situations. Therefore, increasing teachers' awareness of this issue is essential for guiding their actions to help students change their beliefs.

High school students incline to attribute their success and failure to various factors. For students who perceive themselves as successful in English, the most common attributions are internal, stable, and uncontrollable (See Table 3). As Weiner's (1986) theory suggests, a sense of success perceived as a result of internal attributions such as ability and effort is crucial because individuals are likely to find more motivation within themselves to sustain this success and take action. When examining the factors contributing to success in more detail, they include enjoyment in learning English, interest in the language, self-confidence, and having a successful teacher. The item with the highest average, "I have a successful teacher," is particularly noteworthy, suggesting implications for student autonomy. Similarly, Özkardeş (2011) found comparable results in a study with university students, which suggests that teachers should strive to foster autonomy among their students. On the other hand, the least attributed factors to students' perception of success are reading English books outside of school and feeling lucky in exams. In line with this, Taşkıran and Aydın (2017), in their study on preparatory class students' perceptions of success and failure, found that effort, an internal factor, was the most commonly used attribution for explaining success. Aydemir (2007), in a study with middle school students, reported that students attributed their success more to both internal and external factors.

When examining the causal attributions students make for their perceived failures, it is observed that they attribute failures to internal, stable, and controllable factors (See Table 4). According to Weiner (1986), attributing failure to internal, unstable, and controllable factors can positively influence future performance. This belief allows students to take action, knowing they can change the situation and exert additional effort to overcome their failures. In short, attributing failure to external, stable, and uncontrollable factors can lead students to lose their expectations of success and develop a sense of hopelessness. However, the findings of this study indicate that high school students attribute their English failures to internal, temporary, and controllable factors, which suggests that they have the motivation and inclination to reverse the situation.

On the other hand, Taşkıran and Aydın (2017) reported that university students incline to attribute their failures more to external, unstable, and uncontrollable factors. Thus, as students

progress in their educational levels, their perceptions of failure in English may evolve toward learned helplessness, leading them to exert less effort to change their situation in the future. Therefore, it can be inferred that high school students are at an advantage compared to university students in terms of reversing their perceived failures in English classes.

The results of examining students' causal attributions for success and failure based on gender indicate that female students attribute their success in English classes to more internal, unstable, and controllable factors compared to male students (See Table 5). Upon closer analysis, it is seen that female students link their success in English to internal factors (such as enjoying learning English, having interest in the subject, and self-confidence), temporary factors (such as watching films in English, asking for help, and carefully listening to the teacher), and controllable factors (such as knowing how to study, watching films in English, and listening attentively to the teacher). Similar findings have been noted in the literature (Özkardeş, 2011). Likewise, in a study conducted with university students, Koçyiğit (2011) reported that male students tend to make more external attributions for their successes compared to female students.

When examining causal attributions for failure in English classes, it is observed that male students attribute their failures to more external and uncontrollable factors compared to female students (See Table 6). A more detailed analysis reveals that male students relate their failures in English to external (such as exams being difficult, insufficient class hours), stable (such as not knowing how to study, feeling nervous during exams), and uncontrollable (such as fear of failure in class, perceiving English as difficult) factors more frequently than female students. Aydemir (2007) noted that, regarding failure attributions, female students tend to use more internal attributions, while male students tend to use external attributions more often. Dille and Mezack (1991) also highlighted that students who frequently use external attributions generally have lower resilience in coping with challenges. Therefore, based on their attributions, it can be inferred that female students may have a higher likelihood of improving their English performance in the future compared to male students.

The analysis of students' causal attributions for success and failure by grade level reveals that while attributions for failure show no significant difference across grade levels, attributions for success vary significantly (See Table 7 and 8). Similarly, Koçyiğit (2011), in a study conducted with university students, reported that causal attributions for failure do not differ by grade level. According to this study, 10th-grade students tend to use fewer internal and external attributions compared to students in other grades. In contrast, 11th and 12th graders use more internal attributions than 10th graders. Peacock (2010) noted that students with higher English proficiency tend to attribute their success mainly to internal factors, whereas students with lower proficiency levels often attribute it to external factors. Given that 11th and 12th graders have taken more English courses compared to 9th

and 10th graders, the results of this study align with the other works. A similar pattern is observed in other dimensions of attribution theory, where 11th-grade students attribute their success to more stable and uncontrollable factors than students in lower grades.

The analysis of students' causal attributions for success and failure by type of high school reveals that causal attributions for success do not differ by school type (See Table 9). However, attributions for failure differ specifically in the sub-dimension of external attributions between students in religious high schools and those in vocational and technical high schools (See Table 10). Accordingly, students attending vocational and technical schools attribute their failures to external factors more frequently than students in religious high schools. This tendency towards external attributions for failure is a common finding in the literature. For instance, Aydın (2006) found that vocational high school students had lower English achievement levels compared to students in other types of high schools. Therefore, when examining vocational high school students' causal attributions for failure in English, it could be inferred that they may be at a psychological disadvantage in terms of reversing their perception of failure in English compared to students in religious high schools.

### Recommendations

1. English teachers may have students in their classes who perceive themselves as unsuccessful. Teachers should not overlook the relationship between the perception of failure and students' beliefs and should emphasize the importance of this topic in their classes.

2. Analyzing students' causal attributions for success suggests that they may be in a dependent position on their teachers regarding their learning. Therefore, teachers should seek ways and methods to provide students with greater autonomy in their lessons.

3. To prevent high school students' perceptions of failure from evolving into learned helplessness, teachers should pay special attention, particularly in the early years of high school education.

4. Teachers working in vocational high schools should be more sensitive in taking measures to increase students' motivation towards English classes.

5. Researchers conducting similar studies may consider using qualitative methods to examine the attributions of high schoolers regarding success and failure in English classes. Additionally, this study could be conducted with primary school students to explore if different results are obtained.

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The authors declare no competing interest.

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## APPENDICES

The Relationship Between the Most Commonly Attributed Factors and the Dimensions of the Theory

|  | **Locus of Control** | **Stability** | **Controllability** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Ability | Internal | Stable | Uncontrollable |
| Effort | Internal | Unstable | Controllable |
| Luck | External | Unstable | Uncontrollable |
| Task Difficulty | External | Stable | Uncontrollable |
| Strategy | Internal | Unstable | Controllable |
| Interest | Internal | Unstable | Controllable |
| Family | External | Stable | Uncontrollable |
| Teacher | External | Stable | Uncontrollable |
| School System | External | Stable | Uncontrollable |
| Classroom Environment | External | Stable | Uncontrollable |
| Health | External | Unstable | Uncontrollable |

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