

Pupils' Perceptions towards their Success or Failure

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Abstract

The present paper tries to trigger for the factors attributed by the baccalaureate pupils of their success or failure. The study is a two- phases investigation, using Weiner's AT model for the identification of the pupils' perceptions of the factors (internal or external) affecting their success or failure. The study, based on a questionnaire, investigated the pupils' perceptions of the factors affecting their success or failure. Accordingly, a set of questions were provided to the pupils before the baccalaureate exam and the same questions were given after the exam, in order to see whether their perceptions have changed or not. As it had been hypothesized, the obtained data revealed that before the exam the pupils attributed their achievement to internal factors whereas after the exam the pupils attributed their failure to external ones. Thus, learning strategies should be part and parcel of the teaching methodology, so that the pupils get used to proper strategy use for effective learning.

Keywords : perception, failure , success, learning strategies

Résumé

Le présent travail tente de dévoiler les facteurs attribués par les candidats au baccalauréat à leur réussite ou à leur échec. L'étude est une enquête en deux phases, se basant sur le modèle Attribution Theory (AT) de Weiner(1972,1986) pour identifier les perceptions des élèves concernant les facteurs (internes ou externes) affectant leur succès ou leur échec. Un questionnaire d'une série de questions a été fourni aux élèves avant l'examen du baccalauréat et les mêmes questions après l'examen , afin de voir si leurs perceptions ont changé ou non. Comme cela avait été supposé, les données obtenues ont révélé qu'avant l'examen, les élèves attribuaient leur réussite à des facteurs internes,notamment, l'effort et capacité, alors qu'après cet examen, les élèves ont attribué leur échec à des facteurs externes, la chance et difficulté des taches.Il est nécessaire, donc que les stratégies d'apprentissage doivent faire partie intégrante de la méthodologie d'enseignement, de sorte que les élèves s'habituent à une utilisation appropriée de la stratégie pour un apprentissage efficace.

Mots clés: perception, réussite, echec, stratégie d'apprentissage

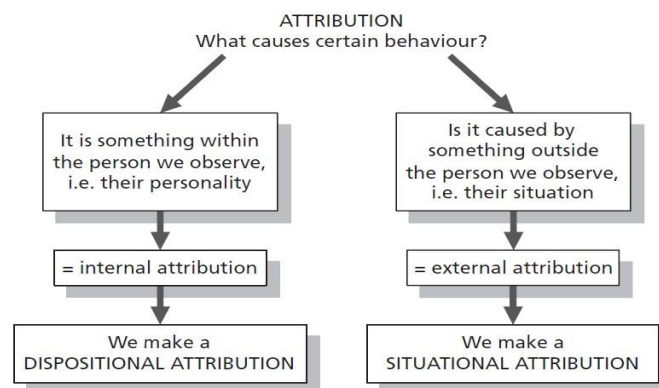
I. Introduction

Research has long demonstrated that success or failure is associated to affective dimensions in second language/ foreign learning. That is, they are closely affected by either pedagogical variables or psychological ones. In fact, the availability of the teaching tools, the quality of the material, and the teaching methodology all contribute to successful learning. Moreover, positive or negative achievement may vary according to the learners' differences, personality, learning style or learning strategy. In fact, their ability, effort, learning goals, and previous learning experiences, are all determinants of their achievement.

In many learning contexts, along with the Algerian one, success is usually related to grades. Teachers, administrators, parents and learners themselves consider a learner successful once he/she passes a test or an examination. Therefore, success is commonly twined with effort and a successful learner is recognized as the one who shows interest and makes effort. Moreover, unless learners recognize the relevance of learning, they will not make effort. "Individuals low in achievement needs are predisposed to attribute failure to a lack of ability" (Weiner, 1972). Firstly, the causes attributed to success or failure may affect the learner's motivational disposition to take decisions. If for example, a learner succeeds in a particular task, he will manifest his desire to do it again. Conversely, if a learner attributes insufficient effort or inappropriate learning strategies, he is more likely to try it another time (Dornyei, 2005). As a consequence, what may discourage a teacher is the negative results and lack of positive achievement among his /her learners. Therefore, the issue of failure has gained much interest on the part of researchers who have been trying to understand the parameters that differentiate successful learners from less successful ones. This has required much research and effort since learners' abilities are as varied as their personalities. Classroom Individual Differences (Ids) pertain to learners' learning styles and strategies. Learners' personality along with their learning style and the strategies they use to complete a learning task determine their achievement.

2. Perceptions towards Success or Failure

Along with the global spread of English, a number of studies have been conducted to explore the affective dimensions of foreign language learners. Besides; research has recognized that learners' perceptions are important parameters of the psychological aspect of foreign language learning. Success and failure, two major judgmental concepts, not only affect the learner at different levels, but the society as a whole. Indeed, people generally do not look for the causes of success but the ones behind failure. For such reasons, success and failure have long been major subjects under discussion and investigation in order to trigger for the factors that lead to each of them. In fact, studies have demonstrated that success relates to the use of adequate learning strategies and failure pertains to the wrong use of the adequate strategy (Oxford, 1990 & 2005). Moreover, research in attribution factors pertaining to learners' perceptions of success and failure relates these to four dimensions: effort, ability, luck, and task difficulty (Weiner AT, 1972 & Crozier, 1997). The four variables are classified as internal or external. They may come from within the learner or from the outside; the learning environment. Effort and ability are identified as being internal factors and luck and task difficulty as being external ones (Gardner, 1985).



(Figure I: Weiner's AT, 1972)

Thus, to better understand learners' psychological and affective variables, intense research in the study of affect has been done. Gardner, (1985), Arnold (1999), Dornyei (2001&2003) and others have given much care to the study of affect in foreign language learning. Besides, research has proved that the learner, more than other individuals needs careful attention on his behaviour within the classroom because it is through careful observation that one can deduce the needs, wants, lacks and desires of the learner. Therefore, educationists are giving priority to the affective side of the learner and they believe that those emotional variables play a crucial role in making learning successful. Hence, taking into account affective and psychological dimensions in the learning process. Moreover, interest in Individual Differences (IDs) has demonstrated that aptitude, attitude and motivation are the parameters that distinguish successful learners from the unsuccessful ones. Gardner 1985 & Dornyei, 2001). In fact; some factors may be directly attributed to failure in foreign language learning. Firstly, if the learner does not identify the relevance of the teaching content, he will probably lack the motivation that sustains learning and consequently fails in acquiring the target language and consequently failure will generate a negative attitude towards learning. Secondly, learners also may attribute their failure to their previous learning experiences. The former teacher and learning conditions may be directly or indirectly the causes to failure. These factors might have contributed to a lack of motivation and as result to failure. In fact, a teacher who does not create a favourable learning environment is probably consciously or unconsciously encouraging failure to install. Therefore, the English teacher should strive for strategies to reinstall motivation and confidence in the language classroom so as failure leaves space to success. This constitutes a hard task to reencourage the learner who lost confidence on his abilities and who has a weak background in the target language. Hence , the simplification of the content and activities in order to unleash the learners' desire to learn which might have been lost during the previous learning experiences. Motivation, then, has been identified as the major contributor to achievement. Therefore, it has to be sustained and developed through strategies.

3. Methodology and Findings

The present study is a two- stages one. Ten (10) pupils from a secondary school in Tiaret, Algeria, sitting for the baccalaureate examination agreed to participate in the study before and after their exam. The main aim of the study was to identify the pupils' attribution factors towards their success or failure. We hypothesized that pupils attribute their success to internal

factors (effort and ability) and their failure to external ones (task difficulty and luck). A set of questions were addressed to the pupils before sitting for the baccalaureate examination and the same questions were provided to them after they finished their exams.

The pupils were asked whether or not they were ready to sit for the examination. The word “ready” implies “preparation” and “memorization”. The majority of the pupils (70%) answered they were ready. Others conceived the word ‘ready’ as whether or not they started doing extra courses. That is they were well prepared. The pupils were then asked to which factors they attributed their success or failure in the baccalaureate examination. (40%) related their achievement to effort and (20%) attributed it to ability. (20%) of the pupils attribute it to task difficulty and (2%) to luck. Amazingly and as expected, after the exam the pupils’ perceptions changed. None of them (0%) attributed their achievement to effort or ability. (50%) of the participants attributed it to luck and task difficulty. Moreover, the pupils after finishing their examination, avowed they relate their achievement to the teacher effort and devotion to prepare them for their final exam. In fact, (70%) of them blamed the teacher for the results they had. Evidently, the pupils, as hypothesized tend to attribute their success to internal factors; that is, their own effort and ability whereas they relate their failure to external factors; luck or task difficulty.

4. Discussion and Suggestions

Learners’ failure does not always relate to the pupils’ weaknesses but it may relate to their inability in using the appropriate learning strategy. Therefore, emphasis should be directed towards learning strategies practice. After the pupils get accustomed to a variety of learning strategies, they can easily get used to the identification of the appropriate one(s) that suits their learning style. Moreover, because our perceptions shape our actions and reactions, it is necessary that individuals and learners, in our case, get prepared and trained to *interpersonal competencies (intelligence)*, as named by Gardner (1985). Interpersonal intelligence implies awareness about one’s personal strengths and weaknesses. Being aware of our weaknesses is half way towards the identification of solutions to those deficiencies. In addition to interpersonal intelligence training, there is a need to train our learners to the use of *metacognitive strategies* which allow them identify themselves. Through planning, self regulation, evaluation and organization, the pupils will certainly overcome their deficiencies in learning and experience success. “*Learning and metacognitive strategies enable students to acquire and master academic content*”. (Alderman, 2004:148). In fact, various sources support the idea that learners who use metacognitive strategies are good learners. “*It is also believed that many learning difficulties are caused by students’ lack of appropriate cognitive strategies and relative absence of metacognition*”(Westwood 2004 :7)

Methodologically speaking, it is worth mentioning that the pupils were aware enough of the purpose of the questionnaire, that is; they discussed with each other before they answered the questions. Thus, their answers credibility remains questionable.

All in all, the importance of success at the very most depends on learners’ perception, attribution and most importantly motivation. As this latter helps one succeed, in reverse, success also stimulates one’s own motivation.

5. Conclusion

In the world of education every learner matters since the individual is a complicated being; his/her personality is a set of constituents and features: emotional, educational, and social that are affected by his senses; smelling, hearing, touching, seeing and feeling. Therefore, his daily actions and decisions depend on those senses which in their turn affect his behaviour. This is called "perception". It is defined as "the process of attaining awareness or understanding of sensory information...What one perceives is a result of interplay between past experiences, including one's culture, and the interpretation of the perceived". Furthermore, needs vary ; they may relate to the individual's physiology (like drinking, eating...), his security (body, health...), his affect (love, family...), his esteem (trust, respect), or to his accomplishment (problem-solving, creativity) (Maslow's Hierarchy). "A need is a condition experienced by the individual as a force that leads the person to move in the direction of a goal.(Wlodkowski, 1978:59). Needs in learning are in the second part of the hierarchy; the ones which relate to security, job, health etc. That is, the learner is looking for learning achievement for future academic and professional security. Yet, learning a foreign language requires an awareness of one's needs because learning depends on ones' prerequisites of the target language. The language which is already acquired helps to determine the lacks and the needs of the learner. The identification of the learning needs is multifaceted; the teacher, the learner, the administrative staff, all share the responsibility in striving for the real needs in learning English. All parts have to participate objectively for identifying the overall goal beyond introducing the English language in the curriculum, helping the learner perceive the importance of learning the target language.

It goes without saying that students' success is the center core of education in any system across the globe. It is considered as a major topic that covers nowadays' government and policy circles. Then, one may question, how should the school policy makers approach today's student's success issues? How can policy makers design a school curriculum that is effective enough to sway learners' attitudes, attribution and motivation about the term success? Succeeding at school, in fact, is often seen as not only in obtaining degrees or certificates but also picturing it as the achievement of the student's own personal and professional goals. What makes student success so crucial and a life-death matter is that most of the students ,if not all, pursue their studies for the sake of being appreciated via a grading system rather than seeking quality in what they succeed at.

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Appendix

Questionnaire for Baccalaureate pupils

This questionnaire is part of an investigation on the pupils' perceptions of their success or failure. The answers are anonymous. Would you, please tick the statements that suit you.

	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1-I am good at English				
2-Exams are often difficult				
3-I have an inborn ability of analyzing what has been taught in class				
4-When I fail in my examinations it is because of bad luck				
5-I have a good memory to remember the course content well				
6-I can pass exams without any difficulty				
7-grades do not reflect my abilities				
8-I do not like to fail				
9-The cause(s) that makes me succeed or fail is not important				
10--When I am successful in my examinations, it is due to my effort				
11-I do not know what to do when I meet difficulties				
12-I always get ready before exams				