Educational Research and Reviews

Full Length Research Paper

Boys' and girls' attribution of performance in learning english as a foreign language: The case of Adama high schools in Ethiopia

Geberew Tulu

Social Sciences and Humanities Education Program Unit, College of Education and Behavioral Studies, Addis Ababa University, Ethiopia.

The main aim of the study was to examine students' attribution of performance in learning English as a foreign language at Adama town government high schools and see into its pedagogical implications. It aimed at investigating the perceived causes of success and failure of boys and girls. In order to meet the objectives of the study, data were gathered through testing, questionnaire and interview from purposively and randomly selected 403 (193 boys and 210 girls) sample population. Mixed research method was used for the purpose of the study, and descriptive statistics, principal component analysis and T-test were employed for detailed analysis of the data. Finally, students' perceived causes of success and failure of performance in learning English as a foreign language were identified. Using principal component analysis eight factors measuring student perceived causes of success were identified. These are: making effort, having ability, good teaching practices, task simplicity, teacher's good behavior, teacher's predisposition, luck or chance, and availability of instructional materials. In the same way, seven factors such as lack of effort, lack of ability, poor teaching practices, task difficulty, teacher's bad behavior, unluckiness, and bad mood measuring student perceived causes of failure were identified. Results of the study revealed that boys and girls conceptualized different attribution patterns of their performance in learning English as a foreign language. That is, girls tend to ascribe the cause of their successes more to effort and luck than boys do. On the other hand, boys cite lack of effort in explaining their failure whereas girls refer to factors such as lack of ability and unluckiness as being the causes for the failure. This attribution difference between boys and girls has got pedagogical implication in that teachers awareness of this difference can help them treat both sexes accordingly.

Key words: Attribution, success, failure, performance.

INTRODUCTION

Background of the study

The English Language has gained importance in Ethiopia since nearly six decades. The need for English language arose from the desire to establish contacts with the outside world and the introduction of modern education to the country (Dejene, 1994; Italo, 1999).

It has been used as a second official language in the law, press and business sectors as its importance has grown over years in many offices in running their day to day activities (Ibid). It has also been serving as the official language of international organizations and some national organizations involved in international contacts and/or transactions (ibid).

Additionally, English language has played a significant role in the educational system of the country ever since.

E-mail: gebtullu@yahoo.com. Tel: +251-911841748.

English has been used as a medium of instruction from general secondary school to university. More specifically, English language has been offered to Ethiopian students as a subject beginning from nursery or elementary to high school and preparatory levels. This indicates the important status that English language has come to occupy in academic sector in Ethiopia. More time is also given to English and mathematics in the school schedules more than any other subjects. This shows the emphasis given to the English language in the curriculum of education in Ethiopia. Despite these situations favoring a wide spread use of English language in Ethiopia, English is a foreign and not yet a second language in the country (Dejene, 1994).

However, nowadays, there is a widely prevailing complaint among English language teachers, trainers and other stakeholders that many students, even at the completion of university education, are far from the standard in their English language ability. In line with this, Gashaw (2008, p. 2) states, "it is generally maintained that high school students and teacher trainees are poor in their English language proficiency." Furthermore, "the results of general schools examination and the higher education of entrance examination given at national levels in 2006, 2007 and 2008 show that the average scores of the majority of the students in English, physics, and mathematics subjects were consistently below 50%. Since these subjects are crucial for the successful pursuit of higher education in science and technology, the results have quit serious implication for the realization of the objectives of the new policy" (Mulu, 2009 p. 8).

This inefficiency in linguistic competence and communicative skills in English, which is a medium of instruction at high school level, is likely to negatively affect students' performance in other subject areas. In line with this, Admasu (2008, p. 5) found out that "educational quality has declined in the last three decades …." in the country. Thus, it appears that the claim is generally true and it is worth investigating the factors responsible for this state of affairs.

In order to approach the problem, the Ministry of Education (MOE) of Ethiopia (1997, 2002) introduced and implemented Education Sector Development Programs (ESDP I and II) to improve the quality of education in general and English language education in particular. A fundamental syllabus revision has been made in the late 1990s in the light of the new Educational and training policy Ethiopia introduced (MOE, 2002). New text books and learning materials have also been produced following the syllabus revision. In line with this program, MOE (2002) also introduced English Language Improvement Program (ELIP) and devised the strategy to improve public teachers' level of English competency. Despite all these endeavors, the performance of students in English has kept on declining (Haregewoin, 2003; Mekasha, 2007).

Hitherto, it has been mentioned that English Language

Improvement Program has been launched to improve the competency of English teachers in Ethiopia. However, the knowledge and skills that teachers grasp could be well transmitted to learners if and only if students' subjective needs and perceptions related to the learning process are recognized by teachers; otherwise there will be a mismatch of ideas in the classroom (Nunan, 1989). This means many factors can affect teaching and learning environment. Even though many factors can possibly hamper learning foreign languages, some of the major factors can be lack of motivation and interest on the part of the learners to learn the language and the rapid growth in the student enrollment in the primary, secondary schools through university with a commensurate challenges in infrastructures and other resources (Dejene, 1994; Hailemichael, 1993). However, Stevick (1980, p. 4) claims that "success depends less on materials, techniques and linguistic analyses, and more on what goes on inside and between the people in the classroom."

Besides, the study of gender differences in English performances has attracted considerable attention among scholars (Li et al., 2007). The author further states that "One research area that still needs attention is gender related differences in attribution for one's own success or failure" (p. 61). Oxford (1994:147) also asserts that "Gender can have profound effect on the ways the learner approaches language learning, ways which may in turn affect proficiency." This implies that the comparison between male and female learners in foreign language learning environment seems inevitably important. Obviously, the differences between male and female learners in foreign language learning classrooms could be significant for cultural, social and religious affairs in various contexts and countries. These differences in learning as a whole and in language learning in particular have an impact for the success or failure of the learning out comes. For the mentioned factors and others too, females' ways of language learning could be different from males'. Specially, socially constructed values of being male and female coupled with classroom factors such as teacher's interactions with learners, attitude towards female and male learners; and learner's ways of language learning widen the gap between male and female learners. The disparity of these learning behaviors between the two categories could also bring differences in their perception and performance. In addition, in developing countries like Ethiopia, it is believed that gender is a stereotype being developed in the society in which it determines differences in all aspects including education (Endaweke, 2008).

Little has been done on attribution theory in foreign language contexts in general and gender domain in particular. The majority of the studies investigating causal attributions for success and failure in achievement-related contexts were based on samples of children from developed countries (Boruchovitch, 2004; Burden, 2003;

Weiner, 1992; Williams et al., 2004,). Indeed, in Africa, few have been done with regard to attribution theory in general (Asonibare, 1986; Anteneh, 2004).

Even though the findings have not been consistent, it has been found that American boys tend to make more internal attributions for success and they are more external to the failure than do American girls (Lochel, 1983 in Joseph and William, 1998). Besides, gender differences have been found among Indian learners. For example, Misra, (1986 in Joseph and William, 1998) spelt out successful female students tended to attribute their performance to external causes such as luck and task easiness than males. This finding also coincides with the earlier studies by Weiner (1974, 1986). Li et al. (2007) also carried out a research on causal attribution regarding success and failure in English learning among Chinese learners at Vocational College of East China. The result of the study revealed that male students are more likely to attribute their failure to internal and stable factor (ability) than girls. Georgiou (1999) also examined achievement attributions of Greek Cypriot students and gender differences were found, with females attributing their achievement to effort more than males did. In addition, Boruchovitch, (2004) conducted a study on causal attributions for success and failure among Brazilian students. The results indicated that males in this investigation were more external to explain both their success and their failure experiences than were females. Stipek (1984) explored the attribution of boys and girls on the test of spelling and mathematics. The author found that more girls than boys were likely to attribute failure to ability. The same author also found that boys are believed to be more competent than girls.

Hence, comparison between boys and girls in foreign language learning setting, (such as in Ethiopian high schools in this case) needs a substantial investigation so as to explore some hidden variables that can affect learners' language learning achievement. This research was thus, an attempt to attract attention of scholars in the area of gender related attribution of performance in learning English as foreign language in Ethiopian contexts.

Attribution theory

Attribution theory is concerned with people's explanations of a behavior, event, or outcome that has occurred. That is, people's perceptions of why an event or behavior happened. Hence, attributions of causes are made for a wide variety of outcomes, including success or failure, social acceptance or rejection, physical conditions, such as death or disease, or behaviors such as aggressive actions or requests for help (Weiner, 1985, 1992).

As Weiner (1985) points out, in learning environment, for instance, when student fails an examination, particularly if the outcome is unexpected, learners undertake an attribution search. A leaner is always trying to

understand what happened toward his/her outcome. In this regard, learner's perceived cause of the event is important regardless of any objective explanation because anything learners perceive as being the cause of their failure will affect their future motivation towards subsequent effort and achievement (ibid).

One important feature of Weiner's theory is that the specific attribution being made (luck, effort, etc.) is less important than the dimension of the attributions, which are classified along three causal dimensions: locus, stability, and controllability (Graham and Weiner, 1996; Weiner, 1992). For instance, Weiner (1992) extended his theory to suggest that it was not only the reasons that people constructed for their successes and failures that were important but whether they saw these as due to internal or external factors, were changeable or un-changeable, controllable or uncontrollable. Thus, if an attribution is seen as external, unchangeable and outside of the individual's control, it will be likely to have a more consistent effect than one which is perceived as internal, changeable and within the person's control (Chan, 1992; Johnson and Johnson, 1994; Peacock, 2007).

Research questions

The study attempted to answer the following research questions:

a) Is there attribution difference between boys and girls in their performance in learning English as a foreign language?
b) To what factors do boys and girls attribute the success and failure of their performance in learning English as foreign language?
c) What are the pedagogical implications of the factors to which boys and girls attribute the successes and failures of their performance in learning English as a foreign language?

METHODS

Sampling

The study was conducted in Adama town which is characterized by diversified population from other regions of the country (USAID, 2007). Hence, this town was purposively selected as a research setting because the diversified nature of the town could contribute to the external validity of the data which could strengthen the application of the finding of this study to wider region (Fraenkel and Wallen, 2006). Three government high schools were purposefully selected. The underlying premise of the selection of the schools was the relative proximity of the location and homogeneity of the student population as the students of public schools are from families of relatively the same economic background (Getahun, 2002) and the heterogeneity of the population residing in the town (USAID, 2007). Besides, all the students were using national English language text book for grade nine. So, it was believed that the finding of the study could be generalizable.

Targeted population

The targeted population was grade nine students. The selection of the grade was purposive. In order to get a representative sample of students from each school, eight sections i.e. four section from Goro High School, three from Adama High School and one section from Danbal High School were randomly selected. As a result, the total number of population involved in the study was 403 grade nine students. Improving students' perception and their performance at this stage is essential as students are admitted to the new environment, that is, general secondary school (grade nine)(Jennifer et al., 2005).

Data collection instruments and procedures

Three research instruments were employed to collect relevant information for this study. These were test, questionnaires and interview. Though different researchers may employ different orders of gathering data, the present study, however, followed Basturk and Yavuz (2009)'s order of collecting information: test, questionnaire and interview. The sequence was adopted thinking that it would provide the study with a more authentic data.

Test

First, a test consisting of fifty items was prepared as an ongoing program of the schools. The test was prepared with an agreement between English subject teachers of the schools who were teaching the subject according to the methods and objectives set in the textbook. A total of 410 grade nine students were expected to sit for the test though seven students failed to sit for the exam for unknown reasons. Face validity of test was checked with the senior teachers of the subject and subject specialists from university. The internal consistencies of the items were also checked and the reliability of the test was found to be 0.80 Cronbach alpha. Therefore, the test was more reliable and valid. Then, the test was administered to the sample students.

Questionnaire

Attribution of success and failure was assessed by using scale widely used in the literature and was developed according to Weiner's (1979, 1985, 1992) attribution theory. Some of the items were also adapted from McCauley et al. (1992)'s questionnaire on Language Achievement Attribution Scale (LAAS) and Anteneh (2004) in such a way that they suit the purpose of the study and to provide the study with a more authentic data. The attribution scale (perceived causes for success or failure) consisted of thirty items on 5-point likert- scale ranging 1 (not important) to 5(very important). The attribution scale was made up of two parts. Part-I for those who felt that they were happy with their test score and hence, successful and Part-II was completed by students who perceived that their score of the test was a failing one. Both parts of questionnaires had open- ended items. The questionnaires were translated into Amharic in order to get an authentic data and piloted to estimate the reliability of the variables before the actual process of data collection. Reliability was also considered to see the internal consistency of the items. Finally, the reliability for perceived causes of success and failure measures was found to be 0.76 and 0.93 Cronbach alpha respectively.

At first, students were given back the result of the test and they were asked to rate their result as success or a failure according to how they were satisfied with the result; hence, success and failure were determined. In other words, students were given instruction to evaluate the performance of their English test in terms of success or failure. It was success if she/he was happy or satisfied with what she/he got; it did not necessarily mean a pass mark. On the other hand, it was failure if she/he was unhappy or dissatisfied with what she/he scored; it did not necessary mean a failing mark. Finally, students rated the degree to which they believed the result of their test was due to their ability, effort, and level of task simplicity, luck, and mood and teacher related factors.

In order to obtain valid data; the administration of the students' questionnaire was conducted in the presence of the researcher. Students were given time to read each item at their own convenience and filled in their genuine responses appropriately. Researcher presence also helped them to clear up some of the misunderstandings that they encountered while completing the questionnaire and hence an immediate feedback on any confusion has increased the validity of the responses. Since the main purpose of the study was to investigate students' causal attributions, open-ended questions were also included for open responses such as views, perceptions, and experiences.

Interview

Interview was another instrument to gather information from students. To be able to validate the information solicited via questionnaires, this tool was employed. Besides, the researcher believes that it allows him flexibility to probe his respondents' responses more deeply. For the study, the researcher interviewed 39 students (Boys 20 and 19 girls). The interview was conducted following the procedures that follow.

The researcher acted as the interviewer in the study. Before the interviews, the home room and subject teachers invited each student to participate in the interview. With their agreement, the interview was arranged after school. The participants were notified and agreed to stay behind after school to take part in the interview. The participants were interviewed in a vacant classroom in the case schools. The interview was audio-recorded with the participants' consent. The names of the participants were kept anonymous. To create a friendly and comfortable environment, drinks and snacks were also provided. The setting of each interview session was kept the same.

Before each interview session, a brief introduction was given. The researcher explained to the participants the purpose of the research. They were allowed to talk freely and to explain what they usually do and feel in real situations. It was explained that there were no right or wrong answers to all the questions. They were also told that data from the interview including the audio recordings would be kept confidential and no other people will have access to them except the researcher. Moreover, to ensure communication between the interviewer and the interviewees, interview was conducted in Amhara and Oromo languages in order to let students feel more at ease in expressing themselves and then it was translated into English for the analysis. Finally, all the data collected were further structured and analyzed.

Methods of data analysis

Both quantitative and qualitative data were gathered for the purpose of the study. The quantitative data were gathered through question-naire while the qualitative data were gathered through interview and open ended questionnaires.

Questionnaires

The participants (193 boys and 210 girls) were asked to fill in questionnaires on the perceived causes of their success and failure after they were given back results of their test**.** The collected data

were tabulated, analyzed and interpreted systematically through some scientific research methods. Descriptive statistics, principal component analysis, and t-tests were applied to analyze the data through SPSS (17 version) software.

To select the major causes/factors for attribution of performance, principal axis factoring with an Eigen cutoff value 0.1 and Varimax rotation was used. The Principal component analysis reduced the thirty items measuring the perceived causes of success into eight factors. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy test was also found to be 0.78. Additionally, Bartlett's test of sphericity (435) = 1978.06, p= .000 was very significant.

On the other hand, thirty items measuring the perceived causes of failure were reduced to seven factors. Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy test was found to be 0.90 which was high, exceeding the recommended value of .6 (Morgan et al., 2005; Pallant, 2007; Tabachnick and Fidell, 2007). Besides, it was checked that Bartlett's test of sphericity (435) = 3175.10, p= .000) was very significant. That is, the items were correlated highly enough to provide a reasonable basis for principal component analysis.

Interview

The data gathered through the open-ended items of the question-naire and the interviews were analyzed qualitatively. The audio recorded data obtained from the interviewees were transcribed and translated from Afan Oromo and Amharic to English. The perceived causes of success and failure of performance were the main focuses of the interview. Accordingly, the data was reviewed, identified, and put into different themes through systematic searching and arranging the interview that the researcher accumulated by reading transcripts as well as listening to the audio recorded data. After that, the researcher sorted and organized the data according to the reasons cited for the success and failure of the performance. The results of emerged attribution were sum-marized and compared between boys and girls and hence, a qualitative analysis of them has been made. Frequency and percentage used to illustrate the frequency of attributions that emerged from the data. At the end, the results were interpreted and discussed.

RESULTS

Using principal component analysis at Eigen value cutoff one, students' perceived causes of success and failure of performance were identified. Hence, eight factors mea-suring student perceived causes of success were identified. These are: making effort, having ability, good teaching practices, task simplicity, teacher's good beha-vior, teacher's predisposition, luck/chance and availability of instructional materials. In the same way, seven factors such as lack of effort, lack of ability, poor teaching practices, task difficulty, teacher's bad behavior, un-luckiness, and bad mood measuring student perceived causes of failure were identified

Attribution difference between boys and girls

The results of the study showed that boys and girls had conceptualized different attribution patterns of their performance in learning English as a foreign language.

From the analyses, significant difference between boys and girls in *perceived causes of failure (PCF)* in their performance was found.

The results indicated that there was significant diffe-rence between girls and boys, t (198) = 3.44, p = .001, α < 0 .05. That is, the mean score of girls in their *perceived causes of failure* (M = 2.96, SD = 0.78) was significantly different from that of boys (M = 3.35, SD = 0.92). Similarly, it was found out that there was significant difference between boys and girls in their *perceived causes of success* (PCS). The results of group statistics and independent sample indicated that, the mean score of girls in their perceived *causes of success* (M = 3.73, SD = 0.47) was significantly different from that of boys (M = 3.47, SD = 0.36) at t (142) = 4.05, p = .000, α < 0 .05.

Gender difference in attributions of failure

Boys who were not satisfied with their performance belie-ved that they were unsuccessful because of lack of effort and ability. They also tended to believe that teacher's bad behavior and poor teaching practices, task difficulty and bad mood as the causes of their failure. On the contrary, girls believed that effort, ability and mood were what determine their performance; therefore they attributed their failure to lack of effort, lack of ability, bad mood and unluckiness. Factors such as poor teaching practices, task difficulty and teacher's bad behavior were less important causes of their failure as opposed to that of boys.

As seen from the group statistics in Table 1, girls rated lack of effort (M= 3.07), lack of ability (M= 3.03), task difficulty (M= 3.66) and unluckiness (M= 3.14) in explaining their academic failure. On the other hand, boys attributed the failure to lack of effort (M= 3.39) lack of ability (M= 3.57), poor teaching practice (M= 3.26), task difficulty (M= 3.21), teacher's bad behavior (M= 3.35), unluckiness (M= 3.02)   and bad mood (M= 3.15). Statistically, significant difference was also found between boys and girls on the causal attributions of the failure. That is, the mean score of boys was higher than that of girls. For instance, the mean score of boys on lack of effort (M= 3.39, SD= 1.15) and lack of ability (M= 3.57, SD= 1.04), and teacher's bad behavior (M= 3.35, SD= 1.22) was greater than the mean scores of girls (M= 3.07, SD= 1.20) and (M= 3.03, SD= 0.96), and teacher's bad behavior (M= 2.83, SD=1.07) respectively. The diffe-rences were also significant at t (221) = -2.09, p= .038, α < 0 .05 in lack of effort and t (2.07)= - 4.13, p= .000, α < 0 .05 in lack of ability and t (201) = -3.47, p= .001, α < 0 .05 in teacher's bad behavior for both boys and girls as illustrated in Table 2.

The researcher compared the attribution difference between the two gender groups. Although both groups did not differ significantly in poor teaching practice, task difficulty, unluckiness and bad mood attributions, boys were more apt to attribute their failures to those

Table 1. Boys' and girls' group statistics on failure attribution.

	Gender group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Lack of effort	Girls	133	3.07	1.20
	Boys	102	3.39	1.15
Lack of ability	Girls	133	3.03	0.96
	Boys	102	3.57	1.04
Poor Teaching Practices	Girls	133	2.83	1.24
	Boys	102	3.26	1.29
Task difficulty	Girls	133	2.96	0.98
	Boys	102	3.21	1.05
Teacher's Bad behavior	Girls	133	2.83	1.07
	Boys	102	3.35	1.22
Unluckiness	Girls	133	3.14	1.20
	Boys	102	3.02	1.24
Bad mood	Girls	133	3.00	1.15
	Boys	102	3.15	1.24

attributions than girls in explaining their failure. The importance both boys and girls gave to unluckiness and bad mood as the explanation of their failure was approximately related.

Gender difference in attributions of success

Unlike the findings of previous attribution research (Beyer, 1999; Felder et al., 1995), the results of the current study demonstrated promising gains for girls in terms of their attributions for success. That is, the mean score of girls in perceived causes of success (effort and luck) was greater than that of boys. For instance, the means score of girls was (M= 4.08, SD= 0.76 for effort) and M= 4.14 SD= 0.85 for luck) while that of boys was (M= 3.54, SD= 0.88 for effort) and M=3.32, SD=1.05 for luck).

The researcher computed weighted mean for each factor which was identified through principal component analysis and compared the mean scores for the gender group using independent sample test. Mean scores, standard deviations and independent sample test for eight factors derived from success attribution measures are reported in Table 3.

The study revealed that girls tended to ascribe the cause of their successes more to effort and luck than boys did. As seen from Table 4, gender difference in perceived causes of success is also exhibited. Therefore, it has been found out that statistically there was significant difference in their effort and luck causal attributions for

success i.e t (165.94) = 4.21, p = .000, α < 0 .05 and t (165.75) = 5.58, p = .000, α < 0 .05 respectively. However, other perceived causes of success such as ability, good teaching practices, availability of instructional material, task easiness, teacher's good behavior and teacher's predisposition were approximately similar and it was computed that statistically there was no significant difference.

Even though the findings of previous study showed (Beyer, 1999) that boys tended to ascribe the cause of their successes to ability more often than girls do; the result of this study did not substantiate this expectation. Hence, gender difference in ability attribution for success was not statistically significant. However, ability was the attribution that both boys and girls rated as important causes in explaining their successes.

In general, almost all the causal factors were rated as important attribution for both boys and girls in explaining their successes; however, girls rated teachers' predisposition as less important causes for their success. This finding challenges Stipek and Gralinski's (1991) claim that girls' attribution patterns are more self‑defeating than boys.

Interview and open ended items results

Success attribution

The data gathered through the open-ended items of the

Table 2. Independent samples test of gender difference in PCF.

		Levene's test for equality of variances		t-test for equality of means						
									95% confidence interval of the difference	
		F	Sig.	T	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean difference	Std. error difference	Lower	Upper
Lack of effort	Equal variances assumed	.529	.468	-2.079	233	.039	-.32206	.15493	-.62729	-.01682
	Equal variances not assumed			-2.091	221.942	.038	-.32206	.15402	-.62559	-.01853
Lack of ability	Equal variances assumed	1.407	.237	-4.135	233	.000	-.54230	.13115	-.80070	-.28391
	Equal variances not assumed			-4.089	207.640	.000	-.54230	.13262	-.80375	-.28086
Poor Teaching Practices	Equal variances assumed	.422	.517	-2.601	233	.010	-.43274	.16636	-.76050	-.10497
	Equal variances not assumed			-2.589	213.339	.010	-.43274	.16717	-.76226	-.10321
Task difficulty	Equal variances assumed	.444	.506	-1.807	233	.072	-.24109	.13340	-.50393	.02174
	Equal variances not assumed			-1.790	209.193	.075	-.24109	.13467	-.50658	.02439
Teacher's Bad behavior	Equal variances assumed	3.403	.066	-3.527	233	.001	-.52950	.15012	-.82527	-.23372
	Equal variances not assumed			-3.468	201.998	.001	-.52950	.15268	-.83055	-.22844
Unluckiness	Equal variances assumed	.306	.581	.768	233	.443	.12325	.16056	-.19308	.43958
	Equal variances not assumed			.765	214.101	.445	.12325	.16120	-.19450	.44100
Bad mood	Equal variances assumed	2.178	.141	-.914	233	.362	-.14330	.15673	-.45210	.16550
	Equal variances not assumed			-.905	208.154	.367	-.14330	.15840	-.45557	.16897

questionnaire and the interviews were analyzed qualitatively. As shown in Table 5, several reasons for success were cited by boys and girls of which the majority was related to effort. For instance, the category included reasons such *as I do my work, I work hard, I study hard, I do my home work, I Listen to English program radio, I read fiction, read supplementary books and read in the library*. In other words, it involved a sense of trying hard.

As illustrated in Table 5, effort was the most important reasons for boys and girls that constituted 77.78 and 71.43 % respectively. The second frequent attribution was teacher factors which constituted 33.33 % for boys and 57.14 % for girls. This category constituted reasons such as *teacher's good methods of teaching, teacher's friendliness, teacher's commitment, teacher's punctuality, teacher's effort to makes the class interesting, teacher's good knowledge of English, teacher's fairness, the teacher's quality in teaching and teachers' help*. Interestingly, students are opposite to hedonic biasing; they did not credit themselves for their success but they gave recognition for the teachers. This indicates that if the teachers are accepted by their students in their actions, personality and competence, students

Table 3. Boys' and girls' group statistics on success attribution.

	Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Ability	Girls	77	3.57	0.91
	Boys	91	3.46	0.83
Effort	Girls	77	4.08	0.76
	Boys	91	3.54	0.88
Good teaching practices	Girls	77	3.79	0.80
	Boys	91	3.87	0.77
Luck	Girls	77	4.14	0.85
	Boys	91	3.32	1.05
Availability of Instructional Material	Girls	77	3.78	0.93
	Boys	91	3.72	1.04
Teacher's Predisposition	Girls	77	3.05	1.18
	Boys	91	2.77	1.15
Task easiness	Girls	77	3.26	0.87
	Boys	91	3.14	0.88
Teacher's good behavior	Girls	77	3.89	0.89
	Boys	91	3.72	0.92

duely acknowledge them for whom they are.

Hence, this result enriches Strevens's (1980, P. 28) comments on the best teacher: "… the best teachers know their pupils, encourage them, show concern for them, find out their interests, discover their learning preferences, monitor their progress with a sympathetic eye, unravel their difficulties – cherish them as a human being engaged in a collaboration of learning." When teacher are like the way the author described, the students will also be encouraged, be motivated and work harder. They also construct helpful belief out of teachers' action, personality and knowledge of subject matter. Consequently, the belief students construct about themselves will affect or enhance their learning conditions such as motivation, expectation and future performance (Weiner, 1985, 2006).

Other attributions such as family assistance (having supplementary materials, rewards, attending private language school during the summer and family follow up), peer assistance (discussion with friends, asking friends for help, borrowing book from friends and study with friends) and God's help (I pray before sitting for a test, God has a big place in my success and I have no parents except God), were only cited by girls. For example, girls mentioned family assistance (57.14%) , peer assistance (42.86 %) and God's help (28.57 and 17.65 %) as the cause of their success. From the assistance attribution mentioned before, these groups of the students have a sense of dependency. They believed that they got assistances and they also acknowledged it

by attributing their success to the assistances they got. From this, one can deduce the extent to which cooperative study and follow up are significant in learning domain. Besides, students constructed a belief of cooperative approach of learning than individualistic approach.

Other attributions such as good background knowledge (66.67 %), attendance (22.22 %) and strategy (42.86 %) were also cited as the causes of the success. Boys cited the first two attributions while girls emphasized on strategy which boys did not mention at all. This shows girls were more systematic and organized than boys.

To sum up, eleven main causes of success were emerged from the qualitative data obtained from students. Among the causes, effort, teacher factors, peer and family assistances were the most frequent attribution that the students cited. Interestingly, low achievers cited God's help as the cause of their success. Even if they implicitly knew that they were successful in their performance, they did not want to tell explicitly and hence they cited God as the cause. From their strong conviction of God's help, one can deduce that culture and the environment where the children grew up can also be considered as the cause of success. As mentioned earlier, these students cited God as the causes of their success; God as the cause was also constructed from the cultural and religious knowledge they accumulated from their parent or environment. From other causes, such as effort, family assistance, peer assistance, and strategy, attribution can be claimed to be culture specific.

Table 4. Independent test of PCS for ability group.

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for equality of means					95% confidence interval of the difference	
		F	Sig.	t	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean difference	Std. error difference	Lower	Upper
Ability	Equal variances assumed	.763	.384	.799	166	.425	.10769	.13476	-.15837	.37375
	Equal variances not assumed			.793	155.559	.429	.10769	.13580	-.16055	.37594
Effort	Equal variances assumed	4.788	.030	4.156	166	.000	.53407	.12850	.28036	.78777
	Equal variances not assumed			4.208	165.943	.000	.53407	.12691	.28350	.78463
Good teaching practices	Equal variances assumed	.059	.809	-.623	166	.534	-.07592	.12188	-.31655	.16470
	Equal variances not assumed			-.621	159.519	.535	-.07592	.12222	-.31730	.16545
Luck	Equal variances assumed	6.552	.011	5.482	166	.000	.81974	.14952	.52453	1.11496
	Equal variances not assumed			5.577	165.754	.000	.81974	.14699	.52953	1.10995
Availability of Instructional Material	Equal variances assumed	.219	.640	.390	166	.697	.05944	.15242	-.24149	.36038
	Equal variances not assumed			.393	165.372	.694	.05944	.15107	-.23884	.35772
Teacher's Predisposition	Equal variances assumed	.628	.429	1.572	166	.118	.28269	.17983	-.07237	.63774
	Equal variances not assumed			1.569	160.035	.119	.28269	.18021	-.07321	.63858
Task simplicity	Equal variances assumed	.000	.994	.894	166	.373	.12150	.13593	-.14687	.38987
	Equal variances not assumed			.895	162.159	.372	.12150	.13576	-.14659	.38959
Teacher's good behavior	Equal variances assumed	.453	.502	1.259	166	.210	.17582	.13968	-.09995	.45160
	Equal variances not assumed			1.262	163.070	.209	.17582	.13928	-.09920	.45085

Failure attributions

Ten attributions of failure emerged from the data (Table 6). Again effort was the major category (here indicating a lack of effort) of the attributions cited between boys and girls which constituted 90.91 and 16.67 % respectively. This attributions included statements such *as I am careless, I do not take time/I rush, I do not do my homework, I do not try/work hard/listen/ and, I do not learn , I come to school because my family wanted me to go and I do not study because I can pass the test.*

Teacher factors were also cited as important causes of failure which included reasons, for example, *mistreating students in the classroom, teacher's low commitment, teacher's poor teaching methods, unfair marking system, lack of serious monitoring during the exam, being late,*

Table 5. Students' success attributions of performance in learning English as a foreign language.

No.	Success attributions	Boys N= 9		Girls N= 7	
		Freq.	Percentage	Freq.	Percentage
1	Ability	2	22.22	3	*42.86
2	Attendance	2	22.22	1	14.29
3	Effort	7	*77.78	5	*71.43
4	Family assistance	0	0.00	4	*57.14
5	God's help	6	*66.67	0	0.00
6	Good background Knowledge	0	0.00	2	28.57
7	Peer assistance	2	22.22	3	*42.86
8	Strategy	0	0.00	3	*42.86
9	Teacher factors	3	*33.33	4	*57.14%

Note. The value indicates the frequency of the perceived causes of success themes emerged from open ended questions and interview of students. * Themes of the most frequent mentioned success causes

Table 6. Students' failure attributions of performance in learning English as a foreign language

No.	Failure attributions	Boys N= 11		Girls N= 12	
		Freq.	Percentage	Freq.	Percentage
1	Test anxiety	0	0.00	6	*50.00
2	Lack of effort	10	*90.91	2	16.67
3	Lack of family assistance	3	27.27	6	*50.00
4	Lack of ability	1	8.33	1	8.33
5	Lack of interest	5	*45.45	1	8.33
6	Lack of reference materials	2	18.18	0	0.00
7	Peer influence/pressure	4	*36.36	0	0.00
8	Poor quality at primary level	4	*36.36	4	*33.33
9	Student's disciplinary problems	2	18.18	8	*66.67
10	Teacher factors	6	*54.55	2	16.67

Note. The value indicates the frequency of the perceived causes of failure themes emerged from open ended questions and interview of students * Themes of the most frequent mentioned failure causes.

teacher's absenteeism, teacher's unwillingness to listen to student's problem, teacher is not friendly, teacher is impatient to listen to students, teachers glorify themselves, teachers being unfair in handling students (gender, good vs bad performers, religion, ethnicity etc).

Girls cited test anxiety which consisted of 50% occurrence as causes of their failure while boys did not see test anxiety as the cause of their failure. These show that students were not well oriented about the test. From the result, it seems that boys were more confident than girls because anxiety was not their concern.

Lack of family assistance was also ascribed as the cause of failure with 50% occurrence for girls. Interestingly, peer assistance which was cited as the cause of success was reciprocated for failure too. For instance, boys cited their friends as the causes of their failure and hence, failure was not their fault. In explaining this

attribution, they mentioned the following expression: *my friends want me to join their group, my friends are careless and they do not want me to study, they want me to go to cinema, they want me to join them and tease and disturb others, when they borrow my books and exercise books, they will not give me back etc.* Since the students are in similar age levels, they can influence each other. Even though the groups raise peer pressure as the causes of their failure, it has also positive pedagogical implication. The pressure they put on each other can also be wisely used for pedagogical purposes when they are well guided and informed.

Students' disciplinary problems in general were what girls indicated as the cause of their failure. This category constituted of 66.67% occurrence. The category included, *Students' disobedience in the classroom, unwillingness to listen to teachers' advice, bullying each other, grouping*

each other, fighting each other, students' malicious expression against the clever students, for example they often use expression such as fara, which stands for "uncivilized" kelem" which means *"the so called wise, knowledgeable."* As Aziz et al. (2009 p. 660) pointed out, "Students' misconduct in the classroom interferes with teaching and learning and is thought to be precursor to later school dropout and similar negative social outcomes." Hence, students' behavior is worth noted in teaching and learning environment for both teachers and students themselves.

Both boys and girls emphasized poor quality of education at primary level as the causes of their failure. Though it is difficult to grant their reasons as the cause for the current performance, it has an implication that they were not confident with their academic background. As their back ground knowledge indirectly contributes to their current performance, there is a need for teachers to take students back ground into consideration during lesson delivery and testing as well.

Besides, lack of interest and student's disciplinary problems were attributed to failure though the importance of the causes was not significantly considered across the group. That is, lack of interest cited by boys while student's disciplinary problems was claimed by girls. Surprisingly, lack of ability was the least significant attribution for explaining failures.

Conclusion

The study has revealed that boys and girls conceptualized different attribution patterns of their performance in learning English as a foreign language. The difference was also found statistically significant in their perceived causes of success and failure at t (142) = 4.05, p = .000, α = 0 .05 and t (198) = 3.44, p = .001, α = 0 .05 respectively. Unlike the previous findings of attribution research, results of the current study demonstrated promising gains for girls in terms of their attributions for success (Beyer, 1999; Felder et al., 1995). That is, girls tended to ascribe the cause of their successes more to effort and luck than boys did. In addition, other perceived causes of success such as ability, good teaching practices, and availability of instructional material, task simplicity, teacher's good behavior and teacher's predisposition were found to be relatively important causes of success for both boys and girls.

On the other hand, boys who were not satisfied with their performance believed that they were unsuccessful because of lack of effort and ability. They also tended to believe that teacher's bad behavior and poor teaching practices, task difficulty and bad mood were the causes of their failure. On the contrary, girls believed that effort, ability and mood were what determine their performance; therefore, they attributed their failure to lack of effort, lack of ability, bad mood and unluckiness. Factors such as poor teaching practices, task difficulty and teacher's bad

behavior were less important causes of their failure as opposed to that of boys.

Pedagogical implications and recommendations

It was mentioned in the conclusions that boys and girls conceptualized different attributions in the success and failure of performance in learning English as a foreign language. Teacher's awareness of the different attributions of boys and girls to the success and failure of their performances has got pedagogical implications. Nunan (1989) writes that the effectiveness of a program relates to the expectation of learners, and if students' objective and subjective needs are not recognized by their teacher, there will be a mismatch between what they are expected to do and what they want to do. Therefore, teachers need to be given training on how their learners construct belief of their language learning and performance as well.

As boys and girls showed attribution differences of their failures and successes, teachers are expected to recognize these differences and treat both sexes according to the attribution differences exhibited.

Students' attributions such as peer assistance and family assistance as causes of success, and peer pressure and students disciplinary problems as causes of failure show a sense of cooperation in attaining their objectives. So, cooperative learning environment is suggested to be employed, which has implication for curriculum developer and subject teacher in designing task. Hence, group oriented activities would enrich their effort attribution.

Awareness of the factors to which learners attribute their success or failure of their performance in language learning will help the subject teacher to motivate his/her learners to attribute their success or failure to desirable factors such as effort. Williams and Burden (1997, p. 134) also confirm that "the extent to which learners are in control of a language will have a pronounced effect up on their motivation to be continually involved in learning that language."

Finally, the researcher suggests that more studies of this kind need to be conducted on this area. Since there are other external cause of attributions like teachers' perception which are thought to be related to students' perception of performance and language learning, it would be good if teachers' perception is studied and the effect of attribution on student's achievement is also studied longitudinally. This study may open door for further studies into attributions of success and failures in language learning in order to build up a more coherent picture of this area in relation to learning foreign language.

REFERENCES

Admasu K (2008). Primary School Enrollment and Progression in Ethiopia: Family and School Factors. Graduate Student, Sociology Department, Brown University.

Anteneh T (2004). Writing self-efficacy, performance in writing and causal attribution. Unpublished MA Thesis. Addis Ababa University.

Asonibare B (1986). Attributions of failure and success by Nigerian Secondary School students. Ilorin J. Educ. 6:30-40.

Aziz Y, Jamaludin R., Shahrin H., Ali I., Raja, R.,and Noordin Y.(2009). Discipline problems among secondary school students Johor Bahru, Malaysi. Eur. J. Soc. Sci. 11(4).

Basturk S, Yavuz I (2009). Investigating causal attribution of success and failure on mathematics instruction of students in Turkish high schools. Procedia Social and Behavioral Science. Istanbul: Elsevier ltd.

Beyer S (1999). Gender differences in causal attributions by college students of performance on course examinations. Current Psychology: Dev. Learn. Pers. Soc. 17(4):346-358.

Boruchovitch E (2004). A study of causal attributions for success and failure in mathematics among Brazilian students. Interamerican J. Psychol. 38(1):53-60.

Burden P (2003). Student perceptions of the causes of failure and the need to raise mastery expectations. JALT Conference Proceedings, Okayama Shoka University.

Chan LKS (1992). Causal attributions, strategy usage and reading competence. Paper presented at the AARE/NZARE 1992 Joint Conference, Geelong, Victoria, 22-26 November, 1992.

Dejene L (1994). Language Testing and Its Practical Application: The testing of reading in focus. Unpublished doctoral thesis. Addis Ababa University.

Endaweke A (2008). EFL learning strategy use: the case of male and female preparatory students. MA Thesis. Addis Ababa University.

Felder R, Felder G, Mauney M, Hamrin C, Dietz J (1995). A longitudinal study of engineering student performance and retention III, gender differences in student performance and attitudes. J. Eng. Educ. 84(2):151-163.

Fraenkel JR, Wallen NE (2006). How to design and evaluate research in education (6th edn.). New York: McGraw- Hill.

Gashaw N (2008). A study on the effectiveness of teaching-learning vocabulary in three second cycle elementary schools in Addis Ababa: grade eight in focus. MA Thesis. Addis Ababa University.

Georgiou S (1999). Achievement attributions of sixth grade children and their parents. Educ. Psychol. 19(4):399-411.

Getahun W (2002). School based factors contributing to differences in students' achievement at high and low passing rate scorers of government secondary schools of Addis Ababa at national examination. Unpublished MA Thesis. Addis Ababa University.

Graham S, Weiner B (1996). Theories and principles of motivation. In: Berliner DC & Calfee RC (Eds.). Handbook of Educational Psychology. New York: Macmillan.

Hailemichael A (1993). Developing a service English syllabus to meet the academic demands and constraints in the Ethiopian University context. Unpublished Doctoral Thesis. Addis Ababa University.

Haregewoin F (2003). An investigation of classroom listening comprehension teaching practices in relation to the new English course books: grade 11 in focus. Unpublished MA Thesis, Addis Ababa University.

Italo B (1999). A comparison of the effectiveness of teacher versus peer feedback on Addis Ababa University students: writing revisions. Unpublished Doctoral Thesis. Addis Ababa University.

Jennifer EV, John W, Manizheh SY (2005). Sex differences in performance attributions, self- efficacy, and achievement in mathematics: if I'm so smart, why don't I know it? Can. J. Educ. 28(3):384-408.

Johnson D, Johnson R (1994). Motivational process in cooperative, competitive, and individualistic learning situations. In: Ames C & Ames R (Eds.), Research on motivation in education, The classroom milieu. Orlando, Fl: Academic Press 2:249-286.

Joseph MK, William TR (1998). A multi-level analysis of cultural experience and gender influences on causal attribution to perceived performance in mathematics. Br. J. Educ. Psychol. 68:25-37.

Li L, Cuixia H, Yueqin H (2007). Causal attribution regarding success and failure in English learning. CELEA Journal (Bimonthly) 30(6):57-65.

McCauley E, Duncan TE, Russell DW (1992). Measuring causal attributions: the revised causal dimension scale. Pers. Soc. Psychol. Bull. 18:566-573.

Mekasha K (2007). An exploration of task design procedures of E.E.L. teachers in Ethiopia: A case study. J. Educ. Dev. 1(11):81-129.

Ministry of Education (2002). Education Sector Development Program. Addis Ababa

Ministry of Education (1997). English for Ethiopia: Grade Nine – Teacher's Book I. Addis Ababa: EMPDA.

Morgan GA, Leech NL, Gloeckner GW, Barrett KC (2005). SPSS for introductory statistics: Use and interpretation (2nd ed.). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Mulu N (2009). Quality of Education in Ethiopian Public Institutions: Forum for Social Studies. Addis Ababa.

Nunan D (1989). The role of learner in program implementation. In: Johnson K (ed.) The Second Language Curriculum. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Oxford R (1994). Language learning strategies in a nutshell: Update and ESL suggestions. TESOL J. 2(2):18-22.

Pallant Julie. (2007). SPSS survival manual: A step by step guide to data analysis using SPSS for windows (3rd edn). New York: Open University Press.

Peacock M (2007). Attribution and learning English as a foreign language in ELT . Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Stevick EW (1980). Teaching Languages: A Way and Ways Rowley. Rowley, Mass: Newbury House.

Stipek DJ (1984). Sex differences in children's attributions for success and failure on math and spelling tests. Sex Roles 1(11/12):969-981.

Stipek DJ, Gralinski H (1991). Gender differences in children's achievement-related beliefs and emotional responses to success and failure in mathematics. J. Educ. Psychol. 83:361-371.

Strevens P (1980). Special-Purpose Language Learning: A Perspective" In: Kinsella V (ed.). Language Teaching And Linguistics: Surveys, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Tabachnick BG, Fidell LS (2007). Using multivariate statistics (5th edn).Boston: Pearson Education.

USAID (2007). Identifying at risk populations and HIV/AIDS referral services: baseline assessment for mobile counseling and testing program in the Oromiya region. United States Agency for International Development/Ethiopia Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

Weiner B (1974). Achievement motivation and attribution theory. Morristown, N.J.: General Learning Press.

Weiner B (1979). A theory of motivation for some classroom experiences. J. Educ. Psychol. 71:3-25.

Weiner B (1986). An attribution theory of motivation and emotion. New York: Springer.

Weiner B (1992). Human Motivation: Metaphors, theories, and research. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Weiner B (1985). An attributional theory of motivation and emotion. New York: Springer-Verlag.

Weiner B (2006). Social motivation, justice, and the moral emotions: an attributional approach. New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc.

Williams M, Burden RL (1997). Psychology for language teachers. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Williams M, Burden R, Poulet G, Maun I (2004). Learners' perceptions of their successes and failures in foreign language learning Language Learning Journal 30:19-29.

BOYS' AND GIRLS' ATTRIBUTION OF PERFORMANCE IN LEARNING ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE: THE CASE OF ADAMA HIGH SCHOOLS

Dear student,

The purpose of this questionnaire is to find out what causal explanations you give to your performance in your English test. Please read the instructions carefully and evaluate your performance in this test.
Thank you in advance!

General Information

Name of school _____
Name of student _____
Gender: Male_____
                   Female_____
Section_____
Age_____

ATTRIBUTION SCALE

Instruction

Evaluate your performance in your current English test in terms of success or failure. **It is success** if you **are happy or satisfied** with what you have got; it does not necessarily mean a pass mark. **It is failure** if you are **unhappy or dissatisfied** with what you have scored; it does not necessary mean a failing mark.
Follow the following steps to fill the questionnaire

1. Based on how success and failure are defined above, to which one do you label your test score? Indicate it by circling the word written below.

Success Failure

2. The perceived causes of your performance of the test are listed below. The degree of influence of each cause may vary from *unimportant to highly important i.e. Unimportant, less important, important, more important* and *highly important* which are labeled 1, 2,3,4,5 respectively.
Please show the degree of influence of each cause by putting a tick mark (✓) in the tables below.
3. If you have circled success, please use **part I** only. If you have circled failure, use **part II** of the questionnaire.

N.B
1 = Unimportant   2 = Less important   3 = Important   4 = More important   5= Highly important

Part 1. Perceived causes of success on current English test.

S/N	Perceived causes of success	1	2	3	4	5
1	Self-confidence					
2	Having good language command					
3	Teacher's competence in teaching English language					
4	Fastness in understanding the content					
5	Sharp-mindedness/being intelligent					
6	Ability to understand English language					
7	Hard work and constant attempt					
8	Good study habit					
9	Taking more time while working on the test					
10	Teacher's good teaching methods					
11	Teacher's high commitment in teaching and making English lesson interesting					
12	Having strategies or plan of study					
13	Study regularly					
14	Giving attention to English language activities and home works					
15	Luckiness					
16	Parents and friends help and encouragement					
17	Teacher's generosity while marking					
18	Availability of appropriate materials in learning English language					
19	Availability of appropriate materials for teaching English language for teacher's					
20	Teacher's ethnicity					
21	God's help					
22	Easiness of the test					
23	Clear instructions and questions for the test					
24	Easiness of English Subject					
25	Easiness of activities and home work					
26	Good mood					
27	Having interest in English language					
28	Teacher's positive attitude					
29	Teacher's good behavior toward students' response and effort					
30	Teacher's friendly approach towards students					

B. what other causes do you think influence your performance in learning English language. Please list them as much as possible.

S/N	Perceived causes of failure	1	2	3	4	5
1	Lack of Self-confidence					
2	Having low ability in understanding English language					
3	Having poor language command					
4	Teacher's low competence in teaching English language					
5	Lack of hard work and constant attempt					
6	Bad study habit					
7	Rushing while working on the test					
8	Teachers non-flexible methods of teaching					
9	Teacher's poor teaching methods					
10	Teacher's low commitment in teaching and making English lesson interesting					
11	Having no strategies or plan of study					
12	Study rarely					
13	Teacher's absenteeism					
14	Giving no attention to English language activities and home works					
15	Unluckiness					
16	Having no help and encouragement from parents and friends					
17	Teacher's bad marking system					
18	Scarcity of appropriate materials in learning English language					
19	Scarcity of appropriate materials for teaching English language for teacher's					
20	Teacher's ethnicity					
21	Difficulty of the test					
22	Unclear instructions and questions for the test					
23	Difficulty of English Subject					
24	Difficulty of class room activities and home work					
25	Bad mood					
26	Having no interest in English language learning					
27	Teacher's negative attitude					
28	Teacher's bad behavior toward students' response and effort					
29	Health problem					
30	Frustration while working on the test					