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**SUCCESS AND FAILURE ATTRIBUTIONS OF ACADEMIC STAFF STUDYING
FOR FOREIGN LANGUAGE ACHIEVEMENT TESTS**

THESIS BY

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We **certify** that this thesis under the title of “**SUCCESS AND FAILURE ATTRIBUTIONS OF ACADEMIC STAFF STUDYING FOR FOREIGN LANGUAGE ACHIEVEMENT TESTS**” is satisfactory for the award of the degree of **Master of Arts** in the Department of **English Language Teaching**.

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ÖZET

YABANCI DİL SEVİYE TESPİT SINAVLARINA HAZIRLANAN AKADEMİK PERSONELLERİN BAŞARI VE BAŞARISIZLIK ATIFLARI

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Bu çalışmada, Türkiye’de yapılan yabancı dil seviye tespit sınavlarına hazırlanan akademik personellerin başarı ve başarısızlıklarını nasıl kavramsallaştırdıkları araştırılmıştır. Bu çalışmaya, YDS’ ye hazırlanan akademisyenler katılmıştır.

Bu çalışma iki farklı konuya değinmektedir: “Yabancı dil sınavlarına hazırlanan akademisyenler hazırlandıkları sınavda başarılı olma kanısını nasıl kavramsallaştırıyor?” “Yabancı dil sınavlarına akademisyenlerin hazırlandıkları sınavda başarılı ya da başarısız olma sebeplerini nelere dayandırıyorlar?”

Veri toplamak için öz değerlendirme ve anket ve öz değerlendirme verilerini desteklemek amacıyla katılımcılara yarı yapılandırılmış sözlü görüşme yöntemi uygulanmıştır.

Sonuçlara göre, iyi iş çıkarma kanısı anlamında “Alınan puan”, “Başkalarıyla kıyas” ve “Başkalarından gelen dönütler” en çok dile getirilen atıflardı. Buna ek olarak, başarı nedeni olarak “Çok çalışmak” ve “yetenek” başarısızlık nedeni olarak da “çaba” ve “görevin zorluğu” sınava hazırlanan akademisyenlerin en çok yansıttığı atıflardı. Ayrıca, çalışma içerisinde elde edilen bulguların olası sebepleri, ilgili çıkarımlar ve öneriler de sunulmuştur.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Yabancı Dil Seviye Tespit Sınavı, Başarı ve Başarısızlık Atıfları,
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ABSTRACT

SUCCESS AND FAILURE ATTRIBUTIONS OF ACADEMIC STAFF STUDYING FOR FOREIGN LANGUAGE ACHIEVEMENT TESTS

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In this paper, how the academic staff who study for YDS exam conceptualize their success and failure attributions is studied. Academic staff who studied for YDS examination took part in this study.

This study refers to 2 different subjects: “How do the Academic staff who study for YDS exam conceptualize their notion of ‘doing well’ in the exam?” and “What reasons do Academic staff who study for YDS exam attribute their success and failure to?”

Self-assessment survey and questionnaire were applied for data collection and in order to support the data obtained through self-assessment, an online semi-structured interview was conducted.

According to the results, in terms of the notion of doing well ‘score’, comparing with others and feedbacks from others’ were the most frequently stated attributions.

In one hand, most frequently stated attributions for success were ‘effort and ability’. On the other hand, most frequently stated attributions for failure were ‘effort and task difficulty’. Moreover, possible reasons for the data obtained, related deductions and suggestions were presented in the study.

Key words: Foreign language Achievement Test, Success and Failure Attribution, Academic Staff

ABBREVIATIONS

YDS	: Foreign Language Achievement Test
BALLI	: Beliefs about Language Learning Inventory
L1	: Mother Tongue
L2	: Second Language
FL	: Foreign language
MA	: Master of Arts

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CHAPTER I

1. INTRODUCTION

This study focuses on academic staff's success and failure attributions and their conceptualization the notion of doing well in a national examination called Foreign Language Achievement Test which is known as YDS in Turkey. This chapter presents the background of the study, statement of the problem and the purpose of the study. Then, the research questions and the limitations of the study are pointed out.

1.1. Background to the Study

In the field of learning and teaching a foreign language, some factors have attracted relatively little attention and these are the reasons that learners construct for their successes and failures in learning a new language. Two major psychological perspectives that shed light on this matter are constructivism and attribution theory are the two main perspectives that illuminate this case. Attribution theory sheds light on understanding of learners' motivation in the learning process.

Despite originating in the work of Heider (1944), attribution theory's most influential exponent has been Weiner (1986), whose "statement of theory" has been widely accepted as guideline in this field (Rogers, 1987). Upon Heider's work, Weiner added some dimensions such as locus of control, stability and controllability to the original concept.

Attribution theory (Weiner, 1985) emphasizes people's notions about themselves and how they explain their perceived successes and failures. Attribution is the process of assigning a cause to a specific event. Every person seeks reasons for success and failure and as a result, similar future situations can be predicted beforehand.

On the other hand, attribution theory is not made use of only in education. It has also been made use of in a great number of disciplines such as sports, economy, psychology and so forth. The reason behind attribution theory's being used in many fields is to do with its being a part of human psychology.

Initial researches on motivation for learning a foreign language were applied by Gardner and Lambert (1972). In the 1990's, Deci and Ryan (1985) presented a more educational

psychological aspect of learners to enlighten motivation with internal and external motivation for learning foreign languages. Dornyei (2001, 2003) utilized psychological elements more comprehensively in foreign language learning with expectancy value theories, achievement motivation, self-efficacy theory, social motivation.

Weiner (1986, 2000) assumed that attributions derive from a person's self-perceptions, which have impact on their feelings, expectancy, perspectives, and beliefs about their proficiency and motivation.

In his early writings, Weiner indicated that there were four major reasons that people attributed outcomes in situations involving achievement to, namely ability, effort, task difficulty, and luck (Weiner, 1979).

Studies about attribution theory in language learning are relatively limited and very few studies have related attribution theory to exam preparation. For this reason this study was undertaken to explain how motivational factors take part in the process of exam preparation.

1.2. Statement of the Problem

There is little awareness among the language teachers about the significance of taking students' success and failure attributions into account while teaching a foreign language to academic staff. Similarly, there is little awareness among the learners who are preparing for national exam (YDS) about the importance of causal attributions. Therefore, learning process can be affected negatively especially for the ones who prepare for national exams in Turkey.

In Turkey, there are at least half a million people that go in for YDS exam, most of whom have little opinion about what causes their success or failure. Being aware of success and failure attributions are of great importance in predicting similar future situations. YDS through which people get their score of language level before being admitted to the posts in their own field, is an exam which is conducted twice a year.

As it is a difficult and challenging exam, academic staff exert a great deal of time, effort and money to get a good score. However, these people exert time, money and effort without knowing the causes of their success and failure. During a process in which people prepare for an exam, people must know the causes which lead to success and failure. Otherwise, learning process during the exam preparation can be affected, repetitively,

negatively. Repetitive negative outcomes of a matter can be avoided through awareness of the positive and negative actions.

1.3. Research Questions

This study seeks answers to the following questions:

- 1) How do academic staff conceptualize the notion of doing well in the exam they are studying for?
- 2) What reasons do academic staff attribute to their perceived successes and failures in the exam they are studying for?

1.4. Justification for the Study

In Turkey, almost every career pursuer has to take English language tests to prove their English level in order to be admitted or promoted in their field. YDS, a national foreign language examination, is one of the ways to prove individuals' level of English. While studying for this examination, exam takers' perceived successes and failures are very important to enhance the learning and studying conditions.

It is vital that success and failure attributions be predicted in the course of exam preparation period. Therefore, with the help of the present study, standard of learning and preparation for an exam process will be improved by learning the students' success and failure attributions.

1.5. Definition of Terms

Attribution: the act of attributing or ascribing, as a quality, character, feature, or function, to a thing or person, an effect to a cause.

Motivation: the psychological feature that arouses an organism to action toward a desired goal; the reason for the action.

Success: an event that accomplishes its intended purpose.

Failure: an act or instance of failing or proving unsuccessful; lack of success

Attribution theory: motivational theory looking at how the average person constructs the meaning of an event based on his /her motives to find a cause and his/her knowledge of the environment.

Intrinsic: belonging to a person by her/his very nature.

Extrinsic: not contained in or belonging to a person; external; outward.

Ability: power or capacity to do or act mentally, physically.

Luck: the force that seems to operate for good or ill in a person's life, as in shaping events or opportunities.

Task difficulty: the fact or condition of being difficult of a piece of work assigned to or expected of a person.

Effort: exertion of physical or mental power.

Locus of causality: the scene, the place of an event or action.

Stable: not subject to a change or variation.

Unstable: subject to a change or variation.

Doing well: to accomplish what is attempted or intended.

CHAPTER II

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This chapter aims to provide a background for the present research by reviewing the relevant literature on attribution theory.

2.1. Attribution Theory

It is necessary to understand exactly what the term ‘attribution’ means. It is a causal explanation of the individual for an event or behavior. For instance, when a student observes another student performing a procedure incorrectly in the classroom, s/he probably tries to form an attributional explanation for this behavior. The observer can conclude that his/her peer lacks of ability, meaning that the observer is associating the behavior with insufficient skills. Likewise, people can create beliefs about their own performances. For example, a student might attribute his/her success in memorizing vocabulary items to his/her intelligence and effort, or to good luck. As the number of the examples increases, the attribution process is people are likely to engage in increases. Every action that results in success or failure forces us to form attributions. We do not notice forming attributions as this process is so automatic. However, a number of researches suggest that forming causal attributions is of great importance for adapting to changing environments and coping with the difficulties we face in our daily lives. In the case of experiencing unpleasant outcomes, attributions help us avoid the behaviors and other factors of the failure we experienced. Likewise, when a desirable result achieved, attributions help us make out the cause of the success. So, we can achieve the similar success through attributions. Attribution theory suggests that attributions for these outcomes ultimately help to form emotional and behavioral responses (Weiner, 1985).

Attribution theory suggests that people try to determine the reason behind the thing they do, that is, interpret and determine causes to an event or behavior. Causal attributions can be various depending on the task, the culture, the person, and the social group (Graham, 1991). Variations in attributions have been referred for self-esteem performance and for social status). The reason why causal attributions vary is the different perception of different individuals.

The importance of trying to find out logical causes to human behavior dates back to 1739. In his essay ‘A Treatise of Human Nature’ David Hume (1739) pointed out the importance of understanding the reasoning behind the successes and failures. Even though

Hume stated the significance of the reasoning earlier, causal attributions had not been empirically studied before 1958 when the first theory of attribution was developed by Fritz Heider (1958). It is vital for learners to explain the reasons for their successes or failures about their learning from the cognitive point of view in order for the reason behind the success or failure to be made clear as a support for future success or prevention of failure.

Students' beliefs and ideas on their ability to determine the result of an assigned task are assumed to have an important role in their actions, motivation, and achievement (Weiner, 1986). This field of study is significant in terms of language teaching and learning as well, since it is closely related to models of motivation that explore factors that shed light on effective language learning. These models propose that effective language learning can occur provided learners can actively attach meaning to their learning conditions. Weiner's attribution theory is mainly concerned with the level of success or achievement, and perceptions of how those achievements were attained or how failure occurred.

Attributions mean people's clear and implicit perspective of the causes of events for the outcomes of events (Heider, 1958). Heider argued that people often make attributions about their own situations and others'. Through these attributions people get an idea to organize their environment and thoughts, to make sense of the reality around them and to achieve harmony and balance inside. According to Heider, people explain a success or a failure either by attributing it to external, controllable factors or to internal uncontrollable ones.

Upon Heider's conclusions, Weiner (1969) designed and developed a model of causal attributions by identifying three causal dimensions about people's perceptions of event and the result of that event. These are stability, controllability, and locus of causality.

The locus of control dimension has two aspects: internal and external locus of control. The stability dimension is as to whether causes change over time or not. For instance, while ability and effort are both internal factors, ability can be classified as a stable construct. And effort is unstable.

According to Weiner, the most important factors that affect attributions are ability, effort, task difficulty, and luck (see Table 1.). And attributions are classified along three causal dimensions, namely;

1. locus of control
2. stability

3. controllability

The ‘locus of causality’ is as to whether a cause for success or failure is thought as being internal or external to the person. ‘Ability and effort’, for example, can be considered as internal, while ‘task difficulty and luck’ are classified as external.

The table below shows the dimensions of causal attributions.

Table 1. Weiner’s Original Model of Attribution

Dimensions and Elements		
	Locus of Causality	
	Internal	External
Stable	Ability	task difficulty
Unstable	Effort	luck

Note. Taken from Biddle, 1993, p. 440.

Cause of the result is considered to be either internal or external. As shown in the table 1, locus of causality is divided into two categories as internal and external.

The ‘stability’ dimension means whether a cause is fixed and stable, or variable and unstable over time. That is, a cause for success or failure can change in time or it will always remain the same is the concept determining the stability. Stability has direct impact on people’s life. Weiner stated that depression, feeling exhausted and resignation would be a result of internal and stable attributions of failure. He also assumed that attributing failure to stable uncontrollable factors would trigger feelings of helplessness as these factors are out of their reach to change the course.

‘Controllability’ indicates how much control a person can have over a cause. Controlling a cause depends on its being tied with your capacity, ability or effort.

The effect of ‘luck’ or ‘task difficulty’ would both be uncontrollable by an examination taker. In addition, an outcome of an examination can be attributed to a number of other factors such as teachers, concentration, mood, illness, personality, and mental state. Therefore, locus of the cause, stability and controllability dimensions are of great importance in attribution theory to make out the causes behind success or failures of people.

Table 2 indicates the beliefs about the reason for success and failure that are classified according to ‘locus, stability, and controllability’.

Table 2. Causes of Success and Failure, Classified According to Locus, Stability, and Controllability

		Locus of Causality			
		Internal		External	
		Stable	Unstable	Stable	Unstable
Controllable	typical effort	immediate effort	teacher bias	unusual help from others	
Uncontrollable	ability	mood	task difficulty	luck	

Note. Taken from Weiner, 1979, p. 7

In table 2, locus, stability and the controllability of the attributions are indicated. As an example, ‘luck attribution’ can be classified as ‘external, unstable and uncontrollable’. This means that a causal attribution is associated with not only one dimension.

Weiner (1986, 1992) added other factors to the ones stated above. He found out that learners consider task difficulty, peer influence and situations in which they are as factors affecting their success and failure.

Factors such as interest, stress and learners’ readiness have been added to this field by recent studies (Romey 2010). Weiner (1980) claimed that ability, effort, luck and other people are the dominant causal attributions. Bounded up with these attributions he designed four

attributions for each success and failure. Matching for success are: ability-competence and confidence; effort-relaxation; others-gratitude; and luck-surprise. And matching for failure, the attribution-affect links are: ability–incompetence; effort-guilt and shame; others-anger, and luck-surprise and frustration.

To understand people's way of making sense of their successes and failures, Fritz Heider began to design the model which was named as “a naive psychology of the layperson” in the 1940s and 50s (Heider, 1958). A focus of Heider's theory was that it was how people made out events rather than the events in themselves that affected behavior. Heider suggested that people would refer to a limited range of internal (personal) and external (environmental) factors when they were asked to state the causes for the results of events or the behaviors.

Psychologist Bernard Weiner suggested his own version of attribution theory in 1970s together with Heider's view of attribution and the theory of control (William and Burden, 2000). Weiner redesigned his attribution theory in 1980s, which is “the most systematic theory to explain learning motivation” (Zhang, 2000, p.163).

Weiner found out and suggested that, on the whole, people refer to six main sets of attributions for their perceived successes and failures after a large number of researches:

1. ability,
2. effort,
3. task difficulty,
4. luck,
5. physical and mental condition,
6. others (which refers to some effect from other elements, such as the help from family, feedbacks from other people).

And the six attributions can be classified into three dimensions through the different properties of the attributions;

- ✓ Locus of causality, which means that people consider the source of attributions as themselves (internal) or environmental (external) factors. Ability, effort and the physical and mental condition attribution elements belong to the internal factors, while others to the external factors.

- ✓ Stability, which refers to the factors are fixed or not. Ability and task difficulty attributions belong to the stable factors and others belong to the unstable factors.
- ✓ Controllability, which refers to whether the factors can be controlled by the individuals or not. The effort attribution relates to the dimension of controllable, all of others to dimension of uncontrollable. Most of the time, people would tend to attribute their successes to the internal, stable and controllable factors, whereas they would tend to attribute their failures to the external, unstable and uncontrollable factors. This is thought to be as the correct method of people's "attribution preference" (William and Burden, 2000, p.105-106).

2.2. Attribution Theory in Language Learning

In the previous studies of the English language learning, extrinsic factor were analyzed, which would influence the English language learning partially learning. Learners were not the center of the researches. When both extrinsic and intrinsic factors are held, fruitful results can be gained. In this case, attributions of the learners are highly significant. The more various attributions there are, the more different results can be observed in language learning.

Researches in the field of causal attributions have been focused mainly on sport psychology while so few researches on language learning have been carried out in the field of the attribution theory. There are very few researchers who work on language learning and attribution theory by combining the two fields. Two of them are Marion Williams and Robert Burden. And it is difficult to find many resources in the field of language learning attributions and attribution theory in language learning.

Most of the studies investigating the relationship between attributions and language learning achievement have been carried out in the fields of mathematics and sports (Basturk & Yavuz, 2010). Young students' success and failure attributions in language learning have been studied by Şahinkarakaş (2011) whose study offered some insight into the factors to which a group of young language learners attributed their successes and failures. Only a few more studies have been carried about learners' causal attributions for success and failure in the area of learning second or foreign languages. Some of them are Gray, Pishghadam, Dornyei, Williams & Burden, Poulet and Maun. Their studies mostly focus on identifying second or foreign language learners' attributions for success and failure. However, the role of

attribution factors has not received enough attention in second or foreign language learning achievement.

There are many cases of feeling failure in language learners for students. For this reason, attribution theory is a relevant research area in the L2 field. In spite of this, most studies in the area of L2 motivation have relied on attitude and anxiety constructs (e.g., Dornyei, 2001).

Studies on foreign language learning attribution showed a number of factors. These are ability, others' influence, attitude, and learning context to be attributes related to either positive or negative results, indicating that these attributions may pose a role to keep a positive self-image (Williams & Burden, 1999). Hsieh and Schallert (2008) tried to combine two motivational factors, self-efficacy and attribution to analyze the motive of 500 foreign language learners in the States. The students were asked give actual reasons for the outcome of the tests considering their test scores in light of these two bases. Results revealed that self-efficacy was the strongest structure of achievement, supported by ability attributions. As most of the data in this field have been collected by qualitative techniques, the results are various in attributions. A quantitative method of investigation would enable collection of data from a larger number of participants, which means statistical procedures can be conducted. The following studies were undertaken under the stated points. The first one was a study which was carried out to analyze the reasons for successes and failures in English classes with Japanese university students (Gobel & Mori, 2007). The outcomes showed that poorly performing learners attributed their failure to a lack of ability and effort while well-performing learners attributed their success to teachers and the learning environment. This finding is in accordance with that of Markus and Kitayama, (1991) Heine and Hamamura, (2007) and it reinforces their findings that success and failure attributions are surely affected by cultural differences. In another study (Gobel, 2010), similar attribution outputs were obtained comparing Thai and Japanese university student attributions towards good performance and poor performance. And again, a similar research was carried out with Japanese, Thai, and Malaysian students (Kan, & Lee, in press). These studies revealed that traditional or cultural differences have a great impact on causal attributions in language learning. These studies suggest that if this bias does indeed exist, then it should be taken into consideration when considering language teaching methodology and the learning environment.

There are some studies that have attempted to date to design a scale for the specific measurement of attributions of foreign language learners (Hsieh, 2004; Pishghadam & Modarresi, 2008). Hsieh (2004) analyzed the relationship between foreign language learners' attribution and their foreign language success. The results showed that those learners who made more internal and stable attributions got higher scores in foreign language classes than those who made more external and unstable attributions.

In another research, Kun and Liming (2007) studied the role of achievement attributions about language learning behaviors. They observed more self-regulated language learning behaviors in those learners who attributed success to internal factors. They recommended that foreign language teachers help learners create positive ideas about the reasons of success and failure in learning a foreign language.

Pishghadam and Modarresi (2008) created and validated a questionnaire for Attribution Theory for Foreign Language Learners (ATFLL) consisting of four subscales of *language policy*, *intrinsic motivation*, *self-image*, and *emotions*, which they applied to the students in Ferdowsi University of Mashhad. The outcome showed that intrinsic motivation and language policy were the success and failure attributions of the students.

Apart from these studies, Lei and Qin (2009) explored Chinese EFL learners' attributions and their English learning achievement. According to the results success in learning English as a second was the result of two attribution factors which are teacher and effort. In this context, after studying on cases and reviewing the literature to do with the role of attributions in foreign language learning, the researchers who explored attributions and language learning came up with quite various findings. As a result, they tried to find the relationship between causal attributions and EFL learners' foreign language achievement.

2.3. Learning Beliefs or Attributions

In some cases, beliefs about foreign language learning have been called 'mini theories' of foreign language acquisition (Hosenfeld, 1978; Wenden, 1986). They may be named as 'psychologically held understandings, premises or propositions about the world that are felt to be true' (Richardson, 1996, 103) and 'general assumptions that students have about themselves, about factors that have effect on learning and about the nature of language learning' (Victori & Lockhart, 1995, 224).

In the field of language learning beliefs, Horwitz (1987) designed the Beliefs about Language Learning Inventory (BALLI) to evaluate students' and teachers' beliefs concerned with language learning (Horwitz, 1987). BALLI has been widely used in most research studies to investigate the relationship between beliefs and language learning behaviors and achievement as well as strategy use, and also the influence of culture on perceived reasons in various contexts (e.g., Kern, 1995). Language learners have ideas about their language learning, but they may not always state these beliefs clearly or consciously (Horwitz, 1987). That learners' beliefs play an important role in students' experience and their success or failure as language learners is not out of question. The fact that learners who consider beliefs important for English language learning reflect higher degrees in their learning process is pointed out by some researchers. Taking these beliefs about language learning into consideration language teachers can create better situations for teaching and are able to adopt a more responsive approach to the organization of learning opportunities in their lessons (Cotterall, 1999). Understanding the beliefs of language learners' about language learning sheds light upon language teachers' understanding of their students' expectations of, commitment to, success in, and satisfaction with their English classes (Horwitz, 1988).

2.4. Causal Attributions and Motivation Relationship

Language learning motivation studies were first conducted by Gardner and Lambert (1972) who brought forward integrative and instrumental motivation. Deci and Ryan (1985) brought a more educational psychological aspect of learners to explain motivation with intrinsic and extrinsic aspects for learning foreign languages. Some researchers used psychological aspects widely in the foreign language education field with diversified motivational theories, achievement motivation, social motivation which attribution theory is a part of.

Attribution theory sheds light upon understanding of learners' motivation in the learning atmosphere; however, it is not used only in the field of language learning. Weiner (1979, 1986) explored causal attributions for hyperactivity, mastery, loneliness and affiliation, and depression. And, when attribution theory is typed on Google, 2.570.000 results (retrieved on April.09, 2010) can be found, which reveals how widely affective aspects of individual behaviors are used in various fields.

When it comes to academic world, a couple of researches have been carried out. For instance, Fry and Ghosh (1980) explored cultural differences between two groups of children

in achievement tasks and found different attribution patterns. Caucasian students see their own abilities as the reason for success and attributed failure to luck; on the other hand, Asian students see their being responsibility as the reason for failure and attributed success to luck.

Many studies show success and failure are attributed to seven factors: ability, effort, task difficulty, luck, mood, family background and help or hindrance from others (Graham, 1994).

On the other hand, Vispoel and Austin (1995) state there are eight causal attributions based on Weiner (1979) who discerned three central causal dimensions: stability, locus and control. Their explanation shows attributions with locus, stability, controllability.

Locus of ability, effort, strategy, and interest are internal, and among them, only one ability is stable and uncontrollable but the rest are unstable and controllable. Task difficulty, luck, family influence and teacher influence are not internal and not easy to control, and luck is not stable but the other three are stable. For example, according to Weiner (1979, 1986), when subjects think that causes of failure are due to lack of ability or task difficulty, their expectations for subsequent learning decreases, because subjects cannot control these. However, since effort is unstable and controllable, their expectancy level will go up if they believe they can be successful with effort. This points out that high expectancy drives one to put more effort to learn better for higher achievement. Because learning and issues related with it vary, attribution theory is result-oriented and situation dependent and is depicted by a self-serving effect regardless of the methodology used (Vispoel and Austin, 1995).

The research deals with learners' subjective importance they place on attribution for self-evaluation, to see which dimensions of causality they attribute their success or failure to. As possible causes are not limited, underlying properties of the causes need to be pinpointed. Learners' self-evaluation will be evaluated since test results and final grades done by teachers cannot be controlled by learners directly. Dimensions of causality here used are the eight factors that Vispoel and Austin (1995) elaborated and peer influence. Since there are both peer-work and group work inside and outside the classroom for particular language courses the learners took, classmates' influence may affect their subjective attributions. Besides, the question whether or not their subjective attribution causes impose on achievement motive for their future learning will be handled, too.

2.5. Relationship between Language Learning Attributions and Achievements

In contrast with the findings of Chen's research (1990), a number of studies of the relationship between language learning achievement and the use of language learning strategies point out that learners with high-achievement scores use language learning strategies more widely and in greater number. Despite these findings, there has been no empirical verification to say that a causal relationship exists between high achieving language learners and their language learning strategy use.

That more strategy use is beneficial to some learners in It has been asserted that in practice more strategy use is helpful to some learners in increasing language learning achievement or proficiency has been claimed. However, it has also been noted that it is not easy to determine whether strategy use contributes to learning achievement or learning achievement influences strategy selection (MacIntyre, 2000).

A key American study of mainly Spanish-speaking learners revealed that students from every level reported extensive use of language learning strategies (Kupper & Russo, 1985). In contrast, Rebecca Oxford, another leading researcher in the field, maintains that lower achieving students do not use fewer learning strategies than their peers. Instead, they are inclined to use learning strategies inefficiently – without paying attention to their learning styles preferences (Oxford, 1993). Other research has set sight on the type of learning strategies that are most common or useful for high achieving students. Cognitive strategies, such as looking for patterns and reading for pleasure in the target language, which are the strategies used by high achieving students are also included (Ehrman & Oxford, 1989). When examining the core of these studies it appears that high achievers display greater use of meta-cognitive strategies to control their own learning than do low achieving learners, therefore a strong correlation between this type of strategy and language learning achievement was found.

There is also abundant evidence indicating that beliefs about language learning have great influence on learning achievements and experiences. An empirical study conducted in China put forward how learners' beliefs are likely to be a primary factor in strategy use and language learning achievement. A direct causal relationship between gender, first language (L1) and foreign language proficiency and vocabulary use, learning strategies and foreign language proficiency, and learning achievement was found through findings (Wen & Johnson, 1997).

CHAPTER III

3. METHODOLOGY

This chapter presents the description of participants, instrumentation, data collection procedures, research questions, hypotheses, rationale for the hypotheses, and method, including and data analyses techniques.

3.1. Participants

The participants of this study are academic staff at Adana Science and Technology University, Turkey. They are learning English as a foreign language for their academic career goals. A total of 5 academic staff were involved in the study. The respondents were from different branches, respectively; “food engineering, tourism, business management, bio-engineering and genetics. All of the participants needed to learn English so as to teach their students in English. The respondents’ English language proficiency was measured by YDS exam. The outcome of the measurement will be given and explained in ‘Chapter IV’.

3.2. Data Collection and Instruments

Three instruments were used in this study for triangulation. These are self-assessment, semi-structured interview and questionnaire.

The data were collected through, at first, self-assessment papers. Self-assessment papers were written in Turkish Language in order to prevent misconceptions. After the self-assessment, semi-structured interview was conducted to find answers to how and why questions that arose in the self-assessment papers. In addition to these instruments, pre-questionnaire was carried out before the examination. Then, in order to see whether there are any changes in the attributions of the participants, the same questionnaire was given to the participants as post-questionnaire after the examination.

In this study triangulation was performed through using three data collection tools so as to make the collected data stronger and put forth multi-faceted findings. As Patton claims (2002), triangulation reinforces a study by combining the methods, which can mean utilizing different kinds of methods or data inclusive of both quantitative and qualitative approaches.

A self-assessment, semi-structured interview and pre/post questionnaire were used for collecting the required data in this study.

- Self-assessment can give us a perspective of student's expectations, necessities, problems and frustrations in the L2/FLL process.
- It gives us a more humanistic perspective of the student's development, in other words how do students' feel, it is a means of checking their emotional thermometer and measuring the level of anxiety they experiment.
- It reveals the students' attitude towards the course, the language they are studying, the materials and activities.
- It gives hints of the students' opinion about the course and their feelings or perception about their progress in learning the L2/FL.
- It is also an important indicator of how mature our students are.
- It develops more interest in the course from students.
- It aids students' in taking responsibility of their own learning.

Interviewing provides for the researcher with the opportunity to gather the required information that will shape the study from the participants themselves.

McMillan and Schumacher (1997, p. 274) gives the advantages of interviewing as follows:

- Interview is flexible and adaptable
- It can be used with non-readers
- There is a chance to probe, clarify and include nonverbal behavior
- There is high response rate

Interviewing enables the researcher to get full range and depth of people's impressions, perspectives or experiences and to learn more about their responses to the questionnaire (Mertens, 2005).

Questionnaire as a tool of data collection provides the opportunity to gather information from a big population without taking too much time.

McMillan and Schumacher (1997, p.274) point out the advantageous points of questionnaire as follows:

- It is economical
- It can be anonymous
- There are standard questions and uniform procedures
- It is usually easy to score
- It provides time for subjects to think about the responses

Mertens (2005) expresses the advantage of questionnaire as obtaining lots of information from a lot people quickly and easily.

To support the findings obtained through self-assessment, participants were interviewed about their perceived success and failure attributions, which represents the qualitative side of the study. Merriam (1998) points out interviewing as the most common form of data collection in qualitative studies in educational contexts. Patton (1990, p.160 in Merriam, 1998) justifies interviewing as follows:

- We interview people to find out from them those things we cannot directly observe
- We cannot observe feelings, thoughts and intentions.
- We cannot observe behaviors that took place at some previous point in time.
- We cannot observe situations that preclude the presence of an observer.
- We cannot observe how people have organized the world and the meanings they attach to what goes on in the world.
- We have to ask people questions about those things.
- The purpose of interviewing, then, is to allow us to enter into the other person's perspective (p.72).

3.3. Procedure

The data was collected from an exam preparation course carried out in Continuing Education center, Science and Technology University in Adana. Participants of the study were asked to write a self-assessment paper about the notion of doing well and their reasons for success and failure at the end of the preparation period of the course. In their self-

assessment paper, they stated their perceived reasons for their successes and failures in English. The papers were content analyzed to verify emerging concepts about students' perceived success and failure attributions. Each of the self-assessment papers was read and coded twice by the researcher at different time intervals in order to discern the consistency of the findings. The students were allowed to write the self-assessment papers in their native language (Turkish Language) in order to get accurate information since their English level may not be enough to express their exact perceived attributions. Then, the emerging categories were translated into English. Then, a semi structured interview was conducted in order to eliminate the misunderstanding about the attributions of the participants in the self-assessment papers. Interview was in Turkish Language as it is in the self-assessment stage. The data obtained through self-assessment papers and semi-structured interview were analyzed and compared to each other.

An open-ended questionnaire was given to the participants of the study before they entered the language exam to ascertain the validity of the data obtained through self-assessment papers. Likewise, the data that were obtained in the pre-questionnaire were compared to the outcome of the self-assessment papers and interview.

In the last phase, the same open-ended questionnaire was given to the participants of the study after the language exam as post-questionnaire to verify the stability of their responses by comparing each questionnaire result, through which any change in the attributions of the participants before and after the examination occurred.

Finally, all the data from self-assessment papers, semi-structured interview and pre-post questionnaires were compared to each other to get accurate outcome.

3.4. Research Design and Data Analysis

The research design of the study was a descriptive one. It described attributions stated by the academic staffs who were studying for a national exam which is called YDS. Before and after the YDS exam self-assessment papers were read and coded, then translated into English to be analyzed. The data to be obtained from the self-assessment papers were evaluated qualitatively. The data that were obtained before the exam through semi-structured interview and questionnaire and the data to be obtained after the exam through post-questionnaire were evaluated qualitatively.

CHAPTER IV

4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter focuses on the analysis of the data gathered by the “self-assessment papers, interview and pre and post questionnaires”. The analysis of each data collection tool is mentioned in different sections supported by the excerpts taken from the data collection tools. In the end the results of the findings will be discussed.

Participants of this study entered YDS Examination for their academic career goals. This is a centralized public examination taken by people from almost all sectors to get a better degree, post and salary. Academic staffs go in for this examination in order to get the minimum score for their academic career goals. The minimum score needed depends on the level of position, degree of each participant. While, the score needed for Master of Arts degree is 55, it is 65 for Philosophy of Doctorate. The participants took YDS exam on the 7th of April and they achieved what they were after.

Table 3 shows the participants’ YDS examination score and needed score for their academic career goals.

Table 3. Participants’ YDS Scores and Minimum Necessary Scores

Participants	YDS Examination Scores	Needed Scores
PARTICIPANT 1	73	65
PARTICIPANT 2	66	55
PARTICIPANT 3	78	65
PARTICIPANT 4	57	55
PARTICIPANT 5	69	65

As the figures show in the table 3 ‘participant 1’ needed the score of 65 and got higher than needed, 73. Just like the participant 1, the other participants got higher score than they needed. As for the needed scores, they are the minimum scores for the academic staff for their career goals.

4.1. Self-assessment Papers

Self-assessment papers were read and content analyzed to reveal ‘the notion of doing well, perceived success and failure attributions’ of the participants of this study. These results were handled in three groups as “the notion of doing well, success attributions and failure attributions”.

4.1.1. The Notion of ‘Doing Well’

As in the questionnaire results, participants of this study stated that score of the examination is the determining factor as to how successful they were. Without exception, score was cited by all of the participants.

As another notion of doing well, ‘feedback from others’ was cited twice by the participants. ‘Comparison with others was cited twice as an indicator of success.

Other than feedback from others and comparison with others, ‘sense of achievement, sense of qualification for jobs and completing a set of goals’, each of which was cited once, were the notions of being successful cited by the participants. And the result of the examination is considered as the level of success.

The following table points out the participants’ notion of doing well in their self-assessment papers.

Table 4. Notion of Doing Well, Self Assessment

Participants	The notion of doing well
PARTICIPANT 1	Score Feedback from others
PARTICIPANT 2	Score Comparison with others
PARTICIPANT 3	Score
PARTICIPANT 4	Score Comparison with others Feedback from others Sense of qualification for jobs
PARTICIPANT 5	Score

In table 4, conceptualization the notion of doing well was illustrated. Main attribution is ‘score’ and ‘comparison with others, feedback from others and also sense of qualifications were the other cited beliefs about the notion of doing well in the examination that participants of this study went in for.

4.1.2. Success Attributions

Analysis of the data suggested that success attributions could be grouped by four factors just as it was in failure attributions: effort, ability, task difficulty and with the least attributed luck. Effort and ability factors are internal while task difficulty and luck are external factor.

In their self-assessment papers, participants referred to these four factors through their reasons for success in YDS examination. ‘Enough knowledge, discipline, trying hard and belief in luck’ were the cited attributions of success by the participants of this study. The data obtained through self-assessment papers indicated that all the four factors, respectively

‘ability, effort, task difficulty and luck’ were uttered by the participants as success attributions.

Table 5 shows academic staff’s perceived reasons for ‘success’ stated in the self-assessment papers.

Table 5. Perceived Reasons for Success

Participants	Success Attributions
PARTICIPANT 1	Enough knowledge Study hard
PARTICIPANT 2	Discipline Enough time Ease of work Enough knowledge and ability Trying hard
PARTICIPANT 3	Ease of work Teacher Practicing Special techniques Enough ability
PARTICIPANT 4	Belief in luck Ease of work Trying hard Concentrating
PARTICIPANT 5	Mood Ease of work Practicing hard

Table 5 indicates the perceived reasons of each participant which they attributed their success to. The most cited reasons, ‘studying hard, disciplined practicing and enough time’ were under category of ‘effort’ (an internal, unstable, and controllable attribution).

‘Effort factor was cited most frequently in the self-assessment papers as the table 5 shows. The item related to effort was regular and disciplined studying which was explained in comment in one of the academic staff’s self-assessment paper “I cannot say I cannot get a good mark out of this exam when I have a regular and disciplined system for exam preparation, “Time and effort are vital for this exam”, “I know I will certainly be successful provided that I have enough time” and “I need more time to study but I do not have enough time”’.

Another attribution which was encountered a lot in self-assessment papers of the students is ‘ability’. All of the participants who stated their perceived reasons gave further explanations including “I have enough knowledge and ability to get a good mark”, “with enough knowledge and techniques, I am confident of my ability to do well in this exam”, “YDS exam calls for ability and I believe I have what it takes” and “It is my ability to survive in an exam”. This shows the success attributions of participants before the exam.

‘Task difficulty’, as another factor, was in the second place attribution cited by the participants in self-assessment papers. The explanations about task difficulty were; “I can have a better mark if the ease of the exam does not surpass regular difficulty”, “I believe YDS exam is a difficult one but it cannot be a big cause for my success or failure”, “I always exert great effort to manage anything in my life; therefore, task difficulty can be overcome through effort” and “I believe YDS exam is a difficult one but it cannot be a big cause for my success or failure”. Some of the students who mentioned these reasons gave further explanations including “I have always exerted great effort to manage everything in my life; therefore, task difficulty can be overcome through effort”, “time and effort can be vital for this exam” and “I know I will certainly be successful provided I have enough time to study”. This may indicate the significance these participants place on the effort factor.

The least cited factor by the participants was ‘luck’. The explanations about luck were; “If I am lucky, I will be successful”, “I can say it is to do with being lucky”, and “I believe greatly in luck factor in the exam.

All the five participants who were the participants of this study stated that they could be successful through ‘effort’ while studying for the national exam, YDS. Again all the five participants referred to ‘ability’ as the success factor while preparing for the exam. “Ease of the work”, in other words ‘task difficulty’ was cited by four of the five participants as the success reason. However, two of five participants stated that ‘luck’ is a reason for their success in the YDS exam. Ability, task difficulty, or luck did not appear as causal attributions for success.

As for the individual success attributions of each participant, *participant 1* is of the opinion that she can cope with an exam with any level of difficulty as she thinks she has what it takes to pass an exam such as ability, effort.

Participant 2 attributes causes of her success to both “internal and external” factors. She, on the one hand, believes that “ease of the task” can be an important factor in her success. On the other hand, she thinks luck does not play an important role in the exams and her main success and failure attributions are ‘ability and effort’.

Participant 3 states that causes of her success depend on both internal and external factors. She has the opinion that her success is linked with ‘luck’ because of the changes in the exam system. Apart from external factors, she points out the ‘ability and effort’ factor as the determining factor for her success in this exam.

Participant 4 claims that ‘ability’ is an important factor for this exam. He points out the ‘importance of luck’, ‘effort and ease of the task’ for his success in the exam. Different from other participants, he emphasizes the significance of ‘luck’.

Participant 5 attributes her success and largely to the “ease of the exam”. She points out the importance of ‘effort and ability’ for a good result. She attributes her success totally to her ‘ability’.

For a general analysis, success attribution findings from the self-assessment papers indicate that participants’ perceived success attributions are mainly *internal in terms of locus of causality*. They do not change over the time, therefore, they are *stable*. As the main attributions were effort and ability, they are naturally *controllable*.

4.1.3. Failure Attributions

‘Effort’ factor which is an internal and unstable factor was cited most frequently by the participants of this study. The participants of this study claimed that the most important reason for their failure was lack of practicing which means exerting less effort than needed. All of the five participants linked their failure to the lack of effort. While giving their reasons for their failures, some of these students also criticized themselves and/or set goals to achieve future success. Some of these criticisms or promises were “I do not have enough time to study for the exam”, “I have enough ability to cope with an exam but I cannot say I have a regular and disciplined system for exam preparation”, “I cannot keep up with the assignments I should do” and “I cannot allocate enough time to study for the exam”.

As in the success attributions, *ability* was cited all of the five participants as a reason for failure. ‘Lack of knowledge, lack of vocabulary and lack of absorbing new language items’ were cited to emphasize the importance of ability in the examination. Some of these criticisms were “I cannot keep up with the assignments I should do”, “because of the things I experienced in the past, I cannot memorize the necessary vocabulary items” and “vocabulary is important for this exam, but I cannot memorize enough vocabulary items”.

Task difficulty’ was another failure reason for the participants of this study. Task difficulty as a failure attribution was cited by four of the five participants. Some of the criticisms about the difficulty of the examination were “Difficulty of the exam is above the standard levels”, “YDS exam difficulty is more than necessary” and “I think YDS exam is a difficult one”.

The other failure attribution of the participants was *luck*, which was cited *twice* as the reason for their failure in YDS examination. One of the criticism about luck was “I can say it is to do with being lucky”.

Participants’ Perceived Reasons for ‘Failure’ in self-assessment papers are shown in table 6.

Table 6. Perceived Reasons for Failure

Participants	Failure Attributions
PARTICIPANT 1	Lack of concentration No luck
PARTICIPANT 2	Not enough time No discipline Not enough practicing Lack of vocabulary knowledge
PARTICIPANT 3	Circumstances Difficulty of the examination Not enough practicing Not enough time
PARTICIPANT 4	Belief in luck Difficulty of the examination Bad mood Sense of qualification for jobs
PARTICIPANT 5	Bad mood Difficulty of the examination Not practicing hard Lack of vocabulary knowledge

Table 6 indicates that the most cited perceived reasons for failure were about ability, task difficulty and effort. These two factors were expressed with ‘not practicing hard, not enough practicing, lack of vocabulary knowledge, difficulty of the examination and not enough time’.

Findings of failure attributions in the self-assessment papers suggested that perceived beliefs of failure are *internal and external in terms of locus of causality; stable and unstable in view of stability; controllable and uncontrollable in controllability*.

4.2. Semi-structured Interview

Semi-structured interview was conducted to make some statements clear and understandable in terms of attributions, through which reliable data was obtained.

All of the participants thought that they conceptualize the notion of ‘doing well’ with the score they get from the national examination, YDS. The reason for this was because the score was the most important criteria to determine how successful they were in the examination and it was a medium to achieve their goals such as academic career and promotion. The higher score they got, the better positions they could reach. Some of the excerpts were “the better score it is, the better chance I have”, “score of the examination is the medium with which I can get what I want” and “score is a passport to success in academic career”.

‘Feedback from others’ was a reason for considering themselves successful in that they would feel better when their achievements were appreciated, not for occupational, academic aspects. This was a kind of source for their being proud of themselves. Excerpt about feedbacks from others was “I feel motivated and honored when I am appreciated by somebody close to me”.

‘Comparison with others’ was another success indicator through which participants made out the level of their success or failure by noticing the standards.

The following examples illustrate the notions of doing well:

Participant 1: “I will understand how successful I am after the results are announced”, “I feel successful when I am appreciated by my exam results.

Participant 2: “Score of the examination is the main indicator of my success”, “comparison with others can be a good scale for my success”.

Participant 3: “Score is important to determine the success level”.

Success and failure attributions of the participants in the self-assessment papers were verified with the interview. ‘Discipline’ as a belief for success was referred to indicate *effort factor* by the *participant 2*. Moreover, *enough time, trying hard and practicing hard* was mentioned to emphasize the significance of ‘effort factor’.

To emphasize the importance of ability was the reason why ‘special techniques’, ‘enough knowledge’ and ‘concentrating’ were mentioned. When details about these beliefs were given by the participants, the meanings of them showed ‘ability factor’ clearly. A few of the explanation in the interview about these specific beliefs were “concentrating is a matter of ability”, “in my opinion, special techniques entail a practical mind which is to do with ability” and “If one does not have enough intelligence, he or she cannot receive information, which means he or she is lack of ability”.

Mood, on the other hand, was cited in self-assessment papers by two participants of this study. Both of the participants put down the word “mood” in their self-assessment papers to emphasize the importance of ability. Excerpts about *mood* were “If I am in a bad mood I cannot understand what I read”, “I need to feel good to score better in the exam”.

The findings obtained through semi-structured interview revealed that success attribution confirmed that participants’ perceived success attributions were to a great extent *internal*. Again, they do not change over the time and can be taken under control by the individuals, so they were *stable and controllable*. Other than success attributions, through semi-structured interview, participants attributed their perceived beliefs of failure to effort, ability, luck and task difficulty. This confirmed the findings of self-assessment as *internal and external* in terms of locus of causality; *stable and unstable* in view of stability; *controllable and uncontrollable* in controllability because of effort, ability, task difficulty and luck attributions of the participants.

4.3. Open-ended Questionnaire

Open-ended questionnaire was conducted before the YDS exam and after YDS exam were analyzed and the results of “pre” and “post” questionnaires were compared to verify the validity of the notion of ‘doing well’, perceived reasons of the participants for success and failure in national foreign language test.

To obtain necessary data, open-ended questionnaire was built up in accordance with the *research questions*.

Open-ended questions were as below:

1. How do you conceptualize the notion of being successful in language examination?
2. What reasons do you attribute to your perceived success in language exam?
3. What reasons do you attribute to your perceived failure in language exam?

The answers given to the questionnaire showed that all of the five participants were of the same opinion about the “notion of being successful”. The response, in common, to the first question was ‘the score’ of the YDS exam. All the participants stated that the score determines their level of success or failure.

Moreover, two of the five participants conceptualized the notion of being successful with ‘feedbacks from others’, which means, apart from the score, these two participants take other people’s opinion into consideration while determining whether they are successful or not.

‘Comparison with others’ is another way of participants to conceptualize the notion of being successful. Two of the five participants referred to ‘comparison with other examination takers’ as the success. ‘Sense of achievement’, ‘sense of qualification for jobs’ and ‘completing a set of goal’ were other notions of being successful. And each of them was stated *once* as the indicator of being successful by the participants.

Responses to Question 1 “How do participants conceptualize the notion of doing well in the exam they are preparing for?” was shown in the table 7.

Table 7. Notion of Doing Well, Questionnaire

Participants	The notion of 'doing well'
PARTICIPANT 1	Score Feedback from Others
PARTICIPANT 2	Score Comparison with others
PARTICIPANT 3	Score Sense of achievement Completing set of goal
PARTICIPANT 4	Score Feedback from Others Comparison with others Sense of qualification for jobs
PARTICIPANT 5	Score

Table 7 shows the participants' notion of 'doing well' in the exam. It is obvious that the score of the examination is the main conceptualization the notion of 'doing well'. 'Comparison with others' is the second major factor that the participants referred to the notion of doing well besides 'score'.

Responses to Question "What reasons do the academic staff attribute to their perceived successes in the exam they are studying for?"

As for the second question in the questionnaire, all of the five participants attributed their success to practicing hard, which indicates the 'effort' factor. The answers to the question two revealed that enough knowledge was important, which indicates the 'ability'

factor. Ability factor was indicated by all of the participants with different expressions such as; ‘practicing hard, study hard and trying hard’.

‘Ease of the work’ was attributed by four of the five participants, which indicates the ‘difficulty of the task’ factor.

‘Special techniques, mood, enough time, concentrating and teacher’ were other success attributions which were stated once in the answers of the participants.

Table 8. Responses to Question “What reasons do the Academic Staff Attribute to Their Perceived Successes in the Exam They are Studying for?”

Participants	Perceived Success Attributions
PARTICIPANT 1	Ability Effort
PARTICIPANT 2	Effort Ability Task Difficulty
PARTICIPANT 3	Effort Ability Task Difficulty Luck
PARTICIPANT 4	Effort Ability Luck Task Difficulty
PARTICIPANT 5	Effort Ability Task Difficulty

Table 8 shows the perceived success attributions of the academic staff. All the participants attribute their perceived successes to mainly their effort and ability. The other factors such as task difficulty and luck were cited as success attributions. Task difficulty was cited three times while luck was cited twice by the participants.

Responses to the second question in the pre-questionnaire revealed, major success attributions were *ability and effort*, which indicated *internal, stable and controllable* dimensions just as the findings obtained in the self-assessment papers and semi-structured interview.

Responses to Question 3 “What reasons do the academic staff attribute to their perceived failure in the exam they are studying for?”

As for the answer given to the third question by the participants, ‘lack of practicing and difficulty of the examination’ were the most frequently attributed reasons to their failure. Each of these two reasons was written three times in their answers to the third question. ‘Lack of concentration and lack of vocabulary’ were written twice as the failure reason, which indicates the ‘effort and ‘ability’ factor.

‘Lack of luck, circumstances, bad mood and not enough time’ were the other reasons attributed to their failures by the participants of this study.

Responses to Question 3 “What reasons do the academic staff attribute to their perceived failure in the exam they are studying for?” is shown in the following table:

Table 9. Responses to Question “What Reasons do the Academic Staff Attribute to Their Perceived Failures in the Exam They are Studying for?”

Participants	Perceived Failure Attributions
PARTICIPANT 1	Effort Task Difficulty
PARTICIPANT 2	Ability Task Difficulty
PARTICIPANT 3	Effort Luck
PARTICIPANT 4	Ability
PARTICIPANT 5	Effort Task Difficulty

Table 9 indicates the perceived failure attributions of the academic staff. Effort and ability factors are the most cited attributions. Task difficulty was another frequently cited attribution by the participants. It illustrates the failure attributions of the participants. Three participants are of the opinion that ‘effort’ and again three participants have the same opinion about ‘task difficulty’, two participants is the main reason behind their failures

The findings through pre-questionnaire about the perceived failure revealed that most frequently cited attributions were effort and ability. So, failure attributions were *internal, stable and controllable*.

After the examination, all the participants were asked to answer the questionnaire again to ascertain the validity of their statements about the notion of being successful, success attributions and failure attributions. The results of the post-questionnaire were very close to those of the pre-questionnaire.

Firstly, the notion of being successful was conceptualized with ‘score’. The score achieved was again the main factor in determining how successful the participants were in the examination. And again, comparison with others was the second frequent answer written as

the conceptualization of being successful in the post-questionnaire. Different from the pre-questionnaire, feedback from others was not mentioned in the answers of participants.

Table 10 shows comparison of responses to the first question of the pre and post questionnaires.

Table 10. Comparison of Notion of Doing Well in Pre and Post Questionnaires

Participants	Pre-Questionnaire	Post-questionnaire
PARTICIPANT 1	Score Feedback from others	Score
PARTICIPANT 2	Score Comparison with others	Score
PARTICIPANT 3	Score Sense of achievement Completing a set of goal	Score
PARTICIPANT 4	Score Sense of qualification for jobs Comparison with others Feedback from others	Score Comparison with others
PARTICIPANT 5	Score	Score

As it is obvious from the table 10 conceptualization of the notion of ‘doing well’ turned into the ‘score’ after the examination. Only the participant 5 had the same notion of doing well as in the pre-questionnaire.

On the other hand, the answer to the question two revealed the consistency between the pre and post questionnaire. As in the pre-questionnaire, effort was written by all of the participants as the success attribution. Ability was the second most frequently stated reason by the four of the five participants.

Table 11 shows comparison of success attributions between the pre and post questionnaires.

Table 11. Comparison of Success Attributions Between the pre and Post Questionnaires

Participants	Pre-Questionnaire	Post-questionnaire
PARTICIPANT 1	Ability Effort	Effort
PARTICIPANT 2	Effort Ability Task Difficulty	Effort Ability
PARTICIPANT 3	Effort Ability Task Difficulty	Effort Ability
PARTICIPANT 4	Effort Ability Luck	Effort Ability
PARTICIPANT 5	Effort Task Difficulty	Effort Task Difficulty

Table 11 indicates the consistency between the pre and post questionnaire results about the success attributions. Effort and ability as internal factors were the main attributions in terms of success in both pre and post questionnaire.

Findings about success attributions obtained from post-questionnaire were in tune with the findings obtained from pre-questionnaire. That is, success attributions of the participants

were again *internal, stable and controllable* since their perceived reasons for success were ability and effort.

The answers to the third question showed that failure attributions stated in the pre and post questionnaire differed in two aspects. As in the pre-questionnaire, effort and difficulty of the task were cited as failure attributions. Different from the pre-questionnaire, ability and luck factor were not mentioned in the answers of participants.

Table 12 shows comparison of failure attributions between the pre and post questionnaires.

Table 12. Comparison of Failure Attributions between the Pre and Post Questionnaires

Participants	Pre-Questionnaire	Post-questionnaire
PARTICIPANT 1	Ability	Effort
	Luck	Task Difficulty
PARTICIPANT 2	Effort	Effort
	Ability	Task Difficulty
	Task Difficulty	
PARTICIPANT 3	Effort	Effort
	Ability	
	Task Difficulty	
PARTICIPANT 4	Effort	Effort
	Ability	Task Difficulty
	Luck	
	Task difficulty	
PARTICIPANT 5	Effort	Effort
	Task Difficulty	Task Difficulty
	Ability	

Table 12 shows a clear change in the failure attributions. While ability, effort, task difficulty and luck were cited as failure attributions in the pre-questionnaire, only effort and task difficulty were cited as failure attributions in the post-questionnaire.

4.4. Discussion

The present study was designed to survey Academic staff's beliefs about language examinations and reasons for their success or failure. Participants were asked to report their perception about the notion of doing well and causal attributions for success and failure.

As in the hypothesis of Weiner (1986) the findings of the study verified the bipolar dimensions of locus, stability, and control for success and failure. All the factors as attributions, namely 'luck, ability, task difficulty, and effort' were found out as the causal attributions by the academic staff who prepares for national examination, YDS.

Parallel findings out of the self-assessment papers, questionnaires and interview suggest that 'score of the examination' is the major conceptualization in terms of being successful or doing well in the exam. Score of the exam is the medium through which the academic staff can achieve their set of goals, reach the positions or status they desire. This shows the real motive behind the academic staff's conceptualization the notion of 'doing well' in the national examination. Therefore, they have positive belief towards learning English and taking YDS examination because of the importance of English for their academic career, which reflects both instrumental and integrative motivation (Gardner & Lambert, 1972) as English is considered important for enhancing their status.

All of the participants of this study put a vital importance on 'effort' for success in language examination, which indicates the necessity for discipline, regular practicing, trying hard in language examination. Weiner (1979, 1986) as an internal attribution, effort, produce greater change in self-efficacy impact than external attributions. This is a crucial view to point out how significant the level of effort is. The more effort the language learners and exam takers exert, the greater improvement they get. In a study conducted by Lei and Qin (2009), important ties were detected between learners' teacher and effort attributions and their English language achievement. Likewise, Peacock (2010) has found significant relationships between attributions and EFL proficiency. Results of the study for causal attributions and proficiency for exam preparation indicated that effort attribution was the best predictor of high scores. All the participants bounded effort with the score, with which they

conceptualized the notion of doing well in the exam. And after the examination, the participants confirmed this attribution as a major factor for doing well.

‘Ability’, on the other hand, was another causal attribution for success and failure. Hsieh and Challert (2008) studied the causal attributions in EFL learner’s achievement. The results of their study suggested that ability attributions were predictive of foreign language achievement on the part of learners. Ability sheds light upon the result, score and outcome of any progress such as language learning examination.

‘Task difficulty’ was cited as an important causal attribution by four of the participants. Although effort and ability attributions were cited as the main reason for their success and failure, participants stated the significance of the exam difficulty in completing their set of goals. Actually, task difficulty or ease of work can be crucial for motivation of the language learners or exam takers, which may have positive or negative effect on the result of the progress. Since task difficulty is an external factor, learners’ self-confidence can suffer due to uncontrollable factors.

On the other hand, the results of the self-assessment papers suggest that the participants, in some way, tend to attribute their success or failure to teacher influence, too. This is also in tune with the study of Williams and Burden (1999) who discovered that a teacher has a significant role in student belief of language learning success and failure.

As for the ‘luck’ factor, it was mentioned in the self-assessment papers and questionnaire. The findings about luck in the self-assessment papers were parallel to the ones in the questionnaire, which increases the validity of the results. As an attribution, luck is an external factor that has influence on the success or failure of the language learners as exam takers. Although the factor luck may not be perceived as a reason or belief for success or failure by all of the participants, it has a psychological effect on the performance of the learners as language learners.

To draw a summary table, the findings of self-assessment papers, questionnaire and semi-structured interview were parallel to each other to a great extent in terms of *ability* and *effort* attributions. These two *internal* attributions were cited in both self-assessment papers and questionnaire as the most important element of success in both language learning and YDS examination. That is, success was attributed to internal factors by all of the participants.

Again, the findings of self-assessment papers, questionnaires and interview were in accord with each other in terms of failure attributions. Especially, post-questionnaire verified this claim. As the questionnaire was conducted before and after YDS examination, the results out of it were very important to confirm the attributions. So, the findings were in tune with each other, which showed both internal and external factors were predictive of failure in language learning and taking YDS examination. As in the success attributions, ability and effort were the main reason for failure, but task difficulty was another major failure attribution for the participants of this study. Therefore, failure attributions were not only internal ones but external.

The other attribution, luck, was cited as a reason for failure but ability, effort and task difficulty were of great importance as reasons for failure.

In this thesis, the notion of doing well, success and failure attributions of academic staff in YDS examination were studied. The findings which were obtained through self-assessment papers, questionnaires and semi-structured interview verified the validity of the study in terms of consistent results.

For a general deduction out of the findings, indicated that the notion of doing well was conceptualized with the score achieved from foreign language achievement test. And also, it is clear that while participants of the study attributed a successful result effort and ability. This means that they were sure that they had the ability and control of effort to successfully complete future tasks. On the other hand, they attributed failure mainly to task difficulty. This means they attributed the result to something out of their control, which is not a good sign for their confidence about future success.

All the findings through self-assessment, semi-structured interview and pre/post-questionnaire revealed that participants' success attributions were mainly *internal, stable and controllable* while their failure attributions were in 'unstable, external and uncontrollable' in terms of dimensional model of Weiner (1979). Different instruments confirmed the validity and reliability of the obtained findings. The only different result not in tune with the results obtained through other instruments was the failure attribution 'task difficulty' in post-questionnaire.

CHAPTER V

5. Conclusions and Implications

In this chapter, findings of the present study and the other studies are combined and compared in terms of the researches that have been conducted so far. All the findings of the present study is associated with related literature. Implications of the study are stated and suggestions for further researches are added.

5.1. Conclusions

This study offers a perspective into the attributed factors of the academic staff about their success and failure in language achievement tests. Success attributions of the participants were mostly internal. This illustrates importance of self-esteem in participants. Attribution theory suggests that attributions for these outcomes ultimately help to form emotional and behavioral responses (Weiner, 1985)

Attribution theory is a medium through which perceived reason or belief about a specific case, situation or result can be clarified. This is the core of this theory. In terms of psychological aspects, these perceived beliefs or reasons can be crucial for following specific cases. In academic world, the importance of attributions in language learning and studying for foreign language achievement tests is inevitably great in that academic staff have to prove their level of foreign language knowledge and this process takes a period of studying and learning which educational psychology has an immense role in. Pioneers of this theory claim that individual's self-assessment of his/her success or failure is of great importance in determining the result of a future event (Weiner, 2000).

Findings of the study revealed that internal and external factors were cited as success and failure attributions. This variety is natural as causal attributions might be very different from each other depending on the culture, the person, and the task (Graham, 1991).

In this study, three aspects about the perceptions of people were determined line with the model of causal attributions that Weiner (1969) developed by identifying three causal dimensions about people's perceptions of event and the result of that event. These are stability, controllability, and locus of causality.

The results of the study confirm the significance of learners' awareness of internal and external factors in language learning and in achieving test. Every participant of the study spontaneously wrote a self-assessment paper, answered the questions asked in the interview

and questionnaires about their perceived reasons or beliefs in language achievement test. This shows how much the theory “a naive psychology of the layperson” (Heider, 1958) is right.

Another interesting point in this study was the choice of attributions by the participants. This was associated with “attribution preference” (William and Burden, 2000). That is, participants of this study attributed the success to internal but failure to external factors. The origin of success belongs to the individuals while the origin of the failure is an outside factor.

Finally, this study provided an insight into the academic staffs’ notion of doing well, perceived reasons and beliefs about their success and failure in the foreign language achievement. Educational psychology has a key role in effective learning process. Therefore, awareness of causal attributions about a success or failure will either convey an academic to a similar success again or prevent a similar failure.

5.2. Limitations of the Study

There were some limitations to this study. The first limitation is related to the population of the study. The population of this study is limited to some academic staff in Adana Science and Technology University. So the results of the study cannot be generalized directly to all academic staff all over Turkey. The results can only provide us with insights and a general opinion from this specific sample.

In addition, participants’ language learning and motivational beliefs may vary depending on different learning and studying phases, environments, teachers’ feedback, and the learning tasks. Perhaps at the beginning of a course, how much time participants spend on studying the foreign language may rely heavily on their language learning beliefs, their assumptions about what language learning is like. However, later on in the course, how much effort and time academic staff spend on the language they are learning may depend more on their attributions and the evaluation of their self-efficacy beliefs, or on teachers’ feedback. Therefore, beliefs, motivation, and achievement may change accordingly. The second limitation is that each academic staff needs different score for her/his academic or career goal. All these changes can provide different results in different environment, conditions, task and periods.

5.3. Implication of the Study

Being aware of perceived beliefs for why a result occurred is important in building self-efficacy and it gives an individual more confidence when approaching the task. Positive beliefs about one's abilities and capabilities lead to desired results thus leading the learner to conceptualize that it is his/her effort and ability that led to success. So, learners who are more aware of these will also take more responsibility for the outcomes of their study period.

Learner autonomy and self-awareness are absolutely determining factors for student motivation. When learners notice that they are responsible for the result of events or grades, they tend to become more involved and active in the learning process. Therefore, language teachers should help learners establish the value of effort and ability.

If the learners' beliefs are not compatible with the reality, they can break down their motivation and decrease language performance while studying for an achievement test. Therefore, in a classroom environment, it is very important to understand these learners and help them identify their beliefs about success and failure.

When learners' perceived attributions about their success and failure are taken into consideration, benefits of the preparation period in the classroom will surely increase. Determining locus of causality, stability and controllability can ease the processes for the learners in the preparation period for achievement test.

If the reason for an outcome is internal, value of ability and effort factors should be clarified for the exam takers by the language teachers or instructors. This will offer a valuable insight for the future success of the learners. Likewise, determining internal factors as the reason behind a failure will offer a perspective to prevent future failure. It is valid for the other dimensions of attribution theory.

As the findings of this study suggests, 'internal, stable and controllable' factors were the attributions for success while 'external, unstable and uncontrollable' factors were the attributions for failure. Therefore, in an exam preparation atmosphere, language teachers should give an extra consideration for this educational psychology in order to get repetitive success and prevent future failures.

5.4. Suggestions for Further Research

The present study was conducted with only 5 academic staff in Continuing Education Center of Science and Technology University, Adana. And the study was conducted for only one foreign language achievement test period. In a similar study, the number of the participants might be increased in order to have more insights that can be generalized to all academic staffs. Moreover, with a bigger number of participants, this kind of study may be conducted in other educational institutions to have better findings in preparation period and language learning for academic staff and other career pursuers who are required to have a certain level of foreign language knowledge.

Furthermore, both qualitative and quantitative methods may be used in a similar study to obtain various data. This may offer a better insight into the matter.

The present study described the attributions of academic staff as examination takers and language learners. In further studies, it may be fruitful to investigate the attributions of teachers, instructors, lecturers so as to obtain a more comprehensive and detailed understanding, perspective and view of the issues about causal attributions.

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7. APPENDICES

7.1. Appendix 1: Self-Assessment by Participant 1

The screenshot shows a Gmail inbox on a desktop browser. The address bar displays the URL: <https://mail.google.com/mail/u/0/?shva=1#search/berna.sziroglu%40hotmail.com/13d6ce1f18c9eb43>. The Gmail interface includes a search bar, navigation links (Gmail, Drive, Takvim, Çeviri, Daha fazlası), and a sidebar with folders like 'Gelen Kutusu' and 'Gönderilmiş Postalar'. The main inbox area shows an email from 'B. Arif Gulec' with the subject 'prep ve assessment'. The email content is in Turkish and discusses a self-assessment process for a course.

prep ve assessment

B. Arif Gulec
preposition dosyası ektedir ... ayrıca sizden yazmanızı istediğim değerlendirdir...

Gönderilmiş Postalar

Taslaqlar (4)

► Çereler

[İmap] Taslaqlar

Kişisel

Notes

Gönderilmiş Postalar

Taslaqlar (4)

► Çereler

[İmap] Taslaqlar

Kişisel

Notes

7.2 Appendix 2: Self-Assessment by Participant 2

The screenshot shows a Gmail inbox on a desktop browser. The email being viewed is titled "Yazmamızı istemistiniz" and is from "Gelen Kutusu". The email content is in Turkish and discusses a project and a competition. The email is marked as "Okunmuş" (Read) and "Gönderilmiş" (Sent). The sender is "Aysegül Yücel" and the recipient is "B. Arif Güleç". The email is dated "7 nisan 2013".

Yazmamızı istemistiniz

Gelen Kutusu

Okunmuş

Gönderilmiş

7 nisan 2013 de girecek olduğum sinavi

- son anda sinav sisteminin değiştirilmesi
- sinavi yapan kurumun sisteminde tatmin edici şekilde bilgi vermemesi

Nedeniyle hem zor bir görev hem de sansa bağlı olarak görebilirim.

Ancak birseyi basamanın %51 inin yapacağına inanmanın, %40 inin gerekli olan cabayı göstermek, ve %9 da dış etkenlerin etkisi diye düşündüğümde sinavi basarmam kaçınılmaz sonuç diye görüyorum.

%9 luk dış etkenleri incelediğimde ve bir kursa gidiyorsam, -kısa sürede sonuçla karşılaşmamı istiyorum -sinif arkadaşlarının uyumu önemlidir. Çünkü sınıfıdaki herkes basari odaklı olursa bende o tempodan üstüne çıkmaya çalışırım. -ayrıca hoca faktöründe var. Hoca istekli olan öğrencilerin dili ilgili sorunlarını dikkate alarak gerekli olan motivasyonu ve cesareti öğrenciye vermektedir. Çünkü dili bir deniz yolculuğudur. Hoca da bu geminin kaptanıdır ve herkes geminin limana nasıl geldiği ile ilgili limana gelip gelmediği ile ilgilidir.

Bunların dışında suan kendi evimde kalmadığım için hocamın önerdiği bazı taktikleri yapamıyorum.

Özel sektörde çalıştığım ve proje hazırlama bölümünde olduğumdan en iyi şartta 10 günde bir proje çıkarmak zorunda olduğumuz için yoğun bir tempoda günlük tekrar ve ya gün içinde soru çözümü yapamıyorum.

Birkac sene önce mükemmel bir hafızaya sahipken hayatta yaşadığım bazı acı tecrübeler (abimi yaklaşık 4 sene önce kaybettim) yüzünden beyin hafızamı kontrol etmem zorlaştığı için kolay ve kalıcı ezber yapamıyorum.

Hedefim 60 net. Bu neti yapamazsam bile kendimi basarisiz görmeyeceğim. Ama 44 neti yapamazsam kendimi basarisiz görürüm.

Umarım isteklerimiz doğrultusunda bir şeyler yazmışımdır.

İyi aksamlar.

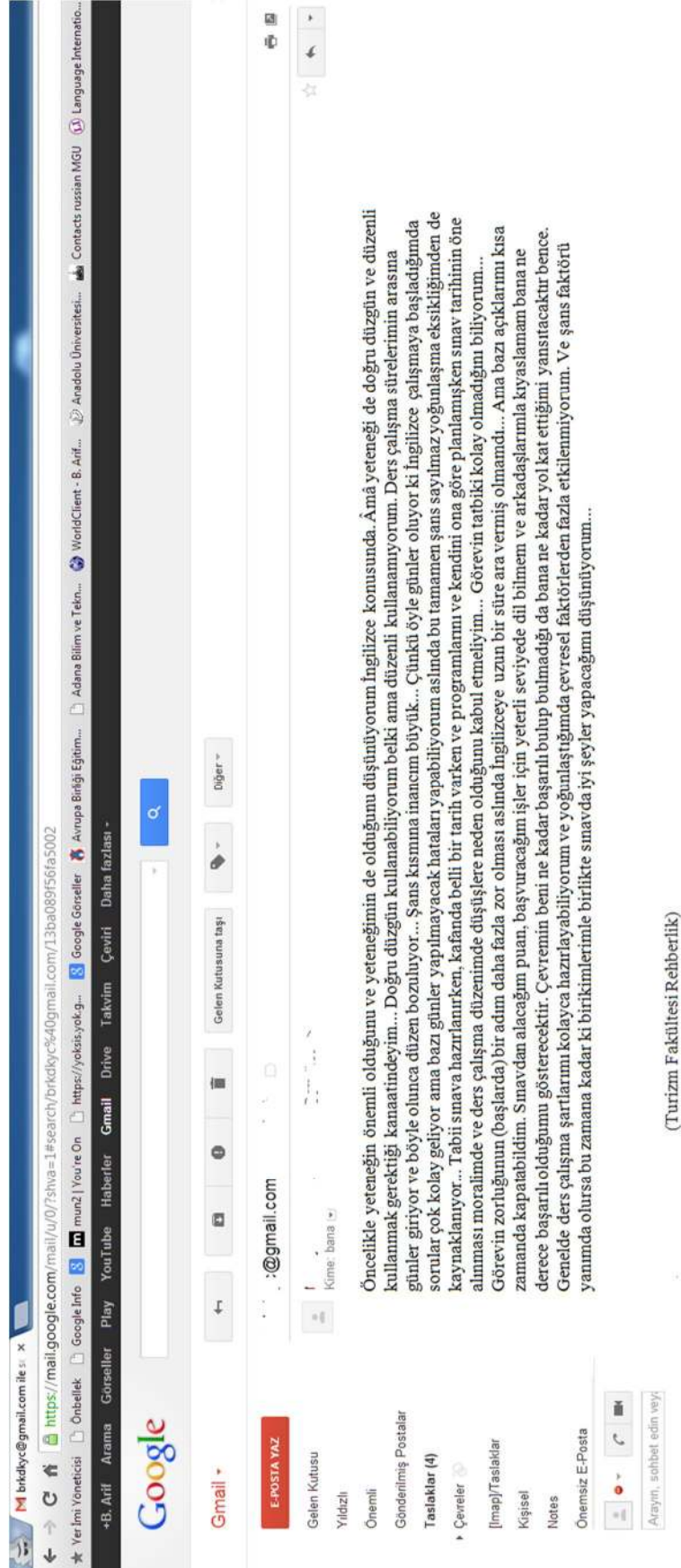
Ayayın, sohbet edin veya

Aysegül Yücel

B. Arif Güleç

Duygu Köse

7.3 Appendix 3: Self-Assessment by Participant 3



The screenshot shows a Gmail inbox on a desktop browser. The email from 'brikyt@gmail.com' is the main focus. The subject line is 'Öncelikle yeteneğin önemli olduğunu ve yeteneğimin de olduğunu düşünüyorum İngilizce konusunda. Ama yeteneği de doğru düzgün ve düzenli kullanmak gerektiği kanaatindeyim... Doğru düzgün kullanabiliyorum belki ama düzenli kullanamıyorum. Ders çalışma süreçlerimin arasında günler giriyor ve böyle olunca düzen bozuluyor... Şans kısmına inancım büyük... Çünkü öyle günler oluyor ki İngilizce çalışmaya başladığımda sorular çok kolay geliyor ama bazı günler yapamayacak hataları yapıyorum aslında bu tamamen şans sayılmaz yoğunlaşma eksikliğimden de kaynaklanıyor... Tabii sınavı hazırlarken kafanda belli bir tarih varken ve programlarını ve kendini ona göre planlamışken sınav tarihinin öne alınması moralimde ve ders çalışma düzenimde düşüşlere neden olduğunu kabul etmiyorum... Görevin tatbiki kolay olmadığını biliyorum... Görevin zorluğunun (başlarda) bir adım daha fazla zor olması aslında İngilizceye uzun bir süre ara vermiş olmandı... Ama bazı açılarımı kısa zamanda kapatabildim. Sınavdan alacağım puan, baş vuracağım işler için yeterli seviyede dil bilmem ve arkadaşlarımla kıyaslamam bana ne derece başarılı olduğumu gösterecektir. Çevremi beni ne kadar başarılı bulup bulmadığı da bana ne kadar yol kat ettiğini ya da ne kadar başarılı bence. Genelde ders çalışma şartlarını kolayca hazırlayabiliyorum ve yoğunlaştığımda çevresel faktörlerden fazla etkilenmiyorum. Ve şans faktörü yanımda olursa bu zamana kadar ki birikimlerimle birlikte sınavda iyi şeyler yapacağımı düşünüyorum...'. The email is from 'brikyt@gmail.com' and is dated 'Kime: bana'. The email is in the 'Gelen Kutusu' (Inbox) folder. The email is marked as 'Önemli' (Important). The email is in the 'Taslaqlar (4)' (Drafts) folder. The email is in the 'Çevreler' (Circles) folder. The email is in the '[imap]/Taslaqlar' folder. The email is in the 'Kişisel' (Personal) folder. The email is in the 'Notes' folder. The email is in the 'Önemli E-Posta' (Important Email) folder. The email is in the 'Arayın, sohbet edin veya...' (Search, chat or...) folder. The email is in the 'Turizm Fakültesi Rehberlik' (Tourism Faculty Guidance) folder.

7.4 Appendix 4: Self-Assessment by Participant 4

The screenshot shows a Gmail inbox on a desktop browser. The email being viewed is from 'KİME: bana' with the subject 'E-POSTA YAZ'. The email content is in Turkish and discusses the participant's experience with a language exam. The participant mentions that they were nervous about the exam but managed to complete it. They also mention that they were not able to answer some questions correctly. The email ends with a note about the participant's performance.

E-POSTA YAZ

Gelen Kutusu

Yıldızlı

Önemli

Gönderilmiş Postalar

Taslaqlar (4)

Çevreler

[İmap]/Taslaqlar

Kişisel

Notes

Önemsiz E-Posta

NOT: Hocam internette sorun yaşadığım için geç gönderdim. Özür dilerim. Saygılar.

KİME: bana

@hotmail.com

Gelen Kutusu taşı

Gelen Kutusu

Diğer

Google

+B.Arif Arama Görseller Play YouTube Haberler Gmail Drive Takvim Çeviri Daha fazlası

https://mail.google.com/mail/u/0/?shva=1#search=nihal.inan%40hotmail.com/13d885a52bafd3bd

Yer İm Yöneticisi Önbellek Google Info mun2|You're On https://yokis.yok.g... Google Görseller Avrupa Birliği Eğitim... Adana Bilim ve Tekn... WorldClient - B. Arif... Contacts russian MGU Language Internatio...

7.5 Appendix 5: Self-Assessment by Participant 5

The screenshot shows a Gmail inbox on a desktop browser. The email being viewed is from 'Anadolu Üniversitesi' (Anadolu University) with the subject 'Dil ve İktisadi Bilimler Fakültesi' (Faculty of Language and Economics). The email content is in Turkish and discusses the participant's self-assessment of their academic performance and future goals.

Header: Dil ve İktisadi Bilimler Fakültesi

Body:

Sınavın zorluk seviyesi yadsınamayacak derecede fazla ve buna zaman ayırmak için çalışmıyor olmak gerek. Yeterince çaba sarf edemiyorum. Başarım ise zekâmla yeteneğimle alakalı diye düşünüyorum. Tabi ders aldığım hocamın da katkısı oldukça fazla olur diye düşünüyorum. Ancak sınav anındaki psikolojim de çok önemli. Kendimi iyi hissettiğimde daha başarılı olabiliyim sanırım. Alacağım puan başarılı olup olmadığımı yansıttacaktır tabi ki de.

Çok kelime ezberleyemiyorum bu yüzden başarısız olma sebeplerinden biri bu olabilir. Ama öte yandan iyi anlıyorum okuduğumu, özellikle de paragraflarda. Bu da çok fazla katkı yapar başarıma bence. Ve asla başarıyı şansa bağlamıyorum. Çünkü zemini hazırlamadan karşıma bina olmaz.

7.6. Appendix 6: Questionnaire

Success and Failure Attributions and Notion of Doing Well Questionnaire
1. How do you conceptualize the notion of being successful in language examination?
2. What reasons do you attribute to your perceived success in language exam?
3. What reasons do you attribute to your perceived failure in language exam?