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Teacher trainers as action researchers: Scrutinizing the reasons for student failure*

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Abstract

This action research aims to identify the teacher trainees' attributions for their failure, their locus of control and their achievement goals as a result of high failure rate in "Teaching English to Young Learners" course at a large state university in Turkey. For this purpose, qualitative and quantitative data were gathered via an attribution questionnaire, locus of control (LOC) scale, and interviews. The 35-item attribution questionnaire was developed by the researchers and consisted of four parts investigating student, instructor, course, and exam related reasons. The student related reasons had also four sub categories such as study skills, critical thinking ability, in-class performance/attendance and group work performance/attendance. The questionnaire also had an open-ended part with the same categories. The overall reliability of the questionnaire was found to be .80 and .77, .78, .70, .81 for respective sub-groups. The participants were also given a LOC scale and finally 21 successful and 21 unsuccessful students were interviewed. The results revealed that, having the highest mean score, student-related reasons were identified to be the major reason for the participants' failure from the course. Moreover, the participants' had internal locus of control and they mostly carried performance goals for achievement. In addition, it was found out that 40% of trainees did not have a desire to be a teacher after graduation. The results have implications for teacher trainers facing similar problems in Turkish context and governmental institutions in terms of teacher qualifications and teacher trainee selection in education faculties.

Keywords: attributions for success and failure, reflective teaching, action research, EFL teacher trainees, teacher training

1. Introduction

Improving students' success is one of teachers' major concerns when determining classroom methodologies, selecting materials, designing activities and planning lessons. Although the teacher and the teaching methods have a considerable impact on student success, Perry, Hall, and Ruthig (2005) argue that autonomy, teacher-independence and self-reliance have a larger role than ever in college students' educational experiences. Despite the fact that university admissions get more stringent and student selection depend on intellectual and academic ability, the number of students who fail at the university is astounding (Perry, et al, 2005). Perry, Hladkyj, Pekrun, and Pelletier (2001) consider this situation as a paradox, the explanation of which should involve an account of psychosocial variables, mainly perceived academic control in addition to other criteria such as academic skills, socioeconomic status etc. In Robbins et al.'s (2004) study psychosocial factors such

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as perceived academic control and achievement motivation were identified to be the strongest indicators of success when compared to socioeconomic status of students and high school GPA (Grand point average).

Perceived control, as one of those factors, is a psychological construct and a motivational variable that has an effect on achievement (Stipek & Weisz, 1981). Students with higher control are more successful and productive in their academic studies than those who have low control. The perceived control is grounded in the theory of social learning (Stipek & Weisz, 1981) as a construct and derived from Rotter's (1966) theory of "Locus of Control" as an individual difference variable. The research on locus of control has identified it to be a determinant in academic success (Hasan & Khalid, 2014; Whilhite, 1990). The causal analysis of academic outcomes by the learner can be attributed to internal or external factors (Hasan & Khalid, 2014). A student with internal locus of control looks for reasons of success and/or failure within the self. They give importance to hard work, studying regularly, attending classes and using appropriate learning strategies. However, students with external locus of control believe that outer factors have control over their learning outcomes such as the examination system, teachers' attitude and/or method, or course content. Rotter (1966) when explaining internal/external locus of control argued that the former group feels the control of events, on the other hand the latter considers everything beyond his/her control.

According to Perry at al. (2005), perceived control "is a person's subjective estimate of his or her capacity to manipulate, influence, or predict some aspect of the environment (p. 369). For a student having higher perceptions of control produces better outcomes than lower perceptions of control. However, it should also be noted that "perceptions of control" need to be evaluated differently from "desire for control". Although their levels of control might be different, both high and low control students share a desire to affect their academic endeavors (Perry et al., 2005). Yet, the level of desire is subject to change depending on the academic task. For example, a student might consider control as unimportant although s/he might be capable of controlling it such as studying regularly for the exam when there are weeks ahead of it or completing an assignment when there are no marks received afterwards.

Perceived academic control is considered to be an individual difference that has a direct impact on motivation and performance (Perry et al., 2005). There are classroom factors that can affect students' perceived control such as the quality of the instruction, grading system of the teacher, difficulty of content, etc. In search for reasons of success and failure students seek for causal attributions within the self or the context of education. According to Perry (1991), perceived academic control is the responsibility of the students over their performance, which relies on students' perception of their actions, such as studying, and their influence on academic outcomes, such as success or failure. To be able to change the outcome one must be aware of the fact that it depends on their actions or personalities.

The remediation of academic failure is critical not only for researchers but also for students, trainers, and educational institutions. Failure and its psychological outcomes might affect students' self-esteem, perseverance and their professional career goals (Perry et al., 2005). Weiner's (1985; 1995, 2000) attribution theory and achievement motivation provide and understanding into failure. Drawing on Heider's (1958) theory of attribution and Rotter's (1966) locus of control, Weiner has developed the attribution theory of achievement. Both Heider and Rotter were interested in the "perceived causes of success and failure and their locus or location (Weiner, 2010, p. 30). Weiner's theory aims to distinguish learners' interpretation of events and its effect on motivation and future learning behaviors (Demetriou, 2011). Weiner combined Heider's causes: ability, effort and task difficulty with Rotter's causes of skill and luck (Weiner, 2010). Thus, he identified two internal and two external perceived causes of achievement outcomes: ability and effort (internal and controllable),

and task difficulty and luck (external and uncontrollable) (Weiner, 2010). Upon failure students look for causes whether they be internal or external. Rotter (1975) claims that students who believe that external factors have a stronger effect on their achievement are "defensive externals" who do not reflect on their real attitudes.

As important as the social learning theories, such as locus of control, and attribution theories that try to identify the students' perceptions of who controls the outcome of their academic endeavors, the achievement goals theory also sheds light in understanding students' success/failure. According to Ames (1992) achievement goals are "integrated pattern of beliefs, attributions, and affect that produces intentions of behavior" (p. 261). Both the "locus of control" and the "achievement goal theory" are related to affective, motivational, cognitive as well as behavioral outcomes (Chubb, Fertman, & Ross, 1997; Covington, 2000; Pintrich, 2000; Seifert, 1995). In achievement goals theory "learning" and "performance" have been identified as the two goal orientations, which function as motives to complete a task (Ames, 1992; Elliot & Dweck, 1988). Accordingly students who have learning goals aim at developing their skills, prefer challenging tasks and endure failure (Akın, 2010; Buluş, 2011; Seifert, 1995s). Students with performance goals, on the other hand, prefer less challenging tasks, easily quit when faced with failure, and try to substantiate their success (Ames, 1992). When the former uses deep and effective strategies the latter uses less complex strategies such as memorization (Middleton & Midgley, 1997; Seifert, 1995). Therefore, the goal orientations of an individual can be another important determiner of success.

Among many other reasons, the learners' locus of control, their attributions, or goal orientations play an important role for teachers and researchers to understand the learning outcomes and determine classroom strategies. From this perspective the current study is designed as an action research to identify third year prospective teachers' perceived causes for failure in "Teaching English to Young Learners" course at a large state university in Turkey.

1.1. The context

Teaching English to Young Learners course is offered by two instructors carrying out the same methodologies both in the theory and practice lessons. For the theory lessons the students are required to come to class prepared and ready for discussion. The classroom discussions are guided by the instructors. The questions involve both knowledge questions and analytical questions that encourage students to build connections between their prior experiences, knowledge and new information. Participation in the discussions is an integral component of the theoretical course.

In the practice lessons students are required to prepare a task, activity, material, game, or a lesson plan as a group and present it. There are several reasons for organizing group work: first of all, encouraging cooperation through which they can develop their critical thinking skills; second, reducing the work load; third, encouraging peer support to compensate for limited skills/knowledge that group members might have. The topic of the presentation is the topic of discussion that week. Criteria for evaluation and the grading principles are given in theory lessons. In practice lessons that are organized as micro-teaching sessions, every group makes a presentation each week and receives a mark. The total of these practice marks become their mid-term grade. Thus, it gives the instructors to conduct process assessment. The presenters are selected by the instructor randomly in order to support group dynamics. There is always a chance that some group members show more effort than the others or vice versa. In that case, hard workers end up presenting more than the others and the mark received after the presentation is shared with other group members who didn't show much effort. Via random selection, each member feels the responsibility for the rest of the group and contributes more to group work.

After presentations they receive peer and teacher feedback immediately. This way students have chance to learn from others, as well as reflect on their own performance, and find opportunity to implement theoretical knowledge in practice.

1.2. The exam

The final exam of the course consisted of 12 open-ended questions from each topic discussed in the classroom. Students were asked to use their theoretical knowledge to identify or solve a problematic situation, evaluate/analyze an activity, discuss its practical implementation, work on a task, etc. The majority of the questions (10) required analytical ability and the use of critical thinking skills. The knowledge level was assessed within the discussions of the questions so that the instructors will evaluate the students' knowledge and ability to implement it to given tasks.

2. Method

In the 2014-2015 fall term 45% of participants failed from the TEYL course in the final exam. Although a decrease in student performance was observed by the researchers as well as the other faculty members over the last four years, the current result was beyond expectations. Therefore, the present action research aims at identifying prospective teachers' attributions for their failure and their locus of control. There are several research questions for the study:

1. What are the teacher trainees' attributions for their failure?
2. Do teacher trainees have internal (ability + effort) or external (task difficulty + luck) attributions for their failure?
3. Do teacher trainees have internal or external locus of control?
4. Do teacher trainees carry learning or performance achievement goals?

2.1. Participants

A total of 110 third year teacher trainees (TTs) contributed to the study. 89 of the participants (45%) who failed from the final exam were given an attributions questionnaire. 65 of the teacher trainees also completed a locus of control questionnaire. For a comprehensive understanding of the quantitative data 42 TTs (21 unsuccessful and 21 successful) were interviewed by the researchers.

2.2. Instruments

Methodological, theoretical, and data triangulations were used in the study. Both quantitative and qualitative data were gathered via an attributions questionnaire, locus of control scale and semi-structured interviews. In addition, data were interpreted by considering three theoretical positions: attribution theory, locus of control theory, and achievement goals theory.

The researchers developed a 35-item questionnaire to identify TTs' attributions for their failure, which consists of four parts investigating student-related (internal) (items 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17), exam related (external) (items 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27), teacher-related (external) (items 28, 29, 30, 31), course-related reasons (external) (items 32, 33, 34, 35). The student related reasons had also four sub categories such as study skills (items 1, 4, 5, 6, 12, 13, 14, 16, 17), critical thinking ability (items 3, 7, 15), in-class performance/attendance (items 2, 8, 11) and group work performance/attendance (items 9, 10). The TTs were asked to indicate their opinion on a grading scale from 1 (absolutely don't agree) to 5 (I definitely agree). The overall

reliability of the questionnaire was found to be .80 and .77, .78, .70, .81 for respective sub-groups (table 1). The questionnaire also had an open-ended part having the same categories in addition to students' suggestions with regard to the course and the exam.

Table 1. Internal consistency of the questionnaire

Parts of the instrument	Alpha values
Overall	.80
Student- related factors	.77
Exam- related factors	.78
Course- related factors	.70
Teacher- related factors	.81

The TTs also completed the academic locus of control (ALOC) scale developed by Akın (2007) that proved to be a valid and reliable instrument. The scale has 17 items and two sub-scales: external (items 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10) and internal (12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17) academic locus of control. Moreover, a semi-structured interview was conducted with 42 teacher trainees.

The 35-item structured questionnaire and the academic locus of control scale were analyzed through descriptive statistics such as mean scores of the categories and the frequency analysis of the items. The open-ended part of the questionnaire and the interview were content-analyzed to support and delve into the findings obtained from the structured questionnaire and the ALOC scale.

2.3. Data collection and analysis

The attribution questionnaire and ALOC scale were given to TTs before the make-up exam and the interviews were conducted at the beginning of the spring term by both of the researchers. 35-item structured questionnaire and the academic locus of control scale were analyzed through descriptive statistics such as mean scores of the categories and the frequency analysis of the items. The open-ended part of the questionnaire and the interview were content-analyzed to support and delve into the findings obtained from the structured questionnaire and the ALOC scale.

3. Results

3.1. Attributions for failure

The first two research questions aimed at investigating TTs attributions for failure and whether these attributions have internal or external causes. The items in the questionnaire related to the participants' attribution of causality for their failure were categorized as four factors such as student, teacher, course, and exam related. Table 2 presents the mean score of each category.

Table 2. The results of the teacher trainees' attribution to their achievement outcomes

Attribution of causality	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Student- related factors	89	1.76	4.22	2.97	.44961
Exam- related factors	89	1.00	4.44	2.56	.81789
Course- related factors	89	1.00	4.60	2.33	.77742
Teacher- related factors	89	1.00	4.50	1.94	.88165

The comparison of mean scores across the categories revealed that the participants attributed their achievement outcomes mostly to the student-related factors at a moderate degree (M = 2, 97). That is

to say, the teacher trainees' attributed their failure to internal factors more than external factors. The other factors are closer to the "I don't agree" scale of the questionnaire. The student related reasons had also four sub categories such as study skills, critical thinking ability, in-class performance / attendance and group work performance / attendance. Table 3 shows the mean scores of these categories.

Table 3. The results of mean scores regarding student-related (internal) reasons

Student-related factors	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Critical thinking skills	89	1.33	5.00	3.70	.80197
Study skill	89	1.30	4.40	2.87	.65718
Group work	89	1.00	5.00	2.76	.63540
In-class performance	89	1.33	4.67	2.71	.64969

3.1.1. Student related factors (Internal factors)

As seen in Table 3, limited use of *critical thinking skills (CTS)* appeared to be the major student-related reason. The results revealed that 72.1 % of the participants use classroom discussions and 73.2 % of the participants use the feedback sessions to make inferences for their occupation. However, half of the students (50.6%) attributed their failure to their lack of ability to put their theoretical knowledge into practice. The answers given in the open-ended part indicate limited critical thinking skills thus, support the quantitative data. Some of the participants (8) stated that they gave importance to the practical part of the course by ignoring the theoretical part whereas a few of them (5) signified that they were good at theory but not practice. In addition, some of them (6) stated that they studied only via memorization, whereas a few of them (4) confessed that they lacked of CTS. Moreover, it was also emphasized by some of the participants (9) that they were not able to transfer their theoretical knowledge into practice during the exam as well.

The findings of the questionnaire related to CTS were conflicting. Although the majority of them agreed that they had *CTS*, half of them also admitted that they could not transfer theory into practice, which is an important indication of CTS. Therefore, they were asked in the interview why they had difficulty in transferring their theoretical knowledge into practice (table 4).

Table 4. The interview results related to the reasons for not transferring theoretical knowledge into practice

Groups of Interviewees	Successful	Unsuccessful
Previous experiences (memorization)	3	7
Giving importance to practice not theory	5	5
Not having the skills	2	5
Inadequate preparation for theory	5	4
Not applicable for me	3	…

The findings in table 4 revealed that the unsuccessful participants relied on their previous experiences, particularly memorization, more than the successful ones to improve their CTSs. The following extracts indicate how education system affects students' CTSs:

4s: "Education in primary school also in high school is not the same as the education we are receiving now. Developing CTS is not easy for me because I did not need to use CTS until the age of twenty-one…"

Is: "Throughout my education, learning was based on memorization. When I was asked to apply what I learned into practice, particularly in this course, I started experiencing difficulty…".

5us: "We mostly study to pass the exam. We think that if we memorize we can pass. When we focus on memorization it becomes difficult to associate the information. Thus, we cannot develop CTS…".

Furthermore, although some of the interviewees stated that they gave importance to both theory and practice (6), some of them expressed clearly that they gave importance to practice more than theory by reporting the following reasons: getting immediate grade from practice (11), responsibility of being a group member (4), and not believing in the applicability of the theory (2). The following extracts reflect their ideas about theory and practice:

2s: "Our theoretical knowledge is assessed via the final exam which is given at the end of the term. In addition, a performance-based assessment is conducted every week. Sometimes we ignore the fact that we will have a final exam. Thus, we mostly focus on short-term assessment".

Is: "Practice is fun but theory is boring. Especially when you attend the theoretical course without getting prepared for the target unit, it becomes more boring…"

Moreover, they were also asked to give their suggestions to develop CTS. The content analysis revealed the following points to improve their CTS: getting more detailed feedback from the instructors about their performances (11); considering previous knowledge and current information to build relations (8); making cause-effect relations (6); doing reflections (4); putting theoretical knowledge into practice (3); getting prepared for the lesson from different sources (4); being exposed to creative samples to analyze (3); and working in groups (2).

Based on the mean scores, the category of *study skills* was ranked as the second factor for their failure. The results of the frequency analysis of each item in the questionnaire showed that more than half of the participants (60.2 %) agreed that they studied more to the practical part of the course than the theoretical part and some of them (37.5 %) agreed and some of them somewhat agreed (35.2 %) that each week they attended the theory lessons without being prepared. Half of the participants (51.1 %) agreed that they did not study for the exam regularly and they stated that they studied just before the final exam (53.4 %). Moreover, nearly half of them (25 % agreed and 20.5 % somewhat agreed) stated that they failed because they thought that they could pass the course by memorizing the content.

In the open-ended part of the questionnaire, some of the participants informed that they did not study sufficiently (18), regularly (8), and properly (3), did not allocate enough time to study for the course (11), and did not attend the course regularly (5).

Because the findings of the questionnaire revealed the participants' inadequate study skills, TTs were asked in the interview to explain their reasons for not studying. Table 5 presents the reasons emerged from their extracts:

Table 5. The interview results related to the reasons for not studying

Groups of Interviewees	Successful	Unsuccessful
Intensity of the 3rd year ELT curriculum	6	5
Prior experiences (bell-shaped curve, memorization)	5	4
Laziness	3	3
Lack of motivation to learn and teach (studying to pass the exam)	4	4
Lack of regular study habits (studying right before the exam)	1	7
Poor time management skills	1	5
Lack of desire for the occupation	2	4

The reasons in table 5 indicated that both successful and unsuccessful TTs could not/did not study due to their prior experiences, laziness, and lack of motivation to learn and teach. The following interview extract show how their prior experiences affected their study habits:

I19us: *"We have been involved in an education system based on rote-learning. We have had lots of exams based on memorization. Thus, we believed that we could pass this exam via memorizing the information just before the exam week. However, it did not work this time…"*

On the other hand, although both groups attributed some of their reasons to the intensity of the 3rd year curriculum, successful students seemed to manage their time and could study regularly better than the unsuccessful ones. The extract below indicates their ideas about the issue:

I1us: "*I did not study my courses during the first and second year of the ELT program but I was able to pass all my courses. In the third year, there are lots of courses which require practice such as community service practices, teaching language skills, and the most challenging one, teaching English to young learners. Sometimes getting prepared for one practice lasts three days. Now, I want to study but I hardly have time to breathe. I could not become organized…*"

The trainees did not attribute their failure to group work (M = 2.76) because most of the participants (72.1 %) reported that they did not miss any group work and the majority (84.3 %) disagreed that they failed because they did not participate in group works regularly.

The items regarding in-class performance (items 2, 8, 11) indicated the lowest mean score (M = 2. 71), which means that the participants did not attribute their failure to their performances in the classroom. 27.3 % agreed and 27.3 % somewhat agreed that they failed because they did not participate actively to the discussions in the theory lessons, indicating that a little more than the half of the participants consider limited or lack of classroom participation as a factor for failure. Moreover, some of the students (37.5 %) agreed and some of them (34.2 %) somewhat agreed that they actively gave feedback to their friends within the practical course. Moreover, nearly half of the participants (21.3 % agree and 23.6 % somewhat agree) thought that they failed because they did not learn some subjects due to their absenteeism.

Following student-related reasons which are internal factors, the participants attributed their failure to exam-related (M = 2.56), course-related (M = 2.33), and teacher-related factors (M = 1.94) respectively as external factors. The mean scores indicate that these factors are not the major reasons for their failure.

3.1.2. Exam related factors (External factor)

Related to the final exam, the participants did not report any problems with regard to the duration of the exam, congruence between the exam questions and the topics discussed in the course, in-class practices and class discussions, and to the content validity of the exam. However, around half of the participants (53.9 %) agreed that they failed because they could not understand the instructions in the exam. In the open-ended part of the questionnaire, some of them (12) stated that the instructions were not clear and they could not understand what was really asked. Furthermore, 57.3 % of them (28.1 % completely and 29.2 % somewhat) agreed that they failed because the exam did not have construct validity and some of the students agreed (30.7 %) and some of them (22.7 %) somewhat agreed that the exam was built on memorization. In the open-ended part, a few of the participants noted that the exam was difficult (4), it was built upon the questions which require the transfer of theoretical knowledge into practice (4), there were too many questions to answer in a limited time (4). Thus, they suggested that there should be a visa exam (7); duration of the exam should be extended (4); there should be more questions based on theory (memorization) (6); and the exam should be based on practice (3).

In parallel with the findings of the questionnaire, the interview results showed that all of the interviewees (Is) but one think that the content of the exam comprised the subjects discussed in the lesson. They were also asked about the possible reasons for not understanding the instructions in the

exam. They reported the following reasons: anxiety due to limited time and different exam style (7Is), lack of vocabulary knowledge (5Is), and complex instructions (4Is). They were asked how instructions should be designed to make it clearer for them. Although 12 successful and 11 unsuccessful interviewees stated that it was not necessary to revise the instructions, some of them provided their suggestions such as using shorter and simpler sentences (9Is), giving the unit name for each question (3Is), and using the sentences in the book (2Is). Finally, they were asked whether the content of the exam should be redesigned or not. While most of the interviewees (30) thought that it was not necessary to redesign the content of the exam, some of them (12) disagreed by offering their suggestions as follows: include more practical questions, exclude questions which require memorization, allocate more time, and use more understandable instructions.

3.1.3. Course related factors (External factor)

By ranking course-related reason number three, the participants did not attribute their failure to this factor except for the course content. Most of the participants (82%) agreed that they love the course, the course attracts their interest (81%), and the materials used in this course were easy enough to understand (71.9 %). On the other hand, more than half of the participants (55.7 %) agreed and some of them (26.1 %) somewhat agreed that the course content was difficult. Moreover, 24.8 % completely and 16,9 % somewhat agreed that they failed due to their prejudices against this course. The open-ended part supported the findings that some of them stated that the course content was detailed and heavy (12). They also noted that the course was difficult (9), tiring (7), and time-consuming (2) because it required too many practices (4) and group work studies with group evaluation (6) besides the classes were crowded (5). Moreover, they suggested that the number of the practices should be reduced (6); the duration of the theoretical course should be longer (4); and the marks received from the presentations in the practice lesson should be the final exam grade not the visa exam (4). Moreover, regarding the interview question investigating whether the course was heavy or not, most of them answered "yes" (16 s and 14 us) and some of them answered "no"(5 s and 7 us). The following extracts might reflect their ideas:

Us5: *"We learn lots of things in this course but it is too heavy to understand everything in a limited time. Thus, the duration of the course should be extended from two terms to two years".*

S2: "*The course is too heavy for us due to practices performed every week. Once a week we must study almost eight hours to finish the task. I think we should prepare a task bi-weekly not weekly".*

3.1.4. Teacher related factors (External factor)

With the lowest mean score (M = 1.94), the participants did not attribute their failure to their teacher. In that, majority of the participants agreed that their teacher has comprehensive knowledge of the field (87.5%) and was fair when giving practice grades (71.3 %). Moreover, participants agreed that they neither failed due to their teachers (81.8%) nor their methodology (66,8 %). In the open-ended part of the questionnaire the participants informed that they were pleased with their teachers (18) by stating that the teachers were good (2), excellent (3), successful in their field (2), positive and cheerful (1), and were teaching very well (10), whereas some of them stated that they asked too many questions (1), produced complex sentences (1), and taught the lesson fast (1).

3.2. Locus of control of the teacher trainees

The results from the attribution questionnaire and the interviews revealed some issues concerning the TTs locus of control. Thus, the third research question inquired about the TTs LOC. Along with

the ALOC scale, TTs were asked some questions regarding their desire to become a teacher. Table 6 shows the findings regarding TTs desire for the occupation.

Table 6. TTs desire for the occupation

	Yes (%)	**No (%)**
Strong desire for becoming a teacher	59.4	40.6
Choosing ELT department purposefully to be a teacher	73.4	26.6
Ownership of the occupation	71.9	28.1
Feeling more like a teacher trainee	67.2	….
Feeling more like a university student	32.8	….

The findings are striking in that only a little more than the half of the participants stated that they definitely would like to become a teacher after graduation. The others stated that teaching is not their primary option but one of the other options they have. Moreover only 3/4 of the TTs chose this department purposefully indicating the limitations of their options when entering the university. In the interviews conducted afterwards, 32 TTs mentioned about the fact that the year they entered the university exam the government announced that there will not be any formation courses offered. Thus, some of the TTs selected this department in order to make sure that they have a paying job after graduation. Furthermore, 1/3 of the participants also claimed that they feel more like a university student rather than a TT, which might be an indication of the responsibilities they do not wish to carry as a prospective teacher.

The findings of the ALOC scale indicated that TTs have internal locus of control (M= 4.16) more than external locus of control (M= 2.18). Regarding internal locus of control, they mostly thought that they must study well to be able get high marks from the exam (M= 4.60). On the other hand, related to external locus of control some of them thought that if they get on well with their teachers they can be successful in their courses (M= 2.59).

In addition to the findings of the scale which indicated that TTs mostly have internal locus of control, in the interview TTs were asked to elaborate certain issues. To that end, the interviewees were firstly asked whether they were able to monitor themselves and do self-evaluation with regard to this course. The content analysis of the interview extracts indicated that all of the participants (41) except for one notified that they were able to monitor their progress and do self-evaluation by addressing the following points presented in table 7.

Table 7. The interview results related to points that help the participants for monitoring and self-evaluation

Groups of Interviewees	**Successful**	**Unsuccessful**
Receiving feedback from their peers and the teachers	5	5
Comparing first presentation and the subsequent ones	3	3
Comparing their previous and current performances	3	2
Comparing their performances in this course to other courses	2	2
Having teaching experiences in kindergartens, primary schools organized within the course of Community Service Practices, private courses, and/or training centers	**6**	**1**

As seen in table 7, the interviewees in both groups reported that they could monitor their progress and do self-evaluation due to similar reasons except for having teaching experiences. It appears that successful TTs are practicing teaching more than the unsuccessful ones. The following extracts indicated how some of the participants did self-evaluation:

I7us: *"When I compare myself now and before taking this course, I realize that I knew nothing about children before. My creativity is developing when planning and preparing materials and activities. My current knowledge increases my motivation both for the course and my job…".*

I10s: *"I certainly can do self-evaluation. I think that this lesson contributes a lot to my professional development. For instance, the things we are doing in this course, particularly my performances in the practice courses, enable me to be comfortable in front of my classmates…".*

The participants were also asked what strategies they were using to succeed. The results in table 8 present the following strategies from the most frequently used to the least both by successful and unsuccessful interviewees:

Table 8. The interview results related to the interviewees' learning strategies

Groups of Interviewees	**Successful**	**Unsuccessful**
regular preparation for the lesson	6	8
studying by writing	**9**	**2**
revising	**5**	2
regular class attendance	2	1
note taking	3	4
group discussions	2	2
active participation in the classroom	3	1
evaluating and synthesizing the information	**6**	…
thinking how the information contributes to their careers	**3**	…
being a responsible person	**1**	…
individual study	**1**	…

The results in table 8 revealed that although the interviewees in both groups used similar strategies in general, successful students used more strategies and they were the only one used CTS. The extracts below show how they use aforementioned strategies:

I4us: *"If I understand the theory, grab the details on the subject, associate the known and new information I could be successful in the practice…".*

I6s: *"I study by writing. I rewrite the notes I take in the lesson and the important parts of the book to create my way of understanding. I record the notes with the examples in my memory. I think how to explain this by producing simple sentences…"*

I11s: *"I believe in the importance of regular and meaningful learning, shortly, life-long learning. I read and reread until I am able to apply the information into practice in my mind. I do not learn to graduate but to use it in my job…".*

When the participants were asked whether they were aware of their strengths and weaknesses, all of them (41) except for 1 answered as yes. The results related to the interviewees' strengths and weaknesses were presented in table 9.

Table 9. The interview results regarding the teacher trainees' strengths and weaknesses.

Groups of Interviewees	**Successful**	**Unsuccessful**
Strengths		
being successful in practice	5	3
being ambitious	3	3
being good at listening	2	1
being good at memorization	1	3
being able to succeed **if** they are intrinsically motivated	…	4
having intrinsic motivation to learn	3	…
being highly responsible	3	…
having good theoretical knowledge	3	…
having the ability to synthesize the information	3	…
having regular study habit	2	…
Weaknesses		
having attention deficit (difficulty to concentrate)	3	**6**
Having weak theoretical knowledge	1	**4**
having anxiety	4	1
not being analytical	2	**5**
being irresponsible	1	1
time management	2	…
use of memorization as a strategy	…	3
language use (speaking)	…	3
having irregular study habit	…	3
dislike studying (laziness)	…	2
having low motivation	…	1
having prejudices	…	1
being shy	…	1

The results revealed that successful teacher trainees mentioned their strengths more than the unsuccessful ones whereas unsuccessful ones reported their weaknesses more than the successful ones. Although they have common strengths and weaknesses, there appeared some striking differences between the two groups. In that, successful ones noted that they had intrinsic motivation with high level of responsibility whereas unsuccessful ones stated that they knew they were able to succeed if they were intrinsically motivated. Moreover, successful ones had regular study habits and good theoretical knowledge with the ability to synthesize the information in detail while the others lacked regular study habits, theoretical knowledge and analytic thinking skills.

4. Discussion

The present action research provides important insights into understanding our students' reasons for failure. The findings from the attribution questionnaire were interesting in that their attributions were at a moderate degree or lower, mostly pointing out the student-related reasons. This indicates that the TTs do not have a strong opinion about the reasons for their failure. This situation raises questions about their degree of ALOC: whether they can control the factors that lead to success. Results of the ALOC scale showed that they have low external but high internal LOC. The findings from the attribution questionnaire and ALOC scale indicate that TTs have a tendency to attribute their reasons for failure to their self.

Among all factors, limited or lack of CTS were found to be the major reason for failure (M= 3.70). The qualitative data suggested that the TTs' former educational experiences didn't help to develop this

skill. TTs stated that this course was one of the first to require higher order thinking skills in which the memorization of the content was not valued. Having a "learning-centered" perspective the course methodology requires the TTs do analysis and synthesis of the new and old information together with their experiences. However, as stated by the TTs, their study habits and earlier experiences prevented them to implement what they thought necessary. According to the achievement goal theory the participants displayed performance goals rather than learning goals. As can be seen from the data, the participants stated that they give importance to receiving immediate marks from the presentations during practice but not to its theory and prefer using ineffective strategies such as memorization to pass the course as also stated in the previous literature (see, Middleton & Midgley, 1997; Seifert, 1995). Ignoring the long-term goal, in this case becoming a skillful and knowledgeable teacher, as well as the final exam at the end of the term, the participants sought for ways to get high marks, however, they didn't carry out an overall plan or used an effective strategy to become successful. By underestimating the importance of theoretical and scientific knowledge to build their skills, TTs failed to notice the fact that their performance relied on their knowledge.

As discussed by Perry et al. (2005) this situation can be explained by their "desire" to control their learning outcomes. Although they were able to control their outcomes such as studying regularly for the exam when there are weeks ahead of it, they chose not to. Thus, the desire for control should be distinguished from the perceptions of control. The participants in the study appeared to have high internal LOC according to the results of the ALOC scale, attributions questionnaire and the interviews, yet they claimed that they didn't carry out the responsibilities to control their success such as working hard, studying regularly, properly and sufficiently, devoting enough time for studying, attending classes regularly, participating in classroom discussions or using deep and effective strategies. These factors are an indication of their effort to become successful, which are internal and controllable (Weiner, 2010). The data analysis showed that the participants did not carry the desire to control their effort.

The content and the type of final exam were explained at the beginning of the term and the TTs were reminded of this information frequently throughout the course of the study. Among the several reasons of this lack of desire is the one that is the most important: the motivation to become a teacher. Unfortunately, only a little more than the half of the participants stated that they definitely want to become a teacher. This seems to be a crucial factor that would affect both their intrinsic and instrumental motivation. As stated by Perry et al. (2005) perceived academic control is an individual difference that has a direct effect on motivation and performance. In this case it is also highly possible to argue the contrary.

The exam was one of the external and uncontrollable causes of failure. Accordingly, half of the TTs attributed their failure to the difficulty of the instructions in the exam. In the interview they were asked the same question and also to give some suggestions. Thus, a few asked for simple sentences in the instructions, they also suggested that the unit names should be given and the exact book sentences should be used. Yet, the majority thought that the instructions should stay as it is. Their suggestions, except for shorter sentences, are signs of their study habit: memorization. Moreover, in the questionnaire half of the participants claimed that the exam was based on memorization. However, 10 out of 12 questions required the TTs to use their theoretical knowledge on a task, by evaluating, improving, identifying, discussing, changing, interpreting or selecting. Therefore, this incorrect judgement of the exam questions can be interpreted as a sign of low awareness.

In addition, a little more than half of the TTs thought that what is assessed in the exam was not what they were taught, claiming a lack of construct validity. However, the test comprised of similar tasks and discussions that was carried on during theory and practice lessons. This unseemly decision might be due to TTs claims about not participating much in the discussions and attending lessons

without prior preparation. Moreover, quite a lot of the participants also claimed that they didn't give importance to theoretical lessons, didn't study regularly or adequately. It appears that TTs study habits caused a lack of awareness and guided their expectations for the assessment.

Finally, even though the TTs stated in the questionnaire that the course was difficult, in the interview they explained that they meant the course was heavy as it required student preparation, use of critical thinking skills, preparing a micro-teaching lesson each week and being reflective. Yet, nobody suggested a change in the course content but they said that the course could be offered for a longer period of time.

5. Conclusions

The current action research guided the researchers to be reflective of their practices by trying to understand the reasons for student failure. As the data displays the participants have attributed their failure mostly to self-related factors but at a moderate level. Moreover, they have more internal LOC than external. Yet, the detailed analysis of the open-ended questions and the interviews revealed that although they were aware and had the control of the reasons for their failure they didn't act upon them, which indicates a low desire to control. It can be interpreted that low motivation to become a teacher might have an effect on their actions. Moreover, limited or lack of CTS as well as their former educational experiences and incorrect strategies have an impact on their academic achievement.

The next step after identifying and reflecting on the reasons for failure is to propose solutions. The fact that quite a lot of participants have a low desire to become a teacher steer our attention to admissions to teacher education institutions in Turkey. Although being an under-valued occupation, becoming an English teacher is a desirable career option due to having regular salaries and opportunities to work in other fields that require the use of foreign language. However, as in many western countries teaching should be the priority of students who select these departments. In addition to the university entrance exam, before enrollment an interview by the department faculty can be organized to identify the commitment, motivation, willingness and the desire to be a teacher in order to prevent future dissatisfaction of the TTs, trainers, institutions and the government. Also, TTs prior experiences with children and or teaching (such as volunteering in a summer camp/school; joining community training programs; attending job-related seminars etc.) can be set as a criteria to indicate TTs determination for the occupation rather than the current educational and/or political changes directing their selection.

In terms of the development of CTS, strategies to enhance such skills will be embedded within the course syllabus. This way, memorization will be exemplified as an incorrect strategy to be successful in CTS tasks. In addition, effective study strategies can explicitly be given and demonstrated. During the theoretical lessons instead of the trainer guiding the discussions the TTs can share the responsibility to do so. Finally, due to limited class times, the feedback in the practice lessons was directive and given fast with little time for self-evaluation. Unless the TTs learn to reflect on their weaknesses and strengths they will not be able to develop their CTS. Thus, more time could be spared for self-reflection after presentations. What's more, teacher trainers in the department can collaborate to help TTs to use their CTSs in classroom tasks and exams. In conclusion, it is critical that TTs learn to be reflective practitioners and carry the responsibility of being a learner and a prospective teacher during teacher training process. Thus, the teacher training institutions need to support TTs professional development in such ways that it promotes lifelong learning. Furthermore, selection of TTs to education faculties might need a revision so that it involves other criteria in addition to the university

entrance examination, in order to sift through the motivated and willing candidates for the teaching profession.

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Eylem araştırmacısı olarak öğretmen eğitimcileri: Öğrenci başarısızlığının altındaki etmenler

Öz

Bu eylem araştırması Türkiye'de büyük bir üniversitede öğrenim gören öğretmen adaylarının "Çocuklara Yabancı Dil Öğretimi" dersinde yaşadıkları yüksek oranlı başarısızlıklarını bağladıkları nedenleri, kontrol odaklarını ve başarı hedeflerini araştırmayı amaçlamaktadır. Bu nedenle, nitel ve nicel veriler başarısızlık nedenleri anketi, kontrol odağı ölçeği ve görüşmeler yoluyla toplanmıştır. Araştırmacıların geliştirdiği ve 35 maddeden oluşan ankette dört bölüm bulunmaktadır: öğrenci, öğretmen, ders ve sınav kaynaklı nedenler. Öğrenci kaynaklı nedenler aynı zamanda dört alt kategoriden oluşmaktadır. Bunlar çalışma becerileri, kritik düşünme yeteneği, sınıf içi performansı/katılımı ve grup çalışması performansı/katılımı. Anketin aynı kategorileri içeren açık uçlu bir bölümü de bulunmaktadır. Anket .80 alfa değeriyle güvenilir bulunmuştur. Anketin alt ölçeklerinin güvenirlikleri ise sırasıyla .77, .78, .70 ve .81'dir. Katılımcılara aynı zamanda bir akademik kontrol odağı ölçeği verilmiş ve 21'i başarılı, 21'i başarısız olmak üzere toplam 42 öğrenci ile de görüşme yoluyla veri toplanmıştır. Sonuçlar en yüksek ortalama ile öğrenci kaynaklı nedenlerin başarısızlığın sebebi olarak ortaya çıktığını göstermiştir. Ayrıca katılımcıların içsel kontrol odağına sahip oldukları ve performans hedefleri olduğu da bulunmuştur. Buna ek olarak katılımcıların %40'ının mezuniyet sonrası öğretmenlik yapmayı düşünmedikleri de ortaya çıkmıştır. Bulgular benzer problemleri Türkiye bağlamında yaşayan öğretmen eğitimcileri ve öğretmen kalitesi ve öğretmen seçimi açısından da hükümet kurumları için önem taşımaktadır.

Anahtar kelimeler: başarı ve başarısızlık sebepleri, yansıtmacı öğretim, eylem araştırması, İngilizce öğretmen adayları, öğretmen eğitimi

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