Causal Attributions of Success and Failure: A Comparison of Madrassah and Secondary School Students

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Abstract

The study was conducted to do comparisons of causal attributions of success and failure in the population of two different streams of education in Pakistan. The researchers gathered data on eight causal attributions namely ability, effort, use of strategy, task interest, luck, difficulty of task, influence of teacher and influence of parents. The sample comprised of 1826 students from both streams of education (619 madrassah and 1207 secondary school students). There were 1023 students from district Lahore and 803 students from district Faisalabad. Two madrassah each and eight secondary schools each were randomly selected for data collection. The results showed that learners had same identical patterns of success attributions where as they had different patterns of failure attributions. According to mean scores secondary school students had a higher mean score on success attributions of effort, use of strategy and influence of parents than the madrassah students.

Key Words: Attributions, Success, Failure, Madrassah, Secondary school, District

Introduction

Causal attributions describe the occurrence of events and behaviors in our lives. Mostly justifications are given when things happening around are not up to the satisfaction level of our expectations. One can say that causal attributions is the answer to the questions dealing with "why"? The process of providing rationalization helps in maintaining esteem and ego. The researchers around the globe are busy in dealing with attributional research on different levels and in different settings(Boruchovitch, 2004; Forsyth, Story, Kelley,& McMillan, 2009;Gipps & Tunstall 1998; Hui, 2001; Hovemyr, 1998; Lei, 2009; Nenty, 2010).

According to Weiner (2010), attribution is the process of creating interpretation regarding the events and behaviors unfolding around them. The person may go for situational (external) or dispositional (internal) attributions. As far as failure attribution arranged as per mean scores, it was observed that madrassah students and secondary school students had different patterns of failure attributions. It was seen that madrassah students considered parental influence, effort and teacher influence as major causes of their failure. On the other hand, secondary school students considered effort, parental influence and teacher influence as major causes of their failure.

The process of attributions particularly starts in a situation which is confronted as an unanticipated or undesirable occasion. In any educational situation, failing a class test would breed questions of why (Tobin, 2012). Weiner (1976) gave away a set of four aspects as attributes such as ability and effort as dispositional attributions while task difficulty and luck as situational attributions. The researchers from that day on ward conducted research on attribution theory that is still considered to be a novel idea in the realm of achievement motivation. The research on attribution theory (which is not a single theory, rather an amalgamations of theories) shed considerable light on the manners people use in understanding reasons behind events, their biases employed, benefits associated and the inferences linked with particular attributes in different domains of action (Tobin, 2012). Usually people give credit to their own self to their success and link it to dispositional attributes. When it comes to failure circumstances, situational attributes are associated (Hunter & Barker, 1987).

According to Weiner (2008), causal attribution research is quite attractive to researchers as learners respond to questions of why at the eve of grades. For Weiner (2005), any outcome related to assessment of students, breeds causal attributions of success and failure. The positive results infer happiness for learners. But if the fallout is contrary to success, inferences are made as failure attributes. Weiner (2007) described anxiety as a most harmful emotions of all that ascends from received appraisals. Other emotions emerged are jealousy, regret, anger, annoyance, guilt, shame, sympathy and appreciation etc.

A number of ways and means are applied by researchers to study and evaluate causal attributions of learners. Proudfoot, Corr, Guest and Gray (2001) studied various ways and gathered them under four wide ranging classifications. The first types of methods is the scales employed by researchers who provide a list of attributions and the respondents have to select and rate from the given options. The second type of methods give free opportunity to people for

attributions and its researcher's task to give ratings to those attributions. In third types of methods employed by researchers, content is analyzed analytically from the available written records. The last type describes self-assumed personally rated attributions of the respondents. Important researchers who developed attribution scales include Russell (1982, 1992), Vispoel and Austin (1995), Weiner (1976, 2005, and 2008), Forsyth (2009).

Attribution beliefs vary among different groups on the basis of age and gender. It is also seen that these beliefs are different in different cultures. Literature on attribution also highlights that attributions changes if one is talking about others. The present study was planned by keeping different viewpoints of attributional research taken place in and outside the national context.

Present Study

In Pakistan, there are different streams of education such as public schools, private schools and madrassah system of education. Causal attributions of success and failure have been studied in secondary school population and madrassah education but no serious effort has been made to compare both streams of education. The current study was planned to measure causal attributions of success and failure in both madrassah education and secondary school students in two districts. The objectives of the study were not only to study the patterns of success and failure attributions but also to compare two different streams of education presently taking place in district Lahore and district Faisalabad.

Research Methodology

Sample

The sample comprised of 1826 students from both streams of education (619 madrassah and 1207 secondary school students); two madrassah each were taken from two districts. There were eight secondary schools selected randomly from each district. The data were collected from district Lahore and district Faisalabad. There were 1023 students from district Lahore and 803 students from district Faisalabad. The self-administered questionnaire dealing with eight causal attributions was used for data collection. The details of questionnaire development, reliability and validity can be seen in Farid & Akhter (2017). The questionnaire had two identical forms i.e. one for success attributions and the other for failure attributions.

Table 1

Sample of the Study

Districts	Madrassah (619)	Secondary Schools (1207)
Lahore (1023)	2	8
Faisalabad (803)	2	8

Results

Table 2 and 3 describe mean scores of the success attributions and failure attributions. The order of success attributions and failure attributions are arranged from lower to higher means.

Table 2

Causal Attributions Beliefs of Madrassah & Secondary School Students

Success Scale	Madrassah (619)		Secondary School (1207)	
	M	SD	M	SD
Difficulty of task	3.53	1.250	3.53	1.244
Luck	3.72	1.154	3.68	1.144
Use of strategy	3.89	1.065	3.98	1.021
Ability	3.95	1.158	4.01	1.124
Task interest	3.99	1.065	4.00	1.071
Influence of teacher	4.04	1.148	4.10	1.139
Effort	4.07	1.002	4.14	991
Influence of parents	4.15	1.164	4.23	1.079

As far as success attribution arranged as per mean scores, madrassah students and secondary school students have same pattern of success attributions. The success attributions were arranged from lowest to highest order (mean scores). The arrangement of success attributes were from difficulty of task, luck, use of strategy, ability, task interest, influence of teacher, effort and influence of parents.

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Causal Attributions Beliefs of Madrassah & Secondary School Students

Failure Scale	Madrassah (619)		Secondary School (1207)	
	M	SD	M	SD
Ability	3.85	1.203	3.93	1.156
Effort	4.06	1.040	4.15	.981
Use of strategy	3.92	1.085	3.98	1.029
Task interest	3.96	1.109	3.99	1.109
Luck	3.76	1.181	3.71	1.181
Difficulty of task	3.50	1.296	3.44	1.298
Influence of teacher	4.01	1.160	4.06	1.174

Influence of parents	4.09	1.158	4.15	1.133

As far as failure attribution arranged as per mean scores, it was observed that madrassah students and secondary school students had different patterns of failure attributions. It was seen that madrassah students considered parental influence, effort and teacher influence as major causes of their failure. On the other hand, secondary school students considered effort, parental influence and teacher influence as major causes of their failure.

Independent samples t-test was used to measure difference in success attributions of students in both streams. One can see in table 4, that only three success attributions had significant mean difference namely effort, use of strategy and influence of parents.

According to mean scores secondary school students had a higher mean score on success attributions of effort (M=4.18) than the madrassah students (M=4.07), use of strategy (M= 4.03), (M=3.89) and influence of parents (M= 4.27), (M= 4.15).

Table 4

Comparison of Success Causal Attributions Beliefs of Madrassah & Secondary School Students

Attributions	Student Type	*N*	*M*	*SD*	*DF*	*T*	*P*
Ability	Madrassah	619	3.95	1.158	1824	-	.091
	SS Students	1207	4.04	1.104		1.69	
Effort	Madrassah	619	4.07	1.002	1824	-	.018*
	SS Students	1207	4.18	.984		2.37	
Use of strategy	Madrassah	619	3.89	1.065	1824	-	.004*
	SS Students	1207	4.03	.995		2.86	
Task interest	Madrassah	619	3.99	1.065	1824	-	.781
	SS Students	1207	4.01	1.074		.278	
Luck	Madrassah	619	3.72	1.154	1824	1.08	.280
	SS Students	1207	3.66	1.139			
Difficulty of task	Madrassah	619	3.53	1.250	1824	-	.858
	SS Students	1207	3.54	1.241		.179	
Influence of teacher	Madrassah	619	4.04	1.148	1824	-	.118
	SS Students	1207	4.13	1.133		1.56	
Influence of parents	Madrassah	619	4.15	1.164	1824	-	.022*
	SS Students	1207	4.27	1.030		2.29	

*p<0.05

Independent samples t-test was used to measure difference in failure attributions of students in both streams. Table 5 shows that only two failure attributions had significant mean difference namely ability and effort.

According to mean scores secondary school students had a higher mean score on failure attributions of ability (M= 3.98), than the madrassah students (M=3.85) and effort (M=4.19) (M=4.06).

Table 5

Comparison of Failure Causal Attributions Beliefs of Madrassah & Secondary School Students

Attributions	Student Type	*N*	*M*	*SD*	*DF*	*T*	*P*
Ability	Madrassah	619	3.85	1.203	1824	-	.022*
	SS Students	1207	3.98	1.129		2.298	
Effort	Madrassah	619	4.06	1.040	1824	-	.007*
	SS Students	1207	4.19	.946		2.702	
Use of strategy	Madrassah	619	3.92	1.085	1824	-	.062
	SS Students	1207	4.02	.999		1.866	
Task interest	Madrassah	619	3.96	1.109	182	-	.344
	SS Students	1207	4.01	1.109	4	.947	
Luck	Madrassah	619	3.76	1.181	1824	1.313	.189
	SS Students	1207	3.68	1.181			
Difficulty of task	Madrassah	619	3.50	1.296	1824	1.363	.173
	SS Students	1207	3.41	1.298			
Influence of teacher	Madrassah	619	4.01	1.160	1824	-	.223
	SS Students	1207	4.08	1.181		1.219	
Influence of parents	Madrassah	619	4.09	1.206	1824	-	.090
	SS Students	1207	4.18	1.092		1.697	

*p<0.05

Independent samples t-test was used to measure difference in success attributions of students in both streams studying in two districts. It is clear in table 5, that from eight listed attribution, six success attributions had significant mean difference namely ability, effort, use of strategy, task interest, luck and difficulty of task.

According to mean scores students from district Lahore had a higher mean scores on success attributions of ability (M= 4.09), than the students of district Faisalabad (M= 3.90), effort (M=4.29), (M= 3.95), use of strategy (M= 4.04), (M=3.90), task difficulty (M= 4.11), (M= 3.86). As far as luck is considered, means score of students of district Faisalabad (M= 3.74) is greater than that of students from district Lahore (M= 3.62), and same is the case with difficulty of task where students from Faisalabad showed higher mean score (M= 3.66), than students of district Lahore (M= 3.43).

Table 6

Comparison of District Wise Success Causal Attributions Beliefs of Madrassah & Secondary

School Students

Attributions	District	N	M	SD	DF	T	P
Ability	Lahore	1023	4.09	1.075	1824	3.53	.000*
	Faisalabad	803	3.90	1.175			
Effort	Lahore	1023	4.29	.876	1824	7.47	.000*
	Faisalabad	803	3.95	1.092			
Use of strategy	Lahore	1023	4.04	1.001	1824	3.03	.002*
	Faisalabad	803	3.90	1.041			
Task interest	Lahore	1023	4.11	1.011	1824	5.11	.000*
	Faisalabad	803	3.86	1.127			
Luck	Lahore	1023	3.62	1.154	1824	-	.025*
	Faisalabad	803	3.74	1.128		2.24	
Difficulty of task	Lahore	1023	3.43	1.239	1824	-	.000*
	Faisalabad	803	3.66	1.239		4.01	
Influence of teacher	Lahore	1023	4.12	1.144	1824	1.07	.285
	Faisalabad	803	4.06	1.131			
Influence of parents	Lahore	1023	4.26	1.067	1824	1.44	.150
	Faisalabad	803	4.19	1.093			

*p<0.05

Independent samples t-test was used to measure difference in failure attributions of students in both streams studying in two districts. Table 7 shows that from eight failure attribution, six failure attributions had significant mean difference including ability, effort, use of strategy, task interest, luck and influence of the teacher. The means score described that students from district Lahore had a greater mean score than students from district Faisalabad. Ability (M=4.00), (M= 3.85). Effort (M=4.27), (M= 3.98). Use of strategy (M= 4.03), (M=3.93). Task interest (M=4.06), (M= 3.91). Influence of the teacher (M=4.12), (M= 3.98). As far as luck as failure attribution is concerned students from Faisalabad district showed higher mean score (M= 3.64) than students of Lahore district (M=3.79).

Table 7

Comparison of District Wise Failure Causal Attributions Beliefs of Madrassah & Secondary

School Students

Attributions	District	N	M	SD	DF	T	P
Ability	Lahore	1023	4.00	1.110	1824	2.84	.004*
	Faisalabad	803	3.85	1.207		8	
Effort	Lahore	1023	4.27	.891	1824	6.38	.000*
	Faisalabad	803	3.98	1.063		5	

Use of strategy	Lahore	1023	4.03	1.003	1824	2.008	.045*
	Faisalabad	803	3.93	1.060			
Task interest	Lahore	1023	4.06	1.085	1824	2.835	.005*
	Faisalabad	803	3.91	1.133			
Luck	Lahore	1023	3.64	1.202	1824	-2.58	.010*
	Faisalabad	803	3.79	1.150			
Difficulty of task	Lahore	1023	3.40	1.272	1824	-1.75	.080
	Faisalabad	803	3.50	1.327			
Influence of teacher	Lahore	1023	4.12	1.149	1824	2.450	.014*
	Faisalabad	803	3.98	1.202			
Influence of parents	Lahore	1023	4.15	1.160	1824	-.076	.939
	Faisalabad	803	4.15	1.097			

*$p < 0.05$

Discussion & Conclusions

The study was designed to study causal attributions of success and failure in two different streams of students studying in Pakistan. A self-reporting research instruments was used to collect data from students. The sample comprised of 1826 students from both streams of education (619 madrassah and 1207 secondary school students). The data were collected from two districts. According to means score, both the madrassah students and secondary school students had same patterns of success attributions. The pattern of failure attributions was different in both types of students. Attributional research is full of studies that proclaim that there is no single fixed type of attributions but there is always room for extracting variety of categories of attributions (Nenty, 2010: Weiner, 2010: Forsyth, Story,Kelley & McMillan, 2009: Vispoel& Austin, 1995: Bar-Tal, 1978). There are multiple types of causes that can increase possibilities of success. Similarly, there are chances that can hamper the success and results in failure (Forsyth,Story, Kelley & McMillan, 2009).

There are some limitations in the study that is natural to every research study. Due to shortage of time and constraints in financial resources, a limited number of attributions were studied. Future researchers can expand on the list of attributions and also on sample so that they can get deeper picture of attributions. A comparative study can be designed by including private sector students in the sample. A number of ways and means are applied by researchers to study and evaluate causal attributions of learners. Proudfoot, Corr, Guest and Gray (2001) studied various ways and gathered them under four wide ranging classifications. The first types of methods is the scales employed by researchers who provide a list of attributions and the respondents have to select and rate from the given options. The second type of methods give free

opportunity to people for attributions and its researcher's task to give ratings to those attributions. In third types of methods employed by researchers, content is analyzed analytically from the available written records. The last type describes self-assumed personally rated attributions of the respondents. Important researchers who developed attribution scales include Russell (1982, 1992), Vispoel and Austin (1995), Weiner (1976, 2005, and 2008), Forsyth (2009).

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