An exploration of EFL teachers' attributions

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The present study investigated English as a foreign language (EFL) teachers'
attributions of success and failure. It also set out to investigate whether these
attributions vary by teachers' age, teaching experience, gender and educational
level. To do so, 200 EFL teachers were selected according to convenience sam-
pling among EFL teachers teaching English in Language Institutes in Mashhad
and Tehran, two cities in Iran. The participants completed the *language teacher
attribution scale* measuring four attributions: *teaching competency* (TC), *teacher
effort* (TE), *student effort* (SE) *and institution supervision* (IS). The present study
yielded mixed results regarding English language teachers' attributions of suc-
cess and failure events. It was also found that these attributions vary by their
age, teaching experience and educational level, but not by gender. The discus-
sion and implications of the research are further presented with reference to the
earlier findings.

Keywords: attributions; EFL teachers; age; teaching experience; gender;
educational level

1. Introduction

Attribution theory is a prime cognitive theory of motivation which concerns seeking
explanations and formulating conceptions of the underlying causes of one's success
or failure. It explores individuals' beliefs about why certain events occur and associ-
ates those beliefs to subsequent motivation. Within this theory, there are three facets
into which a person's attributions for causes of events can be classified: locus, stabil-
ity and controllability (Weiner 2000). Locus refers to causes that a person perceives
to be inside or outside of the actor. Internal causes are those that lie inside of the
person, such as ability, effort and mood. External causes are those that are outside of
the person, such as ease of the task or clear instructions. Stability refers to the dura-
tion of a cause. Stable causes, such as ability or aptitude, are those that are typically
constant, whereas unstable causes, such as luck or chance, are those that are likely
to change over time. Controllability describes the degree to which individuals per-
ceive they are able to control the cause of failure or success. Causes such as effort
and strategy are subject to volitional alteration, whereas others, such as luck or apti-
tude, cannot be willfully changed.

   Much of the research on attribution theory pivoted around determining the causal
ascription of success and failure in academic achievement (e.g. Graham and Folkes
1990; Graham 1991; Georgiou 1999). What has emerged from almost all these

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studies demonstrated that academic achievement is improved when learners attribute academic outcomes to factors such as effort and the use of appropriate study strategies; in contrast, academic achievement is hindered when learners attribute their failure to factors such as lack of ability or chronic health problems and attribute their success to luck (e.g. Graham and Folkes 1990; Pintrich and Schunk 2002).

Since research has indicated that students' attributional patterns are critical for academic achievement, it is conceivable to assume that the teachers' attributions would influence teacher practices and are indicators of teaching expectancies. Viewing from a commonsense perspective, it seems plausible to presume teachers who do not have healthy or realistic attributions will find it difficult or even impossible to construct ideal attributional patterns for their students. Tollefson and Chen (1988) speculated that when teachers attribute student failure to a low level of effort, they might refuse to give help to students, reinforcing student beliefs and behaviour. Despite the increasing evidence that beliefs and attributions strongly influence ways of understanding and acting in the classroom setting (Tollefson and Chen 1988; Davis and Sumara 1997; Peacock 2010), teacher attributions remained an unchartered territory that awaits further research. Indeed, the research for this study did not find any documented study seeking to explore language teacher attributions. Having attributed this gap to the scarcity of a standardised instrument for assessing teacher attributions, Ghanizadeh and Ghonsooly (Forthcoming) designed and validated a scale for measuring English language teachers attributions with the prospect of shedding light on the issue and stimulating future research on teacher attributions. The present study utilised this scale to delve into English as a foreign language (EFL) teachers' attributions and to investigate whether these attributions vary systematically by teachers' age, teaching experience, gender and educational level.

2.   Review of the literature

2.1.   *Background*

The person most often attributed as the originator of attribution models is Heider (1958). He was concerned particularly with 'causal locus' of actions and also made a distinction between 'can' and 'try' (ability vs. effort). Largely influenced by the Heider's ideas, Rotter (1966) coined the term 'locus of control'. Locus of control describes a person's characteristic way of perceiving the world and indicating the extent of control individuals perceive they have over the expectancies of reinforcement or outcomes in their lives. Rotter (1966) defined locus of control as a generalised expectancy of internal (self-initiated change orientation) versus external control (change attributed to a source or power outside of the person) over behaviour outcomes. In other words, individuals with internal locus orientation believe that the ability to influence outcomes resides within themselves and is the direct result of their efforts, personality strength and intensions. In contrast, those with external locus orientation attribute outcomes to forces beyond their control (Rotter 1966). These individuals tend to appraise life events by looking for another individual or circumstance to hold accountable for undesirable outcomes.

Weiner (1986) conceptualised the most comprehensive theory of attribution by integrating and complementing Heider's and Rotter's ideas. Weiner's (1986) theory has four aspects:

- The identification of the causes of success and failure.
- the underlying structures of these causes.
- the relationship between causal structures and emotion.
- the relationship of attributions and emotions with expectancies regarding future behaviour.

Weiner (1986) posed several reservations against earlier attribution theories. First, he questioned the validity of research in which attributions were analysed under laboratory conditions. If students have fixed beliefs about their abilities or the exerted effort, then contradictory feedback would not be embraced. His second concern was over the stability of causes. Some individuals are oriented to perceive the ability as fixed while for others it is incremental in nature. In other words, earlier approaches, as Weiner (1986) put it, confounded dimensions of causality. For instance, ability, in addition to being internal, is also a stable attribution. Furthermore, luck, in addition to being external, is perceived as relatively unstable. Consequently, luck and effort differ not only on the locus dimension of stability but also in subjective stability. Thirdly, previous models of attribution did not adequately take into account individual's emotions or feelings over the event or outcome. Fourthly, they overemphasised the relations between attributions and expectancy and overlooked the equally important relationship between attribution and expectancy change. This can be due to the fact the conventional models posed a framework for studying attributions based on stability vs. instability criterion. Causal attributions, nevertheless, are theorised to be more related to predictions of shifts in expectancy rather than mere attributions derived from causal attributions.

2.2. Attribution theory and language education

As a theory of causal explanations for success and failure, attribution research has found a natural context in academic domain. It is well documented that attributing academic outcomes to factors such as effort and the use of appropriate study strategies enhances academic achievement, while, attributing success to luck or other uncontrollable factors tends to hinder academic achievement. Besides, perceiving oneself as low in ability has substantial negative effects on the grounds that low ability perception lowers individuals' expectation for future success (Weiner 2000).

Although attribution theory has fuelled extensive research in first language (L1) educational settings, it was quite ignored in second language (L2) domain until recently. The first documented L2-related study was conducted by Williams and Burden (1999). They investigated the formation and variation of French language learners' attributions. Results showed that the older learners tend to have more versatile and complicated attributions than their younger counterparts. In another study, Williams, Burden, Poulet, and Maun (2004) analysed different attributional patterns demonstrated by students who consider themselves normally successful in learning a language compared to those students who perceive themselves as normally unsuccessful. They reported that effort, ability, strategy use, interest, the contribution of the teacher and the nature of the learning task were the most commonly cited attributions for success, while rewards and luck had virtually no role. Graham (2004), in a study on French learners' self-perception, found that the learners attributed success

to effort, high ability and effective learning strategies, and failure to low ability and task difficulty.

To examine the interrelationship between EFL college students' attributions, self-efficacy, language learning beliefs and achievement, Hsieh (2004) administered self-report questionnaires about their language learning beliefs, attitudes and motivation toward foreign language learning to 500 undergraduates enrolled in Spanish, German and French classes. Results indicated that self-efficacy correlated positively with internal, personal and stable attributions, and negatively with external attributions. It was also found that students making internal attributions received higher grades than students making external attributions, and the same was true for students making personal as opposed to non-personal attributions.

More recently, Peacock (2010) conducted a large-scale study on 505 university students in Hong Kong to explore EFL learners' attributions and the origin of these attributions. Student interviews identified 26 common attributions, which were listed in a questionnaire. Follow-up interviews with students were then carried out to investigate the origins of students' attributions. The results demonstrated that most attributions were internal, unstable and controllable. It was also reported that the most common origin was personal experience; the second most common origin was being told something positive; the third most common origin was observation.

The trends observed with the role of perceived attributions and beliefs in effectiveness tend to generalise to teachers. Educational scholars posited that the beliefs teachers have about students and their causal attributions for students' performance have significant implications for manifesting both teacher and student effectiveness (e.g. Rose and Medway 1981; Pajares 2003). It is also contended that studying these attributions should be a compelling priority for educationalists given that they are critical in teachers' perception of their own responsibility for students' performance as well as their subsequent behaviour towards the students (Tollefson 2000). In accordance with this, an emerging body of teacher education research examines teacher thinking and belief system as a significant antecedent to teacher practices (Pajares 2003). Brophy (1986) recommends teachers to routinely project attitudes, beliefs, expectations, and attributions of their own as well as those of their students (as cited in Giavrimis and Papanis 2009).

Given what was noted about the role of teacher perceptions in effectiveness, it seems essential to explore the construct in more depth. A review of literature on attribution studies in the realm of teachers, nevertheless, clearly demonstrates that there is a dearth of research on teacher attributions. The present research aims at exploring teacher attributions and examining their relationship with teachers' demographic variables. In so doing, the following research questions were posed and investigated in the present study:

(1) What are the attribution patterns of Iranian EFL teachers teaching in language institutes?
(2) Is there any significant relationship between EFL teachers' attributions and their age?
(3) Is there any significant relationship between EFL teachers' attributions and their years of teaching experience?
(4) Is there any significant relationship between EFL teachers' attributions and their gender?

(5) Is there any significant relationship between EFL teachers' attributions and their educational level?

3. Method

3.1. Participants

The participants of the present study comprised 200 EFL teachers (126 female, 73 male) selected according to convenience sampling among EFL teachers teaching English in Language Institutes in Mashhad and Tehran, two cities of Iran. After a brief explanation of the purpose of the research, all participants received the *language teacher attribution scale*. To gather reliable data, the researchers explained the purpose of completing the questionnaire and assured them that their views would be confidential; moreover, the questionnaires were coded numerically and the participants were asked not to write a name on them. They were just required to provide demographic information such as, gender, age, teaching experience and educational level.

The profile of the teachers is as follows: Their age varied from 21 to 58 years old ($M = 31$, SD = 7.55), with 1–21 years of teaching experience ($M = 7.3$, SD = 4.91). One participant did not specify his/her age, and five participants did not mention their teaching experience. Out of 200 teachers, 20 teachers were PhD candidates, 84 held an MA degree or were MA students, and the rest had a BA degree or were BA students. Six participants did not specify their educational level. There were no requirements other than that the participants be currently teaching an English course during the summer semester of 2012.

3.2. Instrument

3.2.1. English Language Teacher Attribution Scale (TAS)

To determine teachers' attributions, the study employed the *English Language Teacher Attribution Scale (TAS)* designed and validated by Ghanizadeh and Ghonsooly (Forthcoming). The scale comprised 10 hypothetical situations, half of which described situations of success while the other half illustrated failure. It required the teachers to consider similar situations from their own teaching experiences and rate the statements on a six-point scale in the light of their own beliefs, perceptions and understanding of the cause of each situation. For each situation, four attributions were provided as follows: (1) teacher's teaching competency (TC); (2) teacher's effort (TE); (3) students' effort (SE); and (4) the institution supervision (IS). This yielded a scale with 40 items. To rate the attributions, they had to tick a box indicating whether they *strongly agree* with the explanation (6), *agree* (5), *somehow agree* (4), *somehow disagree* (3), *disagree* (2) or *strongly disagree* (1). The questionnaire provided the participants with directions on how to complete the scale. For more elaboration, two items of the scale, one describing success and the other failure, are presented in the following:

Situation 1

Suppose the students in your class performed better on a standardised achievement test compared to other students in your institute. How would you rate the following causes of this event?

1) *your high competence as a teacher*	1❏	2❏	3❏	4❏	5❏	6❏
2) *your high effort*	1❏	2❏	3❏	4❏	5❏	6❏
3) *your students high effort*	1❏	2❏	3❏	4❏	5❏	6❏
4) *the institution proper supervision*	1❏	2❏	3❏	4❏	5❏	6❏

Situation 10

Suppose half a dozen of your students appear to resist using the second language in the class and are reluctant or even hostile to the topics pertinent to the target culture. As a result, their language proficiency and their intercultural competency do not seem to progress at all. How would you rate the following reasons involved in this situation?

1) *your low competence as a teacher*	1❏	2❏	3❏	4❏	5❏	6❏
2) *your low effort*	1❏	2❏	3❏	4❏	5❏	6❏
3) *your students low effort*	1❏	2❏	3❏	4❏	5❏	6❏
4) *the institution improper supervision*	1❏	2❏	3❏	4❏	5❏	6❏

The causal explanations measured via the scale correspond with the three dimensions underlying the Weiners' attribution theory (1986), i.e. locus, stability and controllability, as indicated in Table 1.

The validation process – conducted via structural equation modelling (SEM) and confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) – substantiated the validity of the scale ($\chi^2 = 139$, $\chi^2/df = 2.9$, CFI = .96, NFI = .95, and RMSEA = . 06). The total Cronbach's alpha estimate of the scale was found to be .88. The Cronbach's alpha estimates for each factor ranged from .86 to .92. (TC = .86, TE = .87, SE = .92, IS = .87). In the present study, the reliability of the each factor calculated via Cronbach's alpha was as follows: TC = .82, TE = .84, SE = .89, IS = .81.

4. Results

Table 2 summarises the descriptive statistics of the teacher attributions. To get a more comprehensive view of teacher attributions, attributions for success (+) and failure (–) events are presented separately. The last column represents the total score obtained for each attribution. As the table indicates, teachers tend to ascribe perceived success more to their effort ($M = 22.36$, SD = 4.93) and teaching competency ($M = 21.34$, SD = 4.92), and perceived failure more to students' effort ($M = 20.71$, SD = 5.10). Overall, it was revealed that teachers tend to attribute success and failure more to TE ($M = 40.87$, SD = 8.62), SE ($M = 40.77$, SD = 9.40) and TC ($M = 40.64$, SD = 7.49).

Table 1. Attribution explanations along with the corresponding dimensions.

Explanations	Dimensions		
	Locus	Stability	Controllability
Teacher competence (TC)	Internal	Stable	Uncontrollable (ISU)
Teacher effort (TE)	Internal	Unstable	Controllable (IUC)
Student effort (SE)	External	Unstable	Uncontrollable (EUU)
Institution supervision (IS)	External	Stable	Uncontrollable (ESU)

Table 2.   The descriptive statistics of teacher attributions for success and failure.

Attributions	N	Minimum	Maximum	M	SD
TC+	200	9.00	30.00	21.3400	4.82606
TE+	200	8.00	30.00	22.3650	4.93493
SE+	200	3.00	30.00	20.0400	5.09906
IS+	200	5.00	30.00	16.3100	4.75256
TC-	200	9.00	30.00	19.1950	4.59156
TE-	200	5.00	30.00	18.7050	5.32822
SE-	200	9.00	30.00	20.7150	5.10333
IS-	200	6.00	28.00	17.2300	4.43004
TC total	200	22.00	57.00	40.6400	7.49341
TE total	200	19.00	59.00	40.8700	8.62642
SE total	200	22.00	60.00	40.7550	9.40193
IS total	200	11.00	50.00	33.5400	7.84513

4.1.   Teacher attributions and age

To investigate whether there is any significant correlation between teachers' attributions and their age, a Pearson Product-Moment correlation was employed. It was found that two attributions have positive significant correlations with age as follows: TC ($r = .216^*$, $p < .05$), TE ($r = .199^*$, $p < .05$). It was also revealed that IS has a negative significant correlation with age ($r = -.183^*$, $p < .05$).

4.2.   Teacher attributions and teaching experience

To examine the relationship between teacher attributions and teaching experience, a Pearson Product-Moment correlation was utilised. It was revealed that all attributions correlated significantly with teaching experience; TC ($r = .366^*$, $p < .05$), TE ($r = .320^*$, $p < .05$), and SE ($r = .228^*$, $p < .05$) correlated positively with experience while IS correlated negatively ($r = -.180^*$, $p < .05$).

To explore what percentage of variability in each attribution can be accounted for by their age and teaching experience, a regression analysis was conducted. The results revealed that the model containing the two variables of age and teaching experience can predict 17% of TC. The R value is .41 which indicates the correlation coefficient between TC and the two variables in question. Its square value is .17 and its adjusted square is .16. It indicates that about 17% of the variation in TC can be explained by taking the two variables into account.

Identical analyses were performed for the other attributions. The results indicated that the model containing age and experience can account about 13% of variability in TE. Regression analysis for SE revealed that age and experience can predict less than 10 % of variability in SE. Regression analysis for IS indicated that neither age nor experience can predict variability in IS.

4.3.   Teacher attributions and gender

The fourth research question examined whether there is any significant difference between males and females regarding their attributions. Independent samples *t*-tests

were run for each attribution. The results indicated that there were no significant differences between gender and TC ($t = -1.05$, $p < .05$), TE ($t = 1.02$, $p < .05$), and IS. ($t = -.36$, $p < .05$). Nevertheless, a significant difference was found between gender and SE ($t = 2.11$, $p < .05$). The effect size, calculated via Cohen's d, was found to be .32, which is a small value according to the Cohen's index value.

4.4.   *Teacher attributions and educational level*

The last research question concerned with the effect of teachers' educational level on their attributions. A one-way ANOVA was applied to compare the mean scores of the three groups of teachers on each attribution. The first group comprised teachers who held a BA degree or were BA students; the teachers in the second group had an MA degree or were MA students, and the teachers in the third group were PhD students. It was revealed that there are significant differences among the three groups regarding the first attribution, i.e. TC ($F = 10.35$, $p < .05$). The effect size, calculated via Cohen's f, was found to be .65, which is a large value according to the Cohen's index value. The same result was found for the second attribution, i.e. TE ($F = 6.72$, $p < .05$); the effect size was found to be .52, which is a large value according to the Cohen's index value. However, for the other two attributions, i.e. SE and IS, no significant differences were found: SE ($F = .726$, $p < .05$) and IS ($F = .369$, $p < .05$).

The ANOVA analysis revealed that both in TC and TE, there is a difference somewhere among the means, but the precise location of differences is not clear. To locate the exact place of differences, a *post-hoc* comparison of the means was performed for TC and TE. In so doing, a Scheffe's test was utilised. The results of the *post hoc* Scheffe's test indicated that, at the level of .05, there was no significant difference between the TC mean scores of the MA and PhD holders, but the difference between the TC mean scores of teachers with a BA degree and those of the two other groups with an MA and Ph.D. degree was significant. Identical results were found for TE scores (Table 3).

Table 3.   The Scheffe's test for the comparison of attribution means by educational level.

	L		Mean difference	Std. Error	Sig.	95% confidence interval Lower bound	Upper bound
TC	BA	MA	−3.84048*	1.05442	.002	−6.4418	−1.2391
		PhD	−6.33333*	1.71815	.001	−10.5721	−2.0945
	MA	BA	3.84048*	1.05442	.002	1.2391	6.4418
		PhD	−2.49286	1.72927	.356	−6.7591	1.7734
	PhD	BA	6.33333*	1.71815	.001	2.0945	10.5721
		MA	2.49286	1.72927	.356	−1.7734	6.7591
TE	BA	MA	−3.50000*	1.35945	.038	−6.8538	−.1462
		PhD	−7.21667*	2.21518	.006	−12.6817	−1.7517
	MA	BA	3.50000*	1.35945	.038	.1462	6.8538
		PhD	−3.71667	2.22951	.252	−9.2170	1.7837
	PhD	BA	7.21667*	2.21518	.006	1.7517	12.6817
		MA	3.71667	2.22951	.252	−1.7837	9.2170

*The mean difference is significant at the .05 level.

5. Discussion

The present study aimed at exploring Iranian EFL teachers' attributions. The results demonstrated that on the one hand, TE (internal, unstable, and controllable), SE (external, unstable, uncontrollable), and TC (internal, stable, and uncontrollable) stand out as being the most widely cited attributions, respectively. On the other hand, IS (external, stable, uncontrollable) was mentioned far less frequently than the other attributions. Overall, attribution studies in educational settings posited that internal, unstable and controllable causes are the healthiest and the most promising attributions, whereas the external, stable and uncontrollable causes are debilitative and should be modified or redirected (Graham and Folkes 1990; Weiner 2000; Dörnyei 2005). In addition to achievement perspective, the preeminence of internal ascriptions has been endorsed by the *socionormative approach of internality* (Pansu 2006) which maintains internal causal explanation are more valued typically because they are normative based on social demands. According to this perspective, internal attributions are generally more favoured on the grounds that: (1) they are preferentially chosen for self-presentation purposes; (2) they are mainly given by social groups that occupy a privileged position in society; (3) they are learned within the society by way of socioeducational devices; (4) they take effect in evaluative practices (Pansu 2006).

Apart from the internality dimension, the above finding can be explained from the perspective of stability dimension. According to the Weiner's *expectancy principle*, changes in expectancy of success following an outcome are influenced by the perceived cause of an event. In other words, a success event would considerably contribute to the anticipation of future success, and a failure would induce the idea that subsequent failures would occur. Alternatively, if the causal conditions are perceived as unstable, the present outcome may not be expected to repeat itself and subsequent outcomes are not warranted. Hence, a success does not contribute to goal expectancy and future success is not anticipated. Correspondingly, a failure will not boost the idea that the failure recurs. Based on the findings of the present study, it can be inferred that teachers who had TE and SE attributional patterns are expected to anticipate the future to be different from the past. This is promising when it comes to failure events, but unfavourable for success events. Viewing from the controllability dimension, it can be stated that teachers who believe causes of failure events are not under their control are more susceptible to display signs of *learned helplessness* syndrome. Learned helplessness refers to a state of depression or loss of hope which accompanies a belief that failure is inevitable irrespective of how hard you strive and when you feel powerless to alter or modify a situation (Sharma 2005). In other words, teachers who tend to attribute failure to IS, TC and to a lesser extent to SE are vulnerable to feelings of despair and inefficiency to alter or modify a situation.

A basic tenet of attribution theory applied to achievement motivation is that the perceptions individuals have about the causes for success and failure at a given task will influence how the individuals approach the task in the future. Therefore, it can be concluded that the high frequency of attribution to TE and TC signifies lower levels of teacher stress, greater motivation and higher student achievement, since teachers with internal attributions are more likely to have classes of higher achieving students in comparison with external teachers (Murray and Staebler 1974; Rose and Medway 1981). It has also been reported that internal locus of control tended to

reduce teacher stress and enhance motivation (Czubaj 1996). Norton (1997) noted that teachers with internal tendencies in explaining their instructional outcomes are more reflective in that they are more responsive to the educational and affective needs of every individual student, and constantly review and appraise the instructional goals and aims.

The high frequency of attribution to SE indicates that not only did teachers perceive themselves responsible for their performance as well as their learners' achievement; they also counted on their students' effort. This in turn can lead to teachers' evading their own responsibility and delegating the outcomes to the students. On the other hand, this finding can be promising if we presume teachers of the present study perceived students' effort under the influence of their teaching competency and effort. Although in this study SE was classified as an attribution with low controllability for teachers, it can be tentatively argued that teachers regarded SE as an attribution which is somehow malleable and manipulative by the teachers.

The low frequency of attribution to IS demonstrates that teachers participated in this study were inclined to see students' achievement as a consequence of their own actions and under their personal control. Indeed, they were less likely to deem the organisational structure of the institutes responsible for their success and failure as well as for students' achievement.

Further analysis of the data, nevertheless, revealed that attributions for success and failure events are not quite compatible. Teachers tended to ascribe success more to TC and TE but failure to SE. This demonstrates that teachers of the present study held an *optimistic attribution style*. In other words, they were inclined to ascribe positive outcomes to internal stable factors and negative outcomes to external uncontrollable factors. A potential benefit of this style is that it promotes an individual's self-confidence and sense of self-efficacy. This in turn may lead to better performance, increased persistence and positive emotional reaction since optimistic attribution style has been found to be a predictor of motivation, well-being, job satisfaction and performance (Peterson 2000; Rowe and Lockhart 2005). As a negative consequence of this style, nevertheless, it may result in relaxation and withdrawal of effort (Mezulis et al. 2004). Another disadvantage is that it may lead to evading responsibility when the individual is actually responsible for the failure.

The above-mentioned findings can be interpreted in the light of Graham and Folkes' (1990) contention that the teachers' private attributions for student's outcome can be a central source of attributional information for students. Teachers' perceived attributions give rise to mixed teacher reactions toward the student, including anger, pity, praise, blame, help or neglect. For instance, anger is aroused when students' unsatisfactory outcome is attributed to causes within the students' control such as lack of effort. Following this, the student uses the teacher's reaction to infer the corresponding attribution. This inferred attribution of the teacher builds self-perception of ability or effort influencing subsequent expectancy and achievement.

The second research question investigated whether teacher attributions vary by their age. The results indicated that TC and TE had positive but weak correlations with age, while IS correlated negatively with age. It means as the teachers get older, they tend to ascribe their success and failure more to their teaching competency and effort and less to external uncontrollable factors. This is consistent with previous research although these studies conclusively targeted at young learners. Nicholls conducting a chain of studies on the development of the children's perceptions of ability and effort concluded that these attributions change dramatically with age

(Nicholls 1978; Nicholls and Miller 1983, 1984). Studies involving young foreign language learners also indicated that their attributions for success and failure differ according to age (e.g. Williams and Burden 1999; Williams et al. 2004). It was reported that lack of ability was cited more as a reason for failure by younger learners while lack of interest was mentioned more by older counterparts. In contrast, effort and task were the most common reasons cited for success among younger learners while strategy and interest were rated as the most important reasons of success among older learners. Based on the findings of the present study, it can be plausibly contended that the issue of age differences in attributions generalises to adults.

The third research question aimed at examining the relationship between teaching attributions and years of teaching experience. The results indicated that TC and TE correlated positively with experience while IS correlated negatively. In other words, as the years of service pass, teachers tend to exhibit internal attributions as opposed to external uncontrollable causes. This can also be interpreted from a commonsense perspective. As individuals gain more experience and become more mature, they are liable to develop more realistic expectations and beliefs in comparison with their less-experience counterparts. Research in other domains of achievement motivation attests to this finding. For instance, teaching experience has been found to be a positive predictor of the level of teachers' self-efficacy (Ghanizadeh and Moafian 2011) and the degree of their self-regulation (Ghonsooly and Ghanizadeh 2013).

The fourth research question sought to find out whether male and female teachers differ in their attributional patterns. The results of *t*-test indicated that there were no gender differences in teachers' attributions except for SE. A slightly higher proportion of female teachers attributed their success and failure to SE than did male teachers. This is in contrast with previous research corroborating significant gender differences in learners' attributions. Smith, Sinclaire, and Chapman (2002) reported that boys attributed their failure to unstable external causes like luck or internal causes like effort; and rarely ascribed failure to lack of ability so as to enhance their self-image. On the contrary, female students reported stable internal causes such as ability to explain their successes. In L2-related research, Williams et al. (2004) found considerable variations between boys and girls regarding their internal and external attributions for both doing well and not doing well. For instance, a much higher percentage of girls explained their success through using appropriate strategies and the influence of the teacher than did boys. Moreover, girls showed a greater tendency than boys to attribute their failures to lack of effort on their part, to lack of ability and to lack of employment of appropriate learning strategies. Boys cited lack of interest in the subject as a cause of failure more frequently than girls did. Peacock (2010) found out that females were significantly more likely to attribute success to internal, unstable and controllable factors than their male counterparts.

Given that the research for this study did not find any study exploring the role of gender in teachers' perceived attributions, no cross-comparison can be made with reference to previous teacher-related research. Building upon the results of the current study, nevertheless, we can conceivably conclude that the issue of gender differences in attributions does not appear to generalise to teachers and that teachers of both genders deploy somewhat similar attributional patterns.

The last research question explored the role of teachers' level of education in their attributions. Data demonstrated that a higher education level corresponds to a higher internal attribution and a lower external attribution. In other words, the more

a teacher is educated, the more s/he tends to attribute success or failure events to internal vs. external factors. Therefore, it implies education contributes substantially to teachers' taking responsibility of their performance and of students' achievement. This contention is sustained by research demonstrating that education is associated positively with a sense of personal control (Schieman and Plickert 2008).

6. Conclusions

The present study yielded mixed results regarding English language teachers' attributions of success and failure events. Taken together, it appears that EFL teachers teaching in language institutes hold both ideal attributions which should be encouraged and impeding attributions which are subject to reattribution training. These attributions vary by their age, teaching experience and educational level, but not by gender. Apart from the nature of these attributions, the merit of analysing attributional patterns lies in the fact that they cannot be fostered or redirected unless they have been identified.

The findings of the present study can have important implications for teacher education. It, in the first place, informs teachers of their debilitative or unrealistic attributions. This information in principle encourages them to alter these attributions to more positive and realistic ones which are in turn expected to facilitate the enhancement of their motivation as well as their students' motivational disposition. As Weiner (1992) contended, attribution theory must come at the core of achievement motivation theories given that 'the subjective reasons to which we attribute our past successes and failures considerably shape our motivational disposition underlying future action' (as cited in Dörnyei 2005).

Furthermore, teacher educators and authorities are recommended to equip teachers with teacher education programmes focusing on teachers' perceptions of their effectiveness and students' achievement. They should also develop attribution training programmes which seek to identify unrealistic attributions and enable teachers to change them to ones that will lead to increased motivation and subsequently greater success (William and Burden 1999). As Weiner (1986) contended, these techniques should highlight the role of educational policies in augmenting a renewed sense of hope by encouraging teachers to alter their explanations for failure from low competency to inadequate effort. These programmes should be specifically targeted at younger teachers with less experience and lower levels of education, irrespective of gender. The underlying tenet of attribution-related intervention courses is that causal attributions greatly influence achievement, so any change in attributions is expected to create a change in behaviour. These courses, structured around the Weiner's (1986) proposal, should incorporate two perspectives: learned helplessness and self-efficacy theory. As discussed earlier, learned helplessness theory states that attributions conveying that failure is due to factors that cannot be volitionally changed are maladaptive and should be redirected to controllable factors. Along similar lines, self-efficacy theory as a way of formulating achievement motivation can effectively provide direction for attribution therapy. According to the theory, debilitating attributions implying that one is not capable minimise expectancy of success thereby impede motivation. Thus, attribution of failure to low ability is viewed as dysfunctional, while attributions to insufficient effort are considered adaptive. In other words, self-efficacy inspired attribution interventions should amend ascriptions from lack of ability to lack of effort. These programmes are recommended to

highlight not only the amount of effort but also the quality of one's' effort as articulated by Sharma (2005).

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