

## **Causal Attributions among Higher Education Students of Punjab**

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### **Abstract**

The present study aimed at identifying the causal attribution of higher education students of different programs with respect to successfulness. The study was conducted on 1424 undergraduate and post graduate students of different colleges and universities of Punjab. The Revised Causal Dimension Scale (CDSII) developed by McAuley et al. (1992) was used to take causal attributions of the higher education students for their success or failure. It has been found that majority of the UG and PG level students who perceived themselves as unsuccessful attributed efforts for their failure and the who perceived themselves as successful attributed study habits for their success.

**Keywords:** Causal Attribution, Higher Education, Successful, unsuccessful, Higher Education Students

### **Introduction**

The attribution theory of Weiner (1972, 1974, 1979, 1985, 1986, 1995, 2000, 2008) is directed towards the achievement and emotional contexts. Attribution is a phenomenological model which focusses on how the individuals themselves perceive a situation. Every person tries to explore the cause for why event happened. This process is called the perceptions or judgements of the persons regarding the cause of the event in their environment, these events include personal behaviour and the behaviour of others as well. The perception of the students about the learning

experiences influence their motivational attitude (Seegers et al. 2004). If a student perceives the previous task outcome as successful then he will feel motivated and invest more efforts in subsequent tasks and on the other side if a student perceives the previous task outcome as failure then he will estimate his competence lower on the subsequent task and will invest less amount of efforts to perform that task.

In achievement related context, the causes perceived as most responsible for their failure or success are ability, study habits, efforts, mood, luck, task difficulty, instructor's bias or favouritism and teacher's help. Student's causal attributions of performance have an impact on the adaptive learning process. Attributing success to one's ability will enhance the motivation and there will be reverse effect if one will attribute failure to lack of ability (Dweck and Elliott, 1983). According to Diener and Dweck (1978) attributing failure to lack of ability is called "Learned Helplessness". In order to explain the success or failure, the individual assesses his or her level of ability to perform a task ("I failed because I am poor at mathematics"), here ability is an internal, stable and uncontrollable cause (I-S-UnC). Another attribution for success or failure can be study habits of the student, study habits are the sustained/ stable efforts of an individual throughout the year, hence study habits are considered as the internal, stable and controllable cause (I-S-C). Likewise, individuals may attribute the amount of effort exerted in preparing for the examination for success or failure. The effort is an internal, unstable and controllable cause (I-UnS-C). Apart from this, students may attribute mood which is an internal-unstable and controllable cause (I-UnS-UnC), anticipated luck which is external, unstable and uncontrollable (E-UnS-UnC) cause, perceived difficulty level of the task which is external, stable and uncontrollable (E-S-UnC) cause, Instructor's bias/favouritism which is external, stable and controllable (E-S-C) cause, help from the teacher which is external, unstable and controllable (E-UnS-C) cause. Gibb et al. (2002) reported that the students who make internal and stable attributions for negative and unsuccessful outcomes have poor academic achievement. On the other side, the students with high academic achievement make external and unstable attributions for negative and unsuccessful outcomes. Gobel and Mori (2007) surveyed 233 Japanese first-year

university students and found that learners attributed their success to internal and failure to external causes. Cortes-Suarez and Sandiford (2008) found that the students in the passing group attributed success to internal, stable, personal controllable, and external controllable. On the contrary, the students in the failing group attributed failures to external, unstable other than personal controllable and external controllable dimension.

**Objective of the study**

To identify the causal attribution of higher education students of different programs with respect to successfulness.

**Method****Sample**

The sample of the present study was comprised of 1424 undergraduate and post graduate students of different colleges and universities of Punjab from 3 departments viz. Sciences, Computer Application and Business & Commerce. The data was comprised of the students from a 2<sup>nd</sup> semester, 4<sup>th</sup> semester, 6<sup>th</sup> semester of UG programs viz. B.Sc., BCA, BBA and B. Com and 2<sup>nd</sup> semester of PG programs viz. M.Sc. (Chemistry), MCA, MBA and M.Com.

**Instrument**

The Revised Causal Dimension Scale (CDSII) developed by McAuley et al. (1992) was validated on Indian higher education population and was used to collect data regarding the causal attributions of the higher education students for their success or failure. The Revised Causal Dimension Scale (CDSII) was a self-report instrument designed to assess the causal perceptions of an individual in terms of locus of causality, stability and controllability dimensions as described by Weiner. The scale comprised of 12 items on the semantic differential scale of 9 to 1. There are three scales Locus of Causality, Stability, Personal Controllability and External Controllability.

## **Statistical Analysis**

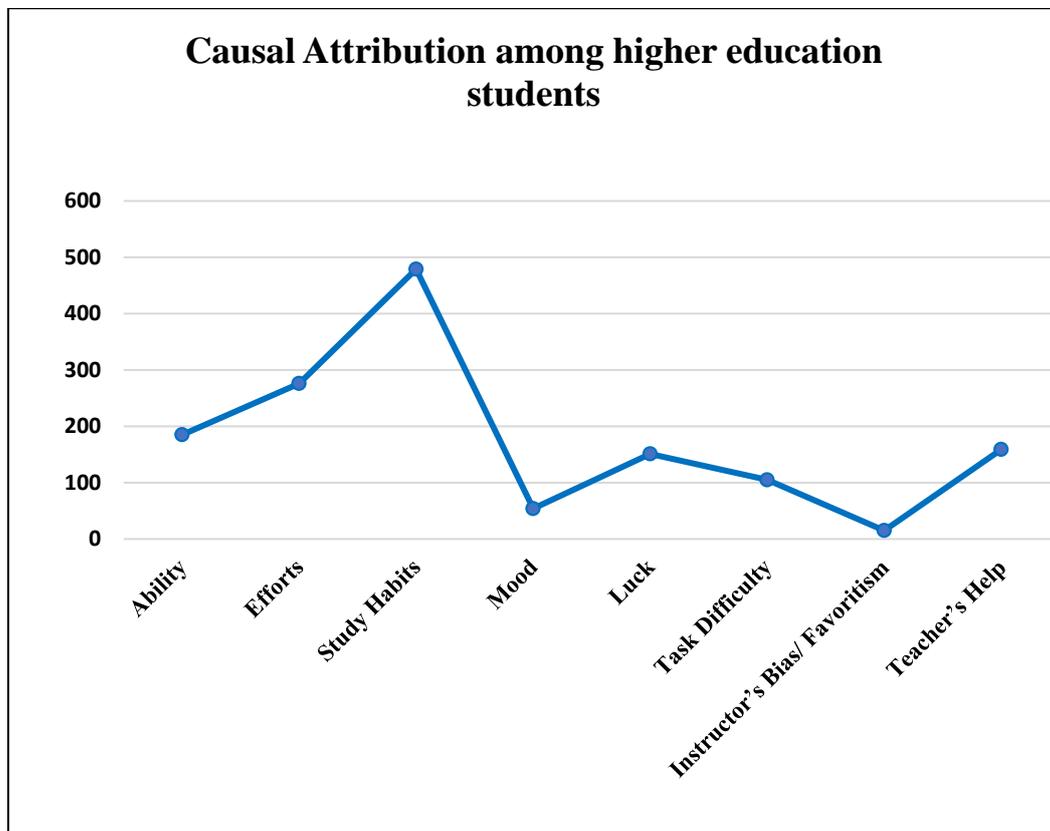
The data thus collected, quantified, processed and presented in the form of frequency and percentage pertaining to different categories given by Weiner (1985) in table 1. The data has been analysed for the students who perceived their score as successful, unsuccessful and also in totality.

## **Results**

Table 1 shows the causal attributions of UG and PG successful and unsuccessful students. In the present study, successful students were the students who perceived that they were successful to achieve the desired score and unsuccessful students were the students who perceived that they failed to achieve the desired score (Dasinger, 2011).

**Table 1: Causal Attributions among Higher Education Students with respect to Successfulness**

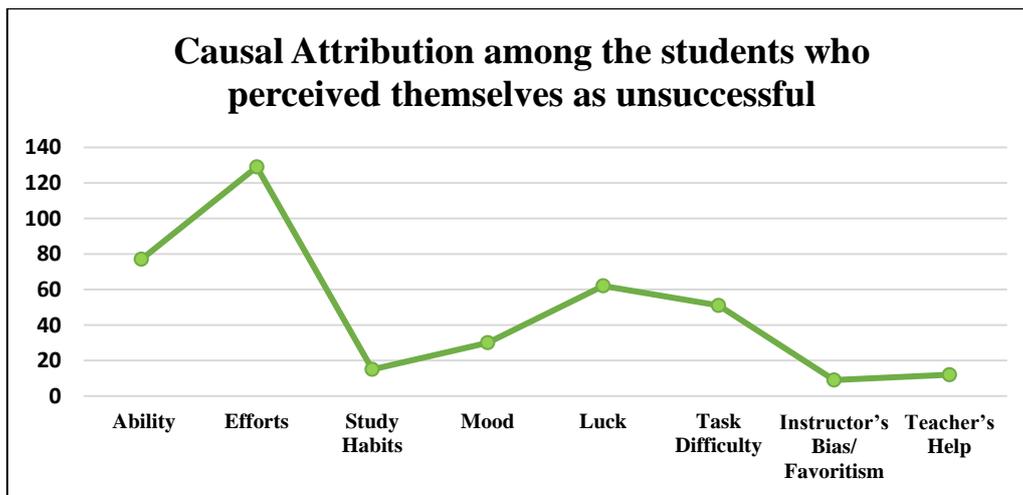
Causal Attributions	Number (Percent)								
	Total	Total Unsuccessful	Total Successful	UG	PG	UG Unsuccessful	UG Successful	PG Unsuccessful	PG Successful
I-S-UnC (Ability)	185 (12.99)	77 (20)	108 (10.39)	119 (13.7)	66 (11.7)	51 (18.88)	68 (11.44)	26 (22.61)	40 (8.99)
I-UnS-C (Efforts)	276 (19.38)	129 (33.51)	147 (14.14)	171 (19.7)	105 (18.7)	82 (30.37)	89 (14.98)	47 (40.87)	58 (13.03)
I-S-C (Study Habits)	479 (33.64)	15 (3.9)	464 (44.6)	257 (29.7)	222 (25.6)	10 (3.7)	247 (41.58)	5 (4.35)	217 (48.76)
I-UnS-UnC (Mood)	54 (3.79)	30 (7.79)	24 (2.30)	33 (3.8)	21 (3.75)	20 (7.40)	13 (2.18)	10 (8.7)	11 (2.47)
E-UnS-UnC (Luck)	151 (10.6)	62 (16.1)	89 (8.57)	103 (11.9)	48 (8.57)	55 (20.37)	48 (8.08)	7 (6.09)	41 (9.21)
E-S-UnC (Task Difficulty)	105 (7.37)	51 (13.25)	54 (5.19)	62 (7.17)	43 (7.6)	37 (13.7)	25 (4.21)	14 (12.17)	29 (6.51)
E-S-C (Instructor's Bias/Favoritism)	15 (1.05)	9 (2.34)	6 (0.57)	9 (1.04)	6 (1.07)	5 (1.85)	4 (0.67)	4 (3.48)	2 (0.44)
E-UnS-C (Teacher's Help)	159 (11.16)	12 (3.11)	147 (14.14)	110 (12.7)	49 (8.75)	10 (3.70)	100 (16.83)	2 (1.74)	47 (10.56)
<b>Total</b>	1424 (100)	385 (100)	1039(100)	864 (100)	560(100)	270 (100)	594 (100)	115 (100)	445 (100)
<b>"I – Internal, S – Stable, C – Controllable, E – External, UnS – Unstable, UnC – Uncontrollable"</b>									



**Fig. 1: “Causal attributions among higher education students”**

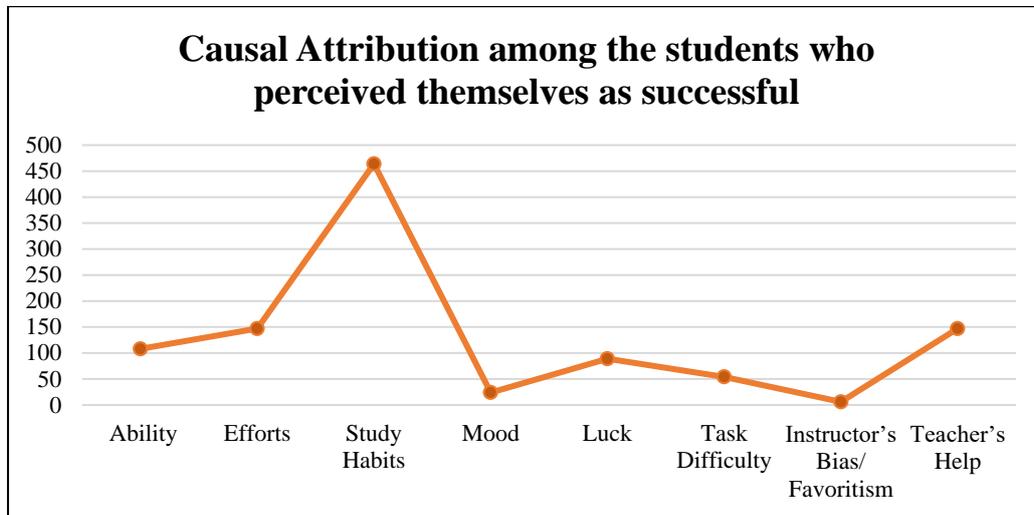
It is clear from table 1 and figure 1 that among total students taken in the study, 185 (12.99%) students attributed ‘Ability’ (Internal-Stable-Uncontrollable) for their perceived failure or success, 276 (19.38%) attributed ‘Efforts’ (Internal-Unstable-Controllable) for their perceived failure or success, 479 (33.64%) students attributed ‘Study Habits’ (Internal-Stable-Controllable) for their perceived failure or success, 54 (3.79%) students attributed ‘Mood’ (Internal-Unstable-Uncontrollable) for their perceived failure or success, 151 (10.60%) students attributed their ‘Luck’ (External-Unstable-Uncontrollable) for their perceived failure or success, 105 (7.37%) students attributed ‘Task Difficulty’ (External-Stable-Uncontrollable)

for their perceived failure or success, only 15 (1.05%) students attributed their failure or success to ‘Instructor’s Bias/Favoritism’ (External-Stable-Controllable) for their perceived failure or success. There were 159 (11.16%) students attributed ‘Teacher’s Help’ (External-Unstable-Controllable) for their perceived failure or success.



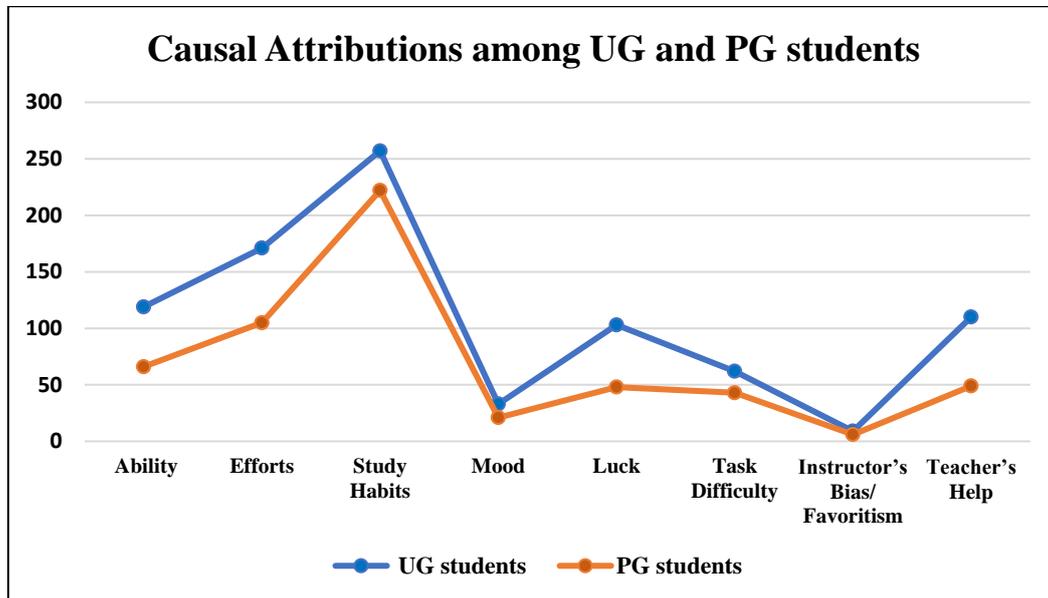
**Fig. 2: “Causal Attributions among the students who perceived themselves as unsuccessful”**

Among the subgroup of the students who perceived their achieved score as unsuccessful, the majority of students 129 (33.51%) attributed ‘Efforts’ (Internal-Unstable-Controllable) for their unsuccessful score. However, a smaller number of students, 9 (2.34%) attributed their failure to external factor i.e. ‘Instructor’s Bias/Favoritism’ (External-Stable-Controllable). The overall ranking of the cause among unsuccessful subgroup is as, Efforts (33.51%), Ability (19.74%), Luck (16.10%), Task Difficulty (13.25%), Mood (7.79%), Overall Study Habits (3.9%), Teacher’s Help (3.11%) and Favoritism by the Teacher (2.34%) were the attributions given by the students who perceived themselves as unsuccessful.



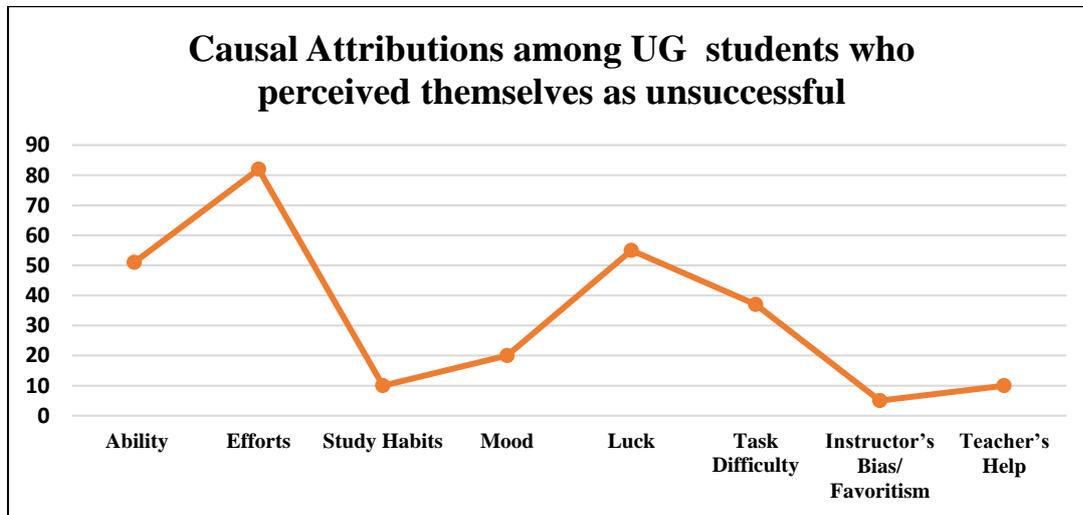
**Fig. 3: “Causal Attributions among the students who perceived themselves as successful”**

Among the subgroup of students who perceived their achieved score as successful, majority of the students, 464 (44.66%) attributed their success to ‘Study Habits’. There were only 8 (0.57 %) successful students attributed their success to ‘Instructor’s Bias/Favoritism’. Ranking wise, the cause for the successful score attributed to Study Habits (44.66%), Efforts (14.14%), Teacher’s Help (14.14%), Ability (10.39%), Luck (8.57%), Task Difficulty (5.19%), Mood (2.30%) and ‘Instructor’s Bias/Favoritism’ (0.57%) were the attributions given by the students who perceived themselves as successful.



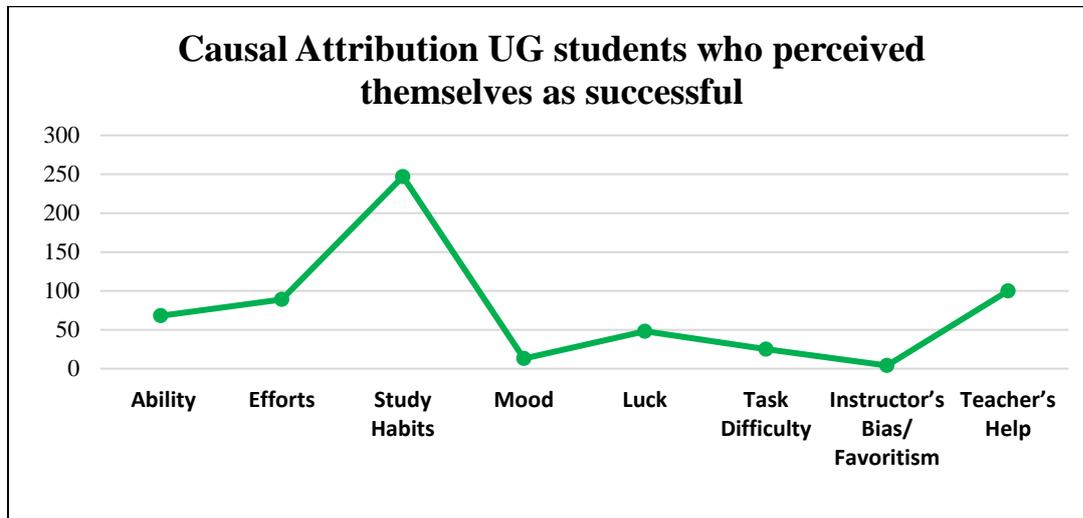
**Fig 4: “Causal Attributions among UG and PG students”**

Among the subgroup of UG and PG students, 257 (29.7%) UG and 222 (25.6%) PG students attributed ‘Study Habits’ (Internal- Stable-Controllable) for their achieved score. Further, a small number of UG students 9 (1.04%) and PG students 6 (1.07%) attributed ‘Instructor’s Bias/Favoritism’ (External-Stable-Controllable) for their achieved score. The overall trend of ranking of the cause for achieved score among UG students is as Study Habits (29.7%), Efforts (19.7%), Ability (13.7%), Teacher’s Help (12.7%), Luck (11.9%), Task Difficulty (7.17%), Mood (3.8%), ‘Instructor’s Bias/Favoritism’ (1.04%). Among PG students, rank wise order to causal attribution is, Study Habits (25.6%), Test Preparation (18.7 %), Ability (11.7%), Teacher’s Help (8.75%), Luck (8.57%), Task Difficulty (7.67%), Mood (3.75%) and ‘Instructor’s Bias/Favoritism’ (1.07%).



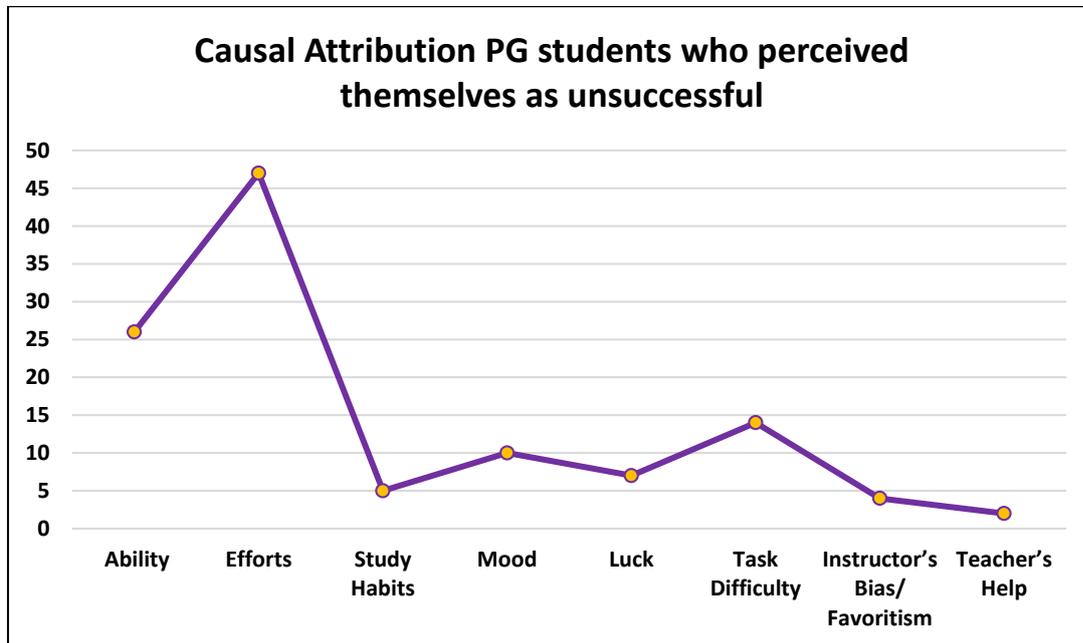
**Fig. 5: “Causal Attributions among UG students who perceived themselves as unsuccessful”**

Among the subgroup of UG students who perceived their achieved score as unsuccessful, 82 (30.37%) attributed ‘Efforts’ (Internal-Unstable-Controllable) their failure. However, a small number of students, 5 (1.85%) attributed ‘Instructor’s Bias/Favoritism’ (External-Stable-Controllable) their failure to. Rank wise order to causal attribution is Efforts (30.37%), Luck (20.37%), Ability (18.88%), Task Difficulty (13.7%), Mood (7.40%), Study Habits (3.70%), Teacher’s Help (3.70%) and Instructor’s Bias/Favoritism (1.85%).



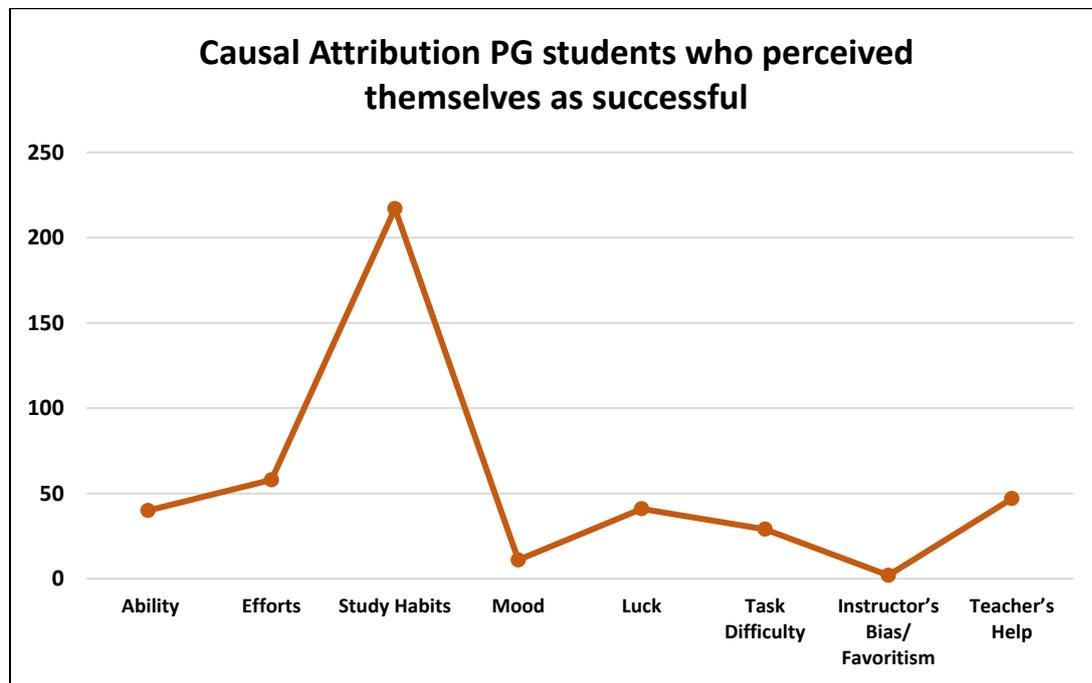
**Fig. 6: “Causal Attributions among UG students who perceived themselves as successful”**

Among the subgroup of UG students who perceived their achieved score as successful, maximum number of students, 247 (41.58%) attributed ‘Study Habits’ (Internal- Stable-Controllable) for their achieved score and only 4 (0.67 %) attributed ‘Instructor’s Bias/Favoritism’ (External-Stable-Controllable) for their achieved score. Ranking wise, the cause for the successful score attributed to Study Habits (41.58%), Teacher Help (16.83%), Efforts (14.98%), Ability (11.44%), Luck (8.08%), Task Difficulty (4.21%), Mood (2.18%) and Instructor’s Bias/Favoritism (0.67%).



**Fig. 7: “Causal Attributions among PG students who perceived themselves as unsuccessful”**

Among the subgroup of PG students who perceived their achieved score as unsuccessful, a maximum number of students, 47 (40.87%) attributed ‘Efforts’ (Internal-Unstable-Controllable) their achieved score. However, a small number of students, 4 (3.48%) attributed ‘Instructor’s Bias/Favoritism’ (External-Stable-Controllable) for their achieved score. Rank wise order to causal attribution is Efforts (40.87%), Ability (22.61%), Task Difficulty (12.17%), Mood (8.70%), Luck (6.09%), Study Habits (4.35%), Instructor’s Bias/Favoritism (3.48%) and Teacher’s Help (1.74%).



**Fig. 8: “Causal Attributions among PG students who perceived themselves as successful”**

Among the subgroup of PG students who perceived their achieved score as successful, majority of the students 217 (48.76%) attributed ‘Study Habits’ (Internal- Stable-Controllable) for their achieved score. There are only 3 (0.67%) students who attributed ‘Instructor’s Bias/Favoritism’ (External-Stable-Controllable) for their achieved score. Rank wise order to causal attribution is Study Habits (48.76%), Efforts (13.03%), Teacher’s Help (10.56%), Luck (9.21%), Ability (8.99%), Task Difficulty (6.51%), Mood (2.47%) and Instructor’s Bias/Favoritism’ (0.44%).

**Conclusion**

It has been found that majority of the UG level students who perceived themselves as unsuccessful attributed efforts for their failure followed by luck, ability, task difficulty, mood,

study habits, help from teacher and instructor bias and successful students attributed study habits for their success followed by help from teacher, efforts, ability, luck, task difficulty, mood and instructor bias. In case of PG level, majority of the students who perceived themselves as unsuccessful attributed their efforts for their failure followed by ability, the difficulty of the task, mood, luck, study habits, instructor bias and help from the teacher. While the majority of students who perceived themselves as successful attributed study habits for their success followed by efforts, help from teachers, luck, ability, the difficulty of the task, mood and instructor bias.

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