

## The exploration of Indonesian students' attributions in EFL reading and writing classes

### Eksplorasi atribusi mahasiswa Indonesia di kelas menulis dan membaca bahasa Inggris sebagai bahasa asing

Yustinus Calvin Gai Mali\* 

*Universitas Kristen Satya Wacana, Salatiga, Indonesia*

Submitted: April 18, 2021; Accepted: January 31, 2022; Published: February 25, 2022

#### KEYWORDS

attribution,  
EFL teaching,  
reading,  
writing

#### ABSTRACT

Although previous studies have given so much attention to exploring the students' attributions in various settings and academic levels, there is a scarcity of research that presents and compares findings on the attributions of Indonesian university students, specifically in the reading (receptive skill) and writing (productive skill) courses. This study researched students' attributions in their English as a Foreign Language (EFL) writing and reading classrooms at a private university in Indonesia. The research participants were 161 students who responded to an online questionnaire that explored their attributions for the success or failure in achieving the learning objectives of the classes. The study revealed that most of the students in both courses could successfully achieve the learning objectives, and there were no attribution differences in the courses. Their effort and positive teacher's performances were mostly cited attributions for the success, whereas low ability and lack of effort were the primary attributions for some students' failure in achieving the learning objectives of the classes. Practical strategies to support teaching and learning in the EFL reading and writing classes and directions for further research were presented.

#### KATA KUNCI

atribusi,  
pengajaran  
EFL,  
membaca,  
menulis

#### ABSTRAK

Meskipun penelitian sebelumnya telah banyak mengeksplorasi atribusi siswa di tempat dan tingkat pendidikan yang berbeda, masih sedikit penelitian yang menyajikan dan membandingkan hasil kajian atribusi dari para mahasiswa Indonesia, khususnya di kelas membaca (kemampuan reseptif) dan menulis (kemampuan produktif). Kajian ini meneliti atribusi para mahasiswa di kelas menulis dan membaca bahasa Inggris sebagai bahasa asing (EFL) di salah satu universitas swasta di Indonesia. Subjek penelitian ini adalah 161 mahasiswa. Mereka mengisi kuesioner secara online yang mengeksplorasi atribusi tentang keberhasilan dan kegagalan mereka untuk mencapai tujuan pembelajaran di dalam kelas. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa mayoritas mahasiswa merasa dapat mencapai tujuan pembelajaran dengan sukses, dan tidak ada perbedaan atribusi di kedua kelas tersebut. Usaha dan performa positif guru mereka menjadi atribusi yang banyak disebutkan oleh para mahasiswa untuk keberhasilannya, sedangkan tingkat kemampuan yang rendah dan kurangnya usaha menjadi atribusi utama yang menjelaskan tentang kegagalan beberapa mahasiswa untuk mencapai tujuan pembelajaran di dalam kelas. Strategi praktikal untuk mendukung pengajaran dan pembelajaran di kelas membaca dan menulis EFL tersebut, dan petunjuk untuk penelitian selanjutnya juga dibahas.

#### How to cite this article:

Mali, Y. C. G. (2022). The exploration of Indonesian students' attributions in EFL reading and writing classes. *Bahasa dan Seni: Jurnal Bahasa, Sastra, Seni, dan Pengajarannya*, 50(1), 1–16.  
<https://dx.doi.org/10.17977/um015v50i12022p1>

\* Corresponding author: [yustinus.mali@uksw.edu](mailto:yustinus.mali@uksw.edu)

## Introduction

How students attribute their success and failure can influence their learning performances (Banks & Woolfson, 2008), motivation (Ellis, 2008), and academic achievement (Ghonsooly et al., 2015; Lei, 2009). Therefore, when students failed, they should ask why they did not perform well and find possible ways to enhance their future performances (Holschuh et al., 2001). In educational fields, attribution is defined as an explanation that students provide for the progress of their second language learning (Ellis, 2008) and reasons they attribute to their success or failure in the process of learning a target language (Gonzales, 2011). From a different angle (e.g., via the lens of psychology), attribution is related to four types of causal explanations: ability, effort, luck, and task difficulty (Weiner, 1985). Meanwhile, viewed from the lenses of motivation, attribution is about a causal structure covering three main dimensions: locus, stability, and control (Weiner, 1979), “along which attributions can be measured” (Banks & Woolfson, 2008, p. 1).

Referring to my discussions (see Mali, 2016, 2021) based on Weiner's (1980) attribution theories, the locus of causality refers to whether individuals perceive a cause as internal or external. The stability dimension is the duration of a cause and whether it is fixed and stable (e.g., ability and aptitude) or unstable (e.g., luck and chance) over time. Meanwhile, controllability is how much control a person has for a cause. For instance, “effort and strategy are subject to volitional alteration, whereas luck cannot be willfully changed” (Ghonsooly et al., 2015, p. 378). Dörnyei (2001) and Ellis (2015) believed that when students referred their failures to an internal, unstable, and controllable attribution, such as lack of effort, they would enhance their motivation to do better and work harder in their learning.

A plethora of research has been carried out internationally among students of different levels to explore the success or failure attributions of their learning. In a large-scale study involving 2,000 Taiwanese secondary school students, Liu et al. (2009) noted that the students who had high educational expectations and effort attribution showed higher growth rates in their academic achievements. These views were in harmony with Ghonsooly et al.'s (2015) that students could enhance their academic performance when they attributed their educational outcomes to efforts or learning strategies. Conversely, when they related success to their luck or other uncontrollable factors, they possibly hindered their academic achievements. Researching 319 adult students who learned EFL in an intensive language program in Turkey, Taskiran and Aydin (2018) also highlighted students' efforts as the main attributions for the students' success in their EFL learning.

Gobel and Mori (2007) investigated the reasons for the success and failure of first-year Japanese university students in their speaking and reading classes. The findings asserted that internal factors (e.g., lack of effort, preparation, strategy) became the attributions for the students' failure in their classes. In contrast, external factors (e.g., classroom atmosphere and teacher's influence) were the attributions for their success. These findings were in harmony with what Bouchaib et al. (2018) found in their research involving 113 students from three high schools in Morocco, where teacher influence and classroom atmosphere became the main attributions for the students'

success in their English language learning. Therefore, teachers who can motivate their students to study (Dörnyei & Csizer, 1998; Harmer, 2007; Mali, 2017) might push students to improve their efforts to be successful in their language learning.

Mori et al. (2010) attempted to explore how EFL university students in Thailand and Japan judged their success and failure to their language learning tasks. The findings revealed that the students' successes were affected by their teacher's influence and classroom atmosphere, whereas lack of ability was one factor for their failure. These results of the teacher's influence and class atmosphere were congruent with those revealed by Gobel and Mori (2007).

In harmony with Mori et al.'s (2010) study, Thang et al. (2011) investigated the relationship between performance attributions and different university settings in the English as a Second Language (ESL) context. The study surveyed around 1000 respondents from six public universities in Malaysia and asked them to respond to twelve factors for their success or failure on a six-point Likert Scale. The results showed that getting a good grade and teacher influence (external factors) were the most cited attributions for success across those six universities.

Other studies were conducted by Khamkien (2014), Mali (2015 a, b), Mori et al. (2011), and Yilmaz (2012). Mori et al. (2011) explored 2152 first-year (non-foreign language majors) Malaysian students' attributions at six different universities in learning a second language. Using similar instruments as Thang et al. (2011), the study revealed that high proficiency students regarded effort and ability as the attributions for their success and considered classroom atmosphere and interest in the task as the attributions for their failure. On the other hand, low proficiency students regarded a lack of effort and ability as the attributions for their failure. Yilmaz (2012) surveyed the attributions of 91 undergraduates studying EFL at a university in Turkey for their success and failure in their second language reading. The findings reported reading strategies as the most cited factor for their success and lack of interest in reading as the attribution for their failure. Khamkien (2014) reinforced the essence of language learning strategies in the students' learning process as a factor to help them become successful language learners. Khamkien (2014) believed that students with limited English learning experiences should be taught how to employ learning strategies to promote their language-learning enhancement.

In a more recent year, Mali (2015a) undertook a study to identify eighteen Indonesian college students' attributions of their English-speaking enhancement. His study reported that learning strategy and the positive motivation/encouragement from friends and the teacher were the prime attributions for the students' speaking enhancement. The finding confirmed the essence of teacher influence for the students' success, as revealed by Mori et al. (2011).

In the same year, Mali (2015b) conducted an in-depth interview with three university students in Indonesia. The interview aimed to explore the students' attributions to failure and success in their EFL learning process. The study revealed that time management, negative environment, and habits were the attributions to their failure. Meanwhile, the students regarded learning strategies as the primary

attribution to be successful in their learning. The strategy could be operationally seen as a directed effort as they were closely related to one another (Williams et al., 2004).

Although the previous studies have given so much attention to exploring the students' attributions, there is a scarcity of research that presents and compares findings on the attributions of Indonesian university students, specifically in the reading (receptive skill) and writing (productive skill) courses. The findings of the present study will inform if positive teacher's influences (reported by Bouchaib et al., 2018; Gobel & Mori, 2007; Mali 2015a; Thang et al., 2011;), effort (revealed by Ghonsooly et al., 2015; Liu, 2009; Taskiran & Aydin, 2018), learning strategies (found by Mali, 2015b; Yilmaz, 2012), and class atmosphere (reported by Mori et al., 2010) can be the attributions for students' success in the EFL reading and writing classes in Indonesia. The results can also confirm if lack of effort (see Gobel & Mori, 2007), ability (see Mori et al., 2011), and interest in a learning task (see Yilmaz, 2012) become the attributions for students' failure in the EFL classes. With these justifications, the present study aimed to explore Indonesian students' attributions in their EFL reading and writing courses and answer the following research questions:

1. Do the students feel that they successfully achieve learning objectives in their EFL reading and writing classes?
2. What are the most frequent attributions for their success or failure in achieving the learning objectives in the classes?
3. How do they clarify the most common attributions for their success or failure in achieving the learning objectives in the classes?
4. Are there any differences between the attributions in the EFL reading and writing classes?

Answers to these research questions are expected to contribute to the discussions of the previous attributional studies in EFL teaching and learning. The identified attributions are also hoped to give insights for EFL teachers in similar teaching contexts, specifically on practical strategies to support teaching and learning in the reading and writing classes and enhance students' learning motivation and academic achievements in their language learning.

## **Method**

Attribution theory views that people have personal perceptions of the world and themselves (Fatemi et al., 2012). With this in mind, this survey research (similar to Bouchaib et al., 2018; Williams et al., 2004) using a simple online questionnaire was carried out to understand the subjective world of human experience (like Stickler & Hampel, 2015) and see real-world situations as they are (like Fraenkel & Wallen, 2009) dealing with students' attributions for success and failure in their courses. The frequency and percentages of the students' attributions and the students' open-ended responses from the online questionnaire supported this research exploration.

### *Research Context*

This study was conducted in two courses in an English Language Education Program of a private university (EDU) in Indonesia. The selection of those two courses, reading (receptive skill) and writing (productive skill) courses, was to fill the research gap in the literature where presenting and comparing findings on the attributions of

Indonesian university students, specifically in reading and writing courses, were still limited in number. EDU aims to prepare its students to become English language teachers in the future and has a population of more than 500 students. The first course was critical reading (CR) that prepared the students to be (a) proficient in English reading skills; (b) able to apply analytical, logical, and systematic thinking when reading texts in the daily, academic, and working field contexts at the post-intermediate level. The second course was creative writing (CW). At the end of the course, the students would be able to identify (a) several features and language aspects addressed in poems and to write several kinds of poems; (b) the generic structure of a biography, some language aspects discussed in it, and write one biography; and (c) the elements of sentence and paragraph writing and write several kinds of paragraphs with various topics. These courses were situated in an EFL context where people (according to Richards & Schmidt, 2010) learn English in a formal classroom with limited opportunities to use the language outside their class.

### *Research Participants*

One hundred sixty-one (161) students from the CR and CW classes participated in the study. Most of the students were bilingual; they spoke the Indonesian language (*bahasa Indonesia*) and Javanese even though some of the students were also from various places outside Java Island. Some of them, for instance, spoke *bahasa Indonesia* and *Ambonese* or *Papuanese*. In the CR course, 105 sophomores responded to the questionnaire. Thirty-one (31) students are male, and the other 74 students are female. At the time when the study was conducted, most of them were 18 (27.4%) and 19 (55.7%) years old. In the CW course, 56 first-semester students participated in the study. Most of them were 18 (64.3%) and 19 (17.9%) years old. Thirteen (13) students are male, and 43 students are female.

### *Data Collection Procedures*

Data were garnered from an online questionnaire (see Appendix for a sample) designed using the *Google Form* (GF) application. GF was selected because it could be accessed flexibly using various electronic devices wherever the students were. Moreover, the use of questionnaires has been widely used in attribution research explorations (Bouchaib et al., 2018). The survey (adapted from Farid & Iqbal, 2012; Mori et al., 2010; Vispoel & Austin, 1995) comprised a combination of both closed and open-ended question formats. The closed-ended section mainly asked the students to tell their age and sex, whether they felt that they successfully achieved the classroom objectives (answering research question 1), and reasons behind their success or failure to achieve the objectives (answering research questions 2 and 4). The question items in this closed-ended section asked the students to choose a list of options (see section 2 in Appendix). Meanwhile, the open-ended part asked the students to articulate reasons for their success and failure (answering research question 3).

To reach out to the research participants more easily and ensure their participation in filling out the online questionnaire, the researcher contacted and asked the favor of the CR and CW courses' lecturers to distribute the GF link to their students and asked them to fill out the online questionnaire together at the end of the class session. Some lectures distributed the GF link via their Learning Management System (e.g.,

Schooling). To minimize any possible inferiority threats concerning the student-teacher relationship in completing the GF, the researcher clearly stated in the online questionnaire (see Appendix) that it is not a test, so there are no right or wrong answers, and the students' responses will not affect their grade in the CR and CW classes.

#### *Data Analysis Procedures*

GF was used to generate the frequency and percentages counts of the closed-ended section of the online questionnaire to answer research questions 1 and 2. The frequency and percentages were then compared to answer research question 4. Then, this study followed Cohen et al.'s (2007) content analysis guidelines for examining and reporting the open-ended responses in the GF. Sentences and phrases that indicated reasons for the students' attributions to the course were highlighted to answer research question 3. Finally, the excerpts of the students' responses were presented to support the findings of the study. In presenting the excerpts, the researcher used the following codes to help readers identify the students' attributions easily.

Table 1. The List of Codes

No	Codes	Descriptions
1	CR	Critical reading course
2	CW	Creative writing course
3	EFT	Effort
4	TCH	Teacher
5	STR	Strategy
6	ABL	Ability

## **Results**

The researcher organized the research findings into three main sections. Findings in the first two sections (i.e., attributions in the CR course and attributions in the CW course) will answer the research questions 1-3. Meanwhile, findings presented in the last section (i.e., comparisons of the attributions in the CR and CW courses) will answer research question 4 of this study.

#### *Attributions in the CR Course*

This paragraph provides the answers to the first and second research questions. The first research question inquired whether the students successfully achieved the course objectives. As the answer, 98 students (93%) believed that they were successful in achieving the goals, while the other 7 students (7%) felt that they could not meet the objectives successfully. Then, the second research question explored the most common attributions for success or failure. The study revealed that the attributions for the success were varied (see Figure 1). The primary ones were the effort (28.6%), the positive influence or support from the teacher (24.5%) and classmates (16.3%), and their learning strategy (12.2%).

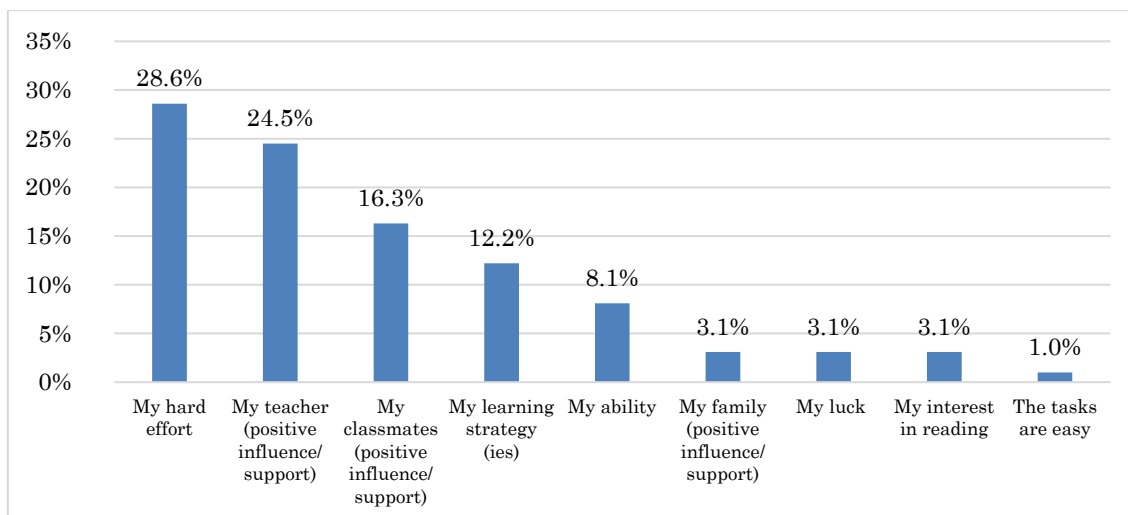


Figure 1. The Students' Attributions for Their Success in the CR Course

Like the attributions for success, the attributions for the failure mainly were related to their lack of effort (37.5%), as shown in Figure 2.

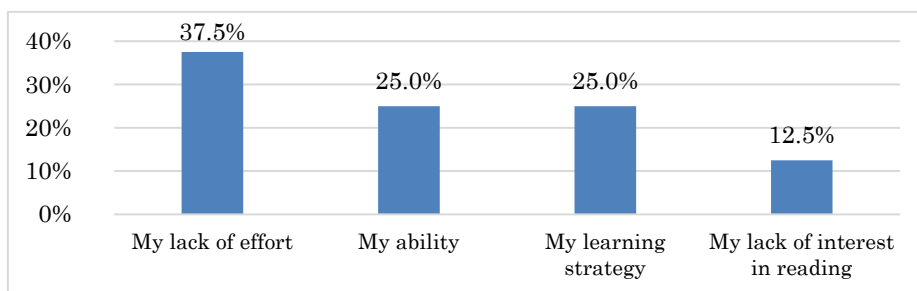


Figure 2. The Students' Attributions for Their Failure in the CR Course

The third research question was to clarify the students' attributions. Some students explained the effort they have made to be successful in the course. For instance, "I try to understand what the lecturer explains. I usually take note if the lecturer gives important information about the material" (S15/EFT/CR). Also, "to be honest, I found some difficulties in doing the assignments in this course. Accordingly, I started to read the articles as many as I could, so I could get more new vocabularies" (S42/EFT/CR). "At home, I always studied the material explained in the class and searched for another example of the reading text from the internet" (S61/EFT/CR). Other efforts included "finding meanings of difficult words in a dictionary (S20/EFT/CR), asking friends to discuss difficult learning materials together after class (S25/S75/S88/EFT/CR), and doing reading exercises regularly" (S91/EFT/CR). Table 2 sums up the overall efforts made by the students in the CR course.

In addition to effort, some students noted that they had a teacher who could explain learning materials well. "My teacher explained all materials in very detail and gave some clear examples from the handouts we got from him" (S57/TCH/CR). The teachers also took an essential role in the success because of their willingness to explain difficult learning concepts several times (S11/S78/S100/TCH/CR) and their encouragement for the students to review learning materials outside the classroom (S10/S84/TCH/CR).

Table 2. An Overview of the Students' Effort for Their Success in the CR Course

Attributions	Descriptions
Effort	<p><b>The students did the following activities:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Taking some notes when reading a text</li> <li>✓ Writing down essential points from the lecturer's explanation</li> <li>✓ Asking lecturer learning materials that need some clarifications</li> <li>✓ Discussing with classmates learning materials that are difficult to understand</li> <li>✓ Finding the meaning of words in an electronic dictionary</li> <li>✓ Paying attention to the teacher's explanation in the classroom</li> <li>✓ Starting the class with a prayer</li> <li>✓ Never coming late to the classroom</li> <li>✓ Doing any homework given by the lecturer</li> <li>✓ Reviewing the learning materials outside the classroom</li> <li>✓ Reading English texts more frequently</li> <li>✓ Considering the results of every test</li> <li>✓ Studying learning materials seriously before doing a test</li> <li>✓ Reading learning materials that will be discussed in the class</li> </ul>

Table 3. An Overview of the Lecturers' Roles for the Students' Success in the CR Course

Attributions	Descriptions
Positive influence/ support from the teachers	<p><b>The lecturers did the following activities:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Giving the students chances to ask learning materials they still do not understand</li> <li>✓ Giving assessments and quizzes at the end of learning materials that encourage the students to read more and memorize many vocabularies</li> <li>✓ Starting and ending the class with a prayer</li> <li>✓ Encouraging the students to review learning materials outside the class</li> <li>✓ Coming to the students' seat and asking whether they understand the learning materials and can follow the classroom discussions well</li> <li>✓ Giving classroom exercises</li> <li>✓ Asking the students to write their answers for the tasks on the whiteboard so that other students can discuss the answers together</li> <li>✓ Discussing the exercises together</li> <li>✓ Addressing any difficult questions to answer in the exercises</li> <li>✓ Summarizing learning materials in PowerPoint slides</li> <li>✓ Using videos to explain learning materials</li> <li>✓ Asking the students to be more active in classrooms</li> <li>✓ Appreciating any responses given by the students in a classroom discussion</li> <li>✓ Walking around the class to talk with the students</li> <li>✓ Reminding the students to come on time to the classroom, so they do not miss important information explained in the classroom</li> <li>✓ Building communication with the students to enhance their learning mood, such as asking about activities that the students like to do outside the class</li> <li>✓ Reviewing grammar patterns that some students still make some mistakes at</li> <li>✓ Explaining difficult learning concepts several times</li> <li>✓ Giving clear examples to support their explanations</li> <li>✓ Encouraging the students to study seriously so that they can make their parents feel proud of them</li> <li>✓ Making some jokes to create a relaxed learning atmosphere</li> <li>✓ Using the first language (Bahasa Indonesia) to explain difficult learning concepts</li> <li>✓ Explaining difficult learning materials slowly</li> <li>✓ Sharing some learning strategies to be successful in the course</li> </ul>

Meanwhile, dealing with attributions to failure, a student said that she often came late to the class and was too lazy to find meanings of vocabulary she did not know (S14/EFT/CR). The other attributions were concerned with learning strategy (25%), such as not knowing what to do to increase the reading skills (S69/STR/CR). Two students admitted that ability (25%) was the reason for their failure. "It was only me who could not understand the materials. Everyone seemed to understand right away after the teacher explained to them" (S16/ABL/CR). Also, "the teacher helped me



understand the material, but I still got a bad grade because of my bad grammar” (S33/ABL/CR).

#### *Attributions in the CW Course*

This paragraph tells the answers to the first and second research questions. As the answer to the first research question, most of the students in the CW course (96.4%) believed that they successfully achieved the course objectives, and only a few of them (3.6%) thought that they could not reach the goals. Then, the study found out that the teacher (38.9%) and students’ effort (27.8%) were the main attributions for success, as the answer to the second research question.

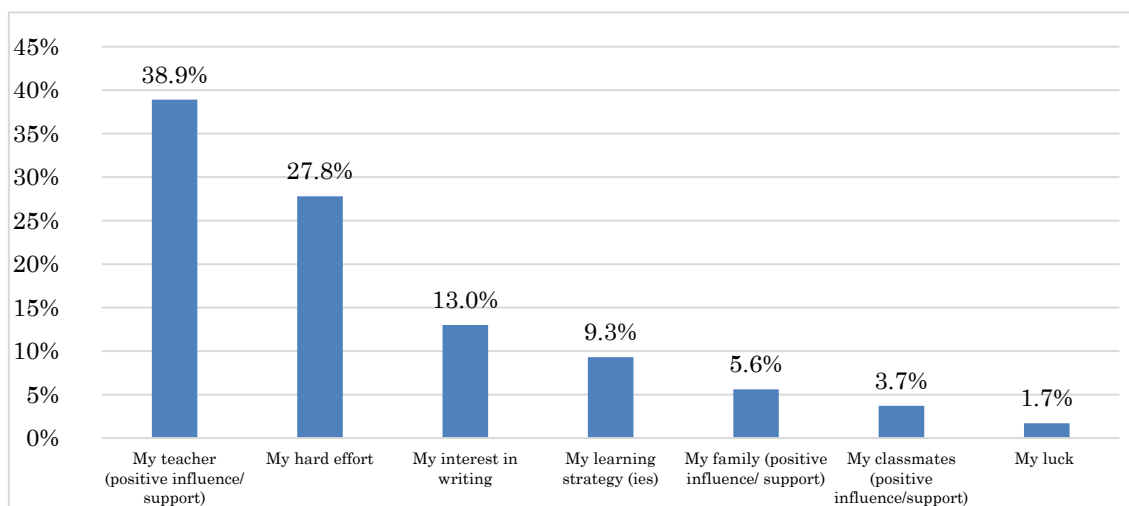


Figure 3. The Students’ Attributions for Their Success in the CW Course

Meanwhile, the students’ ability (50%) and learning strategy (50%) were cited as the attributions for the failure.

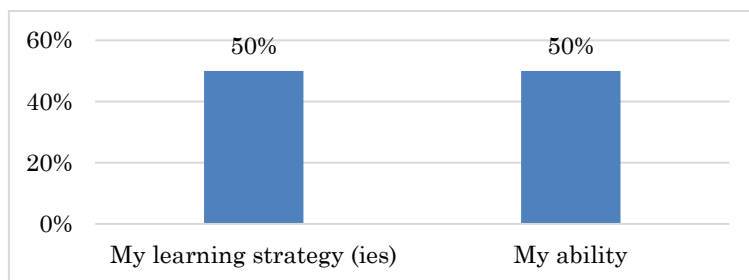


Figure 4. The Students’ Attributions for Their Failure in the CW Course

In response to the third research question, the study provided some details on the students’ attributions to their success. As shown in Figure 3, most of the students regarded their teachers as a crucial factor in successfully achieving the course objectives. For instance, two students said that their lecturer could explain learning materials clearly by giving examples (S15/TCH/CW) and was willing to provide error corrections to grammatical mistakes she made (S38/TCH/CW). Student 21 also stated that his lecturer always gave him a consultation time for every assignment so that he can ask questions and obtain ideas to complete the task (S21/TCH/CW). Further, student 49 believed that her success was because of her lecturer, who was always willing to answer the learning questions she asked in the classroom (S49/TCH/CW).

Table 4 summarizes what the teachers did for the success of their students in the CW course.

Table 4. An Overview of the Lecturers' Roles for the Students' Success in the CW Course

Attributions	Descriptions
Positive influence/support from the teachers	<p><b>The lecturers did the following activities:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Explaining materials clearly and patiently</li> <li>✓ Giving examples when explaining</li> <li>✓ Encouraging students to be on time in coming to the class and submitting the assignments</li> <li>✓ Advising how to minimize grammatical problems</li> <li>✓ Never coming late to the class</li> <li>✓ Starting and ending the course with a prayer</li> <li>✓ Teaching the class enthusiastically</li> <li>✓ Giving simple examples when explaining ideas of writing adjective and metaphor poems</li> <li>✓ Giving assignments from which the students can study independently outside the class</li> <li>✓ Asking whether the students understand what is taught in the classroom</li> <li>✓ Telling the students grammatical mistakes in their written work</li> <li>✓ Discussing the grammar problems in the classroom</li> <li>✓ Suggesting an optimistic belief that all students can do all assignments well</li> <li>✓ Being friendly to all students</li> <li>✓ Making jokes to build a relaxed classroom atmosphere</li> <li>✓ Explaining what and how to do to complete a task</li> <li>✓ Explaining rubrics to use to score the assignment</li> <li>✓ Telling what to do to achieve classroom objectives well</li> <li>✓ Motivating students to be disciplined</li> <li>✓ Giving consultation time for every task</li> <li>✓ Willing to answer the students' questions in the classroom</li> </ul>

Figure 3 also showed that effort was another most frequent attribution for success in the CW course. Student 18 explained that she tried to improve her grammar by writing sentences, seeing grammatical mistakes in the sentences, and re-writing her sentences (S18/EFT/CW). Moreover, student 31 informed that he always read learning materials before coming to the class so that he could follow the classroom discussion more easily (S31/EFT/CW). Table 5 details the efforts that the students made to be successful in the course.

Table 5. An Overview of the Students' Effort for Their Success in the CW Course

Attributions	Descriptions
Effort	<p><b>The students did the following activities:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Listening to the lecturer's explanation carefully</li> <li>✓ Taking notes when the lecture explains the learning materials</li> <li>✓ Reading stories and studying sentence structures in the stories</li> <li>✓ Reviewing learning materials outside the classroom</li> <li>✓ Asking friends about learning materials that are difficult to understand</li> <li>✓ Studying learning materials before coming to the classroom</li> <li>✓ Considering any feedback from the lecturer</li> <li>✓ Doing all assignments given by the lecturer</li> <li>✓ Doing a consultation with the lecturer</li> </ul>

Meanwhile, concerning the attributions to failure, student 28 felt lazy to review learning materials discussed in the classroom. Therefore, she often made some grammar mistakes and patterns in the English poems she wrote (S28/STR/CW). Another attribution was from student 41, who stated learning materials in the CW course were difficult (S41/ABL/CW).

### *Comparisons of the Attributions in the CR and CW Courses*

This section is to answer the fourth research question. As evidenced in the data, most of the students in both courses felt that they successfully achieved the learning objectives. Moreover, there were no main differences between the attributions of success and failure in both classes. Effort and the teacher were the most cited attributions for the success. Meanwhile, learning strategies (also a directed effort) and ability were the primary attributions for the failure.

## **Discussions**

The findings informed that most of the students in both courses could successfully achieve the learning objectives. Also, there were no attribution differences in the reading and writing classes. Effort (as an internal factor) and teacher's performances (as an external factor) were frequently cited attributions for the success in both classes. This result was consistent with that of the previous studies highlighting the essence of effort (Ghonsooly et al., 2015; Holschuh et al., 2001; Liu, 2009; Mali, 2015a; Mali, 2015b; Mori et al., 2011; Taskiran & Aydin, 2018; Yilmaz, 2012) and teachers' teaching performances (Bouchaib et al., 2018; Gobel & Mori, 2007; Mori et al., 2010; Thang et al., 2011) in the success of the students' language learning.

The issue of religion appears as one of the efforts for success in the courses. Some students said that they started the class with a prayer. What they said is in line with their teacher's positive performances that like to begin and end the class with a prayer. Probably, this is a practice that is missing the previous attribution studies. The finding might corroborate the essence of religiosity as a predictor of the students' motivational goals (Sutantoputri & Watt, 2012; Sutantoputri & Watt, 2013) in Indonesian settings and as a teaching strategy to enhance the students' learning motivation (Mali, 2017a). In Indonesia, the essence of religiosity is also highly appreciated as it becomes the first of five cores in *Pancasila*, the Indonesian National Philosophy; Belief in the One and Only God. With these in mind, I concur with Mambu's (2017) views on the importance of incorporating religious values into English Language Teaching, particularly in a non-Western context, such as in Indonesia.

The data (see Tables 2 & 5) also showed that the students used learning strategies to achieve learning objectives in the reading and writing courses. This finding supported the importance of using learning strategies to be successful in language learning, as reported by Ghonsooly et al. (2015), Mali (2015a), and Yilmaz (2012). In that case, teachers can encourage their students to keep using the strategies and suggest ways to make the strategies work better. As Khamkien (2014) believed, students with limited experiences of learning English should be taught how to employ various learning strategies to be successful in their language learning. Possibly, teachers can share their *what-to-do* and *how-to-do* learning experiences when they were still college students and studied in similar reading and writing courses. When teachers can embody a passion for learning, they can encourage their students to possess an emotional connection to learning that will inspire their learning motivation (Wilson & Conyers, 2018).

Despite the success stories in both courses, the study found out that around 10% of the research participants felt that they could not achieve the course objectives well. Most of them attributed their failure to lack of effort and low ability. This finding confirmed Mori et al.'s (2011) findings that students' lack of effort and ability became attributions for the failure of the first-year Malaysian students at six universities in learning a second language. To deal with the failure, the students need to evaluate why they cannot achieve their learning goals successfully and decide how they can enhance their future learning performances (Holschuh et al., 2001). In this case, teachers should convince their students that they can perform better in the future when they put more effort into their learning (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2001). Dörnyei (2001); Ellis (2015) also believed that when students referred their failures to an internal, unstable, and controllable attribution, such as lack of effort, they would enhance their motivation to do better and work harder.

## Conclusions

Based on the findings of this study, the researcher would like to draw these concluding points as the answers to the research questions 1 to 4. First, most of the students (>90%) in the CW and CR courses feel that they can successfully achieve the learning objectives. Second, effort (as an internal factor) and teacher's performances (as an external factor) are frequently cited attributions for the success in both classes. That said, effort and teacher's performances might be attributions for success applicable across settings and educational levels. Third, as shown in Tables 2 and 5, the students make various kinds of efforts to succeed in their courses. In the same vein, as shown in Tables 3 and 4, the classroom lecturers in the CW and CR courses also perform various roles to support their students' success in the courses. Fourth, there are no attribution differences in the reading (receptive skill) and writing (productive skill) classes.

This study proposes the following practical recommendations for EFL teachers based on the research findings. First, the teachers, as someone who can motivate their students to study (Dörnyei & Csizer, 1998; Harmer, 2007; Mali 2017), should always encourage their students to keep making the efforts (e.g., presented in Tables 2 & 5) to be successful in their language learning. For example, the teachers can always remind and encourage their students to review learning materials outside the class, study materials seriously before they take a quiz, and meet them to discuss learning materials that are difficult to comprehend. Moreover, teachers can no longer just come to the classroom, teach students, and leave the class with an assumption that their students can understand the learning well. Instead, as shown in Tables 3 and 4, teachers should give and discuss learning exercises, summarize learning materials in PowerPoint slides, and share some learning strategies to be successful in the course.

The teachers can also start the class by inviting some students who get the best grade in the first test to share how they studied learning materials to get an excellent result. This sharing session can also be done in a small group as a part of a group discussion to complete a classroom task. In that case, a teacher should arrange the group members and ensure that successful students should be with those who did not perform well in the test. The idea is that the students with different proficiency levels should work in a group so that those with a high proficiency level can help those with

the lower level (Melinda, 2007) by sharing their learning strategies to pass the first test successfully. This activity refers to brain buddies that allow students to learn from each other's learning experiences; getting support from a peer can be a motivating experience for the students (Wilson & Conyers, 2018).

This study was conducted before the COVID-19 pandemic when all teaching and learning activities were still in face-to-face classrooms. It might be fruitful to explore students' attributions in their language classes during the pandemic situation where most of the teaching and learning activities are conducted in online environments. Future researchers can also survey teachers' beliefs on the importance of students' effort to be successful in language learning and identify learning strategy patterns used by EFL students to be successful in their online language classrooms. How far EFL teachers believe that their presence and attitudes can affect students' success in their language classrooms might be another area for further investigations. In the current COVID-19 pandemic, future studies can also investigate how far technology and digital literacy skills might be attributions for students' success in language learning.

## References

- Banks, M., & Woolfson, L. (2008). Why do students think they fail? The relationship between attributions and academic self-perceptions. *British Journal of Special Education*, 35(1), 49-56.
- Bouchaib, B., Ahmadou, B., & Abdelkader, S. (2018). High school students' attributions of success in English language learning. *International Journal of Instruction*, 11(2), 89–102.
- Cohen, L., Manion, L., & Morrison, K. (2007). *Research methods in education* (6th ed.). Routledge.
- Dörnyei, Z. (2001). *Motivational strategies in the language classroom*. Cambridge University Press.
- Dörnyei, Z., & Csizer, K. (1998). Ten commandments for motivating language learners: Results of an empirical study. *Language Teaching Research*, 2(3), 203-229. <https://doi.org/10.1177/136216889800200303>
- Dörnyei, Z., & Ushioda, E. (Eds.) (2001). *Teaching and researching motivation* (2th ed.). Pearson Education Limited.
- Ellis, R. (2008). *The study of second language acquisition* (2nd ed.). Oxford University Press.
- Ellis, R. (2015). *Understanding second language acquisition* (2nd ed.) [PDF file]. Oxford University Press.
- Farid, M. F., & Iqbal, H. M. (2012). Causal attribution beliefs among school students in Pakistan. *Interdisciplinary Journal of Contemporary Research in Business*, 4(2), 411-424. <https://journal-archieves19.webs.com/411-424.pdf>
- Fatemi, A. H., Pishghadam, R., Asghari, A. (2012). Attribution theory and personality traits among EFL learners. *International Journal of Linguistics*, 4(2), 229-243. <https://doi.org/10.5296/ijl.v4i2.1451>
- Fraenkel, J. R., & Wallen, N. E. (2009). *How to design and evaluate research in education* (7th ed.). The McGraw-Hill Companies, Inc.
- Ghonsooly, B., Ghanizadeh, A., Ghazanfari, M., & Ghabanchi, Z. (2015). An exploration of EFL teachers' attributions. *European Journal of Teacher Education*, 38(3), 378-391. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02619768.2014.921155>
- Gobel, P., & Mori, S. (2007). Success and failure in the EFL classroom: Exploring students' attributional beliefs in language learning. In L. Roberts, A. Gürel, S. Tatar, & L. Martı (Eds.), *EUROSLA Yearbook 7* (pp. 149-169). John Benjamins Publishing Company.

- Gonzales, A. S. (2011). Attribution theory and culture: Using focus groups to uncover parameters of influence. *Language Studies Working Papers*, 3, 29-37.
- Harmer, J. (2007). *The practice of English language teaching*. Pearson Education Limited.
- Holschuh, J. P, Nist, S. L., & Olejnik, S. (2001). Attributions to failure: The effects of effort, ability, and learning strategy use on perceptions of future goals and emotional responses. *Reading Psychology*, 22, 153–173. <https://doi.org/10.1080/027027101753170601>
- Khamkhien, A. (2014). Factors affecting language learning strategy reported usage by Thai and Vietnamese EFL learners. *Electronic Journal of Foreign Language Teaching*, 7(1), 66-85.
- Lei, C. (2009). On the causal attribution of academic achievement in college Students. *Asian Social Science*, 5(8), 87-96. DOI:10.5539/ass.v5n8p87
- Liu, K. S., Cheng, Y. Y, Chen, Y. L, & Wu, Y. Y. (2009). Longitudinal effects of educational expectations and achievement attributions on adolescents' academic achievements. *Adolescence*, 44(176), 911-924. <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/20432607/>
- Mali, Y. C. G. (2015a). Students' attributions on their English-speaking enhancement. *Indonesian Journal of Applied Linguistics*, 4(2), 32-43. <https://doi.org/10.17509/ijal.v4i2.681>
- Mali, Y. C. G. (2015b). Theorizing students' attributions on their EFL learning process. *A paper presented at the 2nd International Language and Language Teaching Conference*, English Language Education Study Program, Sanata Dharma University. [https://www.academia.edu/24344770/Theorizing\\_Students\\_Attributions\\_on\\_Their\\_EFL\\_Learning\\_Process](https://www.academia.edu/24344770/Theorizing_Students_Attributions_on_Their_EFL_Learning_Process)
- Mali, Y. C. G. (2016). Promoting effort attributions in Indonesian EFL classrooms. *Jurnal Ilmu Pendidikan*, 22(1), 80-93. <http://dx.doi.org/10.17977/jip.v22i1.8648>
- Mali, Y. C. G. (2017). Motivational teaching strategies in Indonesian EFL writing classrooms. *A Journal of Culture, English Language, Teaching & Literature*, 17(1), 60-85. <https://doi.org/10.24167/celt.v17i1.1139>
- Mali, Y. C. G. (2021). Attribution theory. In J. Egbert & M. F. Roe (Eds.), *Theoretical models for teaching and research* (Chapter 2). Available from WSU Open Text. <https://opentext.wsu.edu/theoreticalmodelsforteachingandresearch/chapter/attribution-theory/>.
- Mambu, J. E. (2017). Addressing religious issues and power in ELT classrooms: Voices from English teachers in Indonesia. *International Journal of Christianity and English Language Teaching*, 4, 6-27. <https://digitalcommons.biola.edu/ijc-elt/vol4/iss1/4/>
- Melinda, R. (2007). *Teaching in the multilevel classroom*. [www.pearsonlongman.com/ae/download/adulted/multilevel\\_monograph.pdf](http://www.pearsonlongman.com/ae/download/adulted/multilevel_monograph.pdf)
- Mori, S., Gobel, P., Thepsiri, K., & Pojanapunya, P. (2010). Attributions for performance: A comparative study of Japanese and Thai university students. *JALT Journal*, 32(1), 5-28. <https://doi.org/10.37546/JALTJJ32.1-1>
- Mori, S., Ming, T. S., Nor, N. F. M, Suppiah, V. L., & Imm. (2011). Attribution tendency and its relationship with actual and perceived proficiency. *GEMA Online Journal of Language Studies*, 11(3), 199-218. [http://journalarticle.ukm.my/2770/1/pp199\\_218.pdf](http://journalarticle.ukm.my/2770/1/pp199_218.pdf)
- Richards, J. C., & Schmidt, R. (2010). *Longman dictionary of language teaching and applied linguistics* (4<sup>th</sup> ed.). Pearson Education Limited.
- Stickler, U., & Hampel, R. (2015). Qualitative research in CALL. *CALICO Journal*, 32(3), 380-395. <https://doi.org/10.1558/cj.v32i3.27737>
- Sutantoputri, N. W & Watt, H. M. G. (2012). Attribution and motivation: A cultural study among Indonesian university students. *International Journal of Higher Education*, 1(2), 118-129. <https://doi.org/10.5430/ijhe.v1n2p118>
- Sutantoputri, N. W & Watt, H. M. G. (2013). Attribution and motivation: Gender, ethnicity, and religion differences among Indonesian university students. *International Journal of Higher Education*, 2(1), 12-21. <http://dx.doi.org/10.5430/ijhe.v2n1p12>

- Taskiran, A., & Aydin, B. (2018). Do adult English language learners and their teachers have similar approaches to success? *Journal on Efficiency and Responsibility in Education and Science*, 11(1), 1–8. <https://doi.org/10.7160/eriesj.2018.110101>
- Thang, S.W., Gobel, P., Mohd. Nor, N. F., & Suppiah, V. L. (2011). Students' attributions for success and failure in the learning of English as a second language: A comparison of undergraduates from six public universities in Malaysia. *Pertanika J. Soc. Sci. & Hum*, 19(2), 459-474.  
[https://www.academia.edu/29632716/Students\\_Attributions\\_for\\_Success\\_and\\_Failure\\_in\\_the\\_Learning\\_of\\_English\\_as\\_a\\_Second\\_Language\\_A\\_Comparison\\_of\\_Undergraduates\\_from\\_Six\\_Public\\_Universities](https://www.academia.edu/29632716/Students_Attributions_for_Success_and_Failure_in_the_Learning_of_English_as_a_Second_Language_A_Comparison_of_Undergraduates_from_Six_Public_Universities)
- Vispoel, W. P., & Austin, J. R. (1995). Success and failure in junior high school: A critical incident approach to understanding students' attributional beliefs. *American Educational Research Journal*, 32(2), 377-412. <https://doi.org/10.3102/00028312032002377>
- Weiner, B. (1979). A theory of motivation for some classroom experiences. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 71(1), 3–25. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-0663.71.1.3>
- Weiner, B. (1980). The role of affect in rational (attributional) approaches to human motivation. *Educational Researcher*, 9(7), 4-11. <https://doi.org/10.3102/0013189X009007004>
- Weiner, B. (1985). An attributional theory of achievement motivation and emotion. *Psychological Review*, 92(4), 548–573. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-295X.92.4.548>
- Williams, M., Burden, R. L., Poulet, G. M. A., & Maun, I. C. (2004). Learners' perceptions of their successes and failures in foreign language learning. *The Language Learning Journal*, 30(1), 19-29. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09571730485200191>
- Wilson, D., & Conyers, M. (2018). *Guiding students to be independent learners*. Edutopia. <https://www.edutopia.org/article/guiding-students-be-independent-learners>
- Yilmaz, C. (2012). An investigation into Turkish EFL students' attributions in reading comprehension. *Journal of Language Teaching and Research*, 3(5), 823-828. doi:10.4304/jltr.3.5.823-828

## Appendix

A sample questionnaire in the CR class. Some parts were edited for brevity purposes.

It is not a test, so there are no right or wrong answers in this reflection. Your answers will not affect your grade in your class. Therefore, please respond to how you really feel.

### Section 1: Background information

1. Age:
  - 17
  - 18
  - 19
  - 20
  - 21
  - 22
  - Other...
2. Sex:
  - male
  - female

### Section 2: Attributions

At the end of the course, you are expected to: (1) be proficient in English reading skills; (2) be able to apply critical, logical, and systematic thinking when reading texts in the daily, academic, and working field contexts at post intermediate level.

3. Reflecting on my learning performances in the class during this semester, I will say that:
  - I successfully achieve the classroom objectives (if you select this, go to question 4)
  - I do not successfully achieve the classroom objectives (if you select this, go to question 6)

#### Attributions for the success

4. I successfully achieve the classroom objectives because of (select one):
  - my ability
  - my effort
  - my learning strategy
  - my interest in reading
  - the tasks are easy
  - (positive influence/ support from) my family
  - (positive influence/ support from) my family my teacher
  - (positive influence/ support from) my classmates
5. Please clarify your response, give examples of what you did/saw/ heard (at least 50 words)
 

.....

#### Attributions for the failure

6. I do not successfully achieve the classroom objectives because of (select one):
  - my ability
  - my lack of effort
  - my learning strategy
  - my interest in reading
  - the tasks are difficult
  - (negative influence from) my family
  - (negative influence from) my family my teacher
  - (negative influence from) my classmates
7. Please clarify your response, give examples of what you did/saw/ heard (at least 50 words)
 

.....