

Exploring Bedan Psychology Students' Attribution for Their Academic Performance

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ABSTRACT:

Attribution refers to the set of thought processes by which people interpret and assign causes for their own or other people's behavior. Studies on the causal attribution of academic achievement abound; however, they have yielded contradictory results. This paper attempts to explore the Bedan psychology students' attribution for their success and failure in the academics. The findings revealed that students attribute both success and failure more to internal than external factors. When those who had experienced success only and those who experienced both failure and success were compared as to how they attribute their good performance in school, the chi-square analysis showed that those with no experience in failure were more likely to attribute their success to internal than external factors ($\chi^2 = 6.59$, $df = 1$, $p < .05$). General findings support previous research in attribution.

Key Words: attribution, attribution styles, Bedan psychology students

People have always been inquisitive – we wonder why and how things occur (Manusov & Spitzberg, 2008). Figuring out what caused something and why it happened seem to be people's natural tendency. This natural curiosity in us enriched our knowledge about the things in our environment and paved the way for the many inventions in our society that we are now enjoying. Thus, we have continuously improved our culture, religion, and the different fields of study.

Giving causal explanations for events or our behavior in certain situations is second nature to us that it has motivated psychologists to look into it. This causal explanation of an event is called attribution while the study of how individuals explain events that take place in their lives is called attribution theory (Bruning, Schraw, & Norby, 2011).

Attribution has been a central topic in social psychology in the early 20th century and has continued to be relevant up to modern times (Smith, Nolen-Hoeksema, Fredrickson, & Loftus, 2003). It has often been discussed vis-à-vis motivation especially in light of individuals' performance in the real world: school or work setting. It seemed difficult to fully comprehend the intricacies of motivation without touching on individuals' attributional style or their habit of explaining the causes of their successes and failures.

A common error in attribution is the self-serving bias wherein people claim undue credit for success and minimize their own responsibility for failures (Duval & Silvia, 2002; Kalat, 2011; Newstrom, 2007; Shepperd, Malone, & Sweeney, 2008). In the same manner, other people's success is likely to be attributed to lack and easy task rather than the latter's competence or expertise and assuming that others failed because they didn't try hard enough or simply lacked the appropriate personal characteristics or overall ability (Newstrom, 2007).

How people make causal explanations of the daily happenings in their lives especially their performance on a particular task has an impact on their expectations of the outcome of a behavior. In turn, this expectation would affect their motivation to pursue a goal or not (Anderman & Anderman, 2009).

Attributional style

Attributional style refers to people's habitual way of explaining the causes of events in their lives or their behaviors. A self-enhancing attributional style is one that habitually gives credit to hard work for success and attributes failure to lack of effort ("Assessing Women in Engineering Project," 2005).

Optimistic people have positive attributional style. They perceive the positive events in their lives as an effect of their personal attribute/s (internal) and see negative things as not being their fault (external). In contrast, pessimistic people have negative attributional style. They minimize the positive and magnify the negative in the same way. Thus, without realizing it, they create a lot of stress for themselves (Scott, 2012).

Attributional style has a great impact on academic performance (Ciarrochi, Heaven, & Davies, 2007; Cortes-Suarez & Sandiford, 2008). According to Ciarrochi et al. (2007), individuals with positive attributional style are more likely to perform well in the academics than those with a negative attributional style. In fact, positive attributional style is related to elevated academic achievements and indices of positive adjustments whereas, negative attributional style is more correlated with a wide range of negative social and emotional outcomes (Ciarrochi et al., 2007).

In another study where attributional style was correlated with grade-point average (GPA), it was found out that pessimistic or negative attributional style may not be altogether harmful. It may only negatively impact students' levels of achievement if coupled with low levels of academic ability. In contrast, for students with high levels of

academic ability, negative attributional style may even lead to enhanced academic performance (Gibb, Zhu, Alloy, & Abramson, 2002).

Weiner's model of attribution

Attribution theory has been associated with Fritz Heider, the founder of attribution theory (Kalat, 2011). According to Heider (as cited in Kalat, 2011), there are two causes of behavior: internal and external causes. Individuals are making internal attributions when they explain the cause of an event using characteristics internal to them like attitude, personality traits, or abilities. An example of which would be: "I got high in the test because I have a high IQ." External attributions, on the other hand, occur when the explanation is based on the situation, including events that presumably would influence almost anyone (Kalat, 2011). For example, "I got high in the test because my professor had taught me well." Later, Bernard Weiner developed a more comprehensive model of human attributions (Anderman & Anderman, 2009). He enhanced the earlier theory of Heider by adding more dimensions to it to make it more comprehensive especially in explaining school-related performance (Anderman & Anderman, 2008).

This paper used Weiner's model of attribution to explain respondents' reasons for their successes and failures in their academics. Weiner's theory was selected over other theories in attribution because it provides relevant elements that could explain achievement-related attributions.

The basic assumption of Weiner's model of attribution is that "learners are affected by both environmental factors (e.g. characteristics of the students' home or school) and by personal factors (e.g. prior experiences and prior knowledge). These background variables affect the types of attributions that individuals are likely to make" (Anderman & Anderman, 2009).

To better understand Weiner's model of attribution, it is imperative that the three causal dimensions, namely: locus, stability and controllability are explained. The locus dimension refers to whether the cause of an event is believed to be internal or external to the individual (Anderman & Anderman, 2009). Examples of internal causes are effort, ability, interest, and motivation. External causes, on the other hand, may include professors, peers, parents, classmates, curriculum, noise, and so forth. The locus of control dimension is often associated with the kind of affective responses individuals experience after an outcome (Bruning et al., 2011).

The stability dimension, as the name implies, pertains to how stable or unstable the cause is. Some causes of success and failure, such as ability and intelligence, are usually assumed to be stable while some,

such as luck and effort, are less stable (Bruning et al., 2011). If students attribute low performance in a test to low intelligence level, then they are attributing the outcome of the test to an attribute which is relatively stable. However, if low performance in a test is attributed to poor study habits, then the cause is unstable and temporary (Anderman & Anderman, 2009). The stability dimension usually is related to a person's success expectancy (Bruning et al., 2011). As Bruning et al. (2011) had pointed out:

If success is attributed to a relatively stable trait, such as ability or knowledge, it seems reasonable that past success would be repeated; in contrast, if success is attributed to a highly unstable cause, such as luck, there is little reason to believe that success will occur again" (p. 118).

The controllability dimension, on the other hand, refers to the degree of control which the individual can exert on the cause (Anderman & Anderman, 2009). If students believed that they failed the test because the professor gave an unreasonably difficult exam, then the cause is uncontrollable. However, if they believed they failed because they didn't study hard, the cause is said to be controllable. Some causes of success such as effort, are highly controllable while others, such as ability or intelligence, are not (Bruning et al., 2011).

Students' interpretation of their successes and failures can be analyzed using these three dimensions. As the theory suggests, those who attribute success to internal and stable attributes are more likely to repeat their success than those who attribute it to external and unstable causes. In contrast, in the face of failure, attributions to internal and stable causes can result in low expectations for success in the future (Anderman & Anderman, 2009).

Cultural differences in attributional style

Studies on cultural differences in attributional style abound. Many of these had shown that people from different countries vary in their interpretations of the events that happen in their lives. Nisbett and his colleagues (as cited in Kalat, 2011), for instance, had noted that Asian people tend to focus more on the situation and less on individual personality than do most people in the West. In addition, there was evidence that showed that Asians tend to make more external (situations) attributions than internal (personality) ones (Kalat, 2011). In general, Westerners rely more on internal (personality) attributions to explain events in their lives than do people in China and other Asian countries. "Self-serving bias are, however, less evident among Chinese,

Japanese, and other East Asian people, presumably because their cultures define self-worth in terms of fitting into the group rather than out-competing one's peers" (Kalat, 2011).

Another study by Brown, Gray, Ferrara (2005), had pointed out that, indeed, there are cultural differences in the way students' explain causes of their success or failure. Brown et al. (2005) investigated the attributional thinking of Turkish, Japanese, and Chinese university students and they had found out that all three samples tend to believe internal causes were more potent than external factors for success and failure. For the Turks and Chinese, internal factors were more potent for success than for failures. For the Japanese, external factors were more potent for success than for failures, but for the Turks and Chinese external factors were more potent for failures than for success. These students were found to be neither self-enhancing nor self-effacing, but instead, they seemed to accept both credit for their successes and blame for their failures (Brown et al., 2005).

In another research done in China, Chinese college students, like the Japanese in Brown et al.'s (2005) study attributed success more to external factors than internal ones; in contrast, with failures, they tend to attribute it more to internal than external factors (Lei, 2009). This result may have reflected the kind of society where these students came from. Japanese and Chinese traditional cultures value humility and this could have influenced students' perception. Therefore, students attributed their success to external rather than internal factors. In contrast, failures were attributed more to internal rather than external causes.

In a different research that looked into performance and attributional style of students, it was found out that high performing students were more likely to attribute their academic performance to internal and controllable factors than low performing students (Mkumbo & Amani, 2012). In addition, success was attributed to internal and controllable factors, while academic failure was attributed to external and uncontrollable factors (Mkumbo & Amani, 2012). This research somehow confirms the predictions of Weiner's attribution model that individuals would always place themselves in a good light. Therefore, positive events like success will be attributed to factors internal to the individuals and negative events to causes external to them.

It seemed like individuals from different cultures vary in the way they attribute success and failures. It is tempting to conclude that indeed these differences truly exist. However, according to Jen & Lien (2009), previously observed cultural differences in attribution process may be due to different content rather than the attribution process (Jen & Lien, 2009). Thus, this study was conducted to help shed light on this issue.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

This research explored the attributional style of Bedan psychology students. It attempts to explain how students process their successes and failures in their academic subjects using Weiner's model of attribution. Success or high grade in this context refers to getting a grade of 2.0, which is equivalent to 85-87, or better. Failure or failing grade, on the other hand, pertains to getting a grade of 5.0 or failure due to absences (FA). Specifically, it aims to: (1) know how many of the total sample had experienced failure and success in their academics; (2) identify reported causes for success and failure, and; (3) analyze students' identified causes using the three causal dimensions explained by Weiner, namely: locus, stability, and controllability.

Although attribution has been greatly studied in Western countries, there is a dearth of literature in the Philippines. This research tried to look into attribution styles of Filipino students and see whether there are similarities with how individuals, particularly college students in other countries process academic events in their lives. Moreover, educators would find the information gained by this research useful and relevant in handling problems that concern students' performance. As pointed out by research evidence, causal attribution theory is the most suitable theoretical orientation to explain academic performance especially in mathematics (Cortes-Suarez & Sandiford, 2008).

METHODOLOGY

This is a descriptive research which aimed to look into attributional styles of the Psychology students towards their success or failure in their academic performance. Unlike previous studies in attribution that used hypothetical situations in their questionnaires, students in this study had to respond to open-ended questions that asked about their real experience and their cognitive or emotional response to these experiences. This was done to avoid influencing the students' responses to questions. As Fitshimons and Shiv (2001) had found out in their experiments on the contaminative effects of hypothetical questions in decision making, hypothetical questions do not merely measure our current attitudes; such questions can actually influence and sway opinions.

The Sample and Sampling Design

The sample consisted of psychology students of San Beda College Alabang enrolled in the second semester of the Academic Year 2012-2013. Slovin's formula, with a five percent (5%) margin of error was used to determine the sample size. Random sampling was used to identify participants of the study. None of the identified students refused to participate. All of them willingly responded to the survey questionnaire.

A total of 116 students participated in the survey. However, two of them did not experience either a failing grade or a high grade. Therefore, responses of these two students were discarded. In the data analysis, only responses of 114 participants were included.

The data gathering started on the last week of November up to December 2012, just before Christmas vacation. Students were given a self-administered questionnaire to fill out. This questionnaire focused on eliciting the respondents' experiences when they got a failing grade as well as a high grade. The respondents were also asked to explain the reasons for their successes and failures in their academic performance. Moreover, they were also requested to indicate the subjects where they failed/succeeded, identify people responsible for such, and give tips or pieces of advice to new students.

RESULTS

There are 114 psychology students who participated in the survey. Out of the total population, 54 (47.4%) had never experienced getting a failing grade but have at least 2.0 which is equivalent to 85-87. On the other hand, almost an equal percentage obtained both high and failing grades (53 or 46.5%). The remaining 6.1% (7) however had never had a grade of at least 2.0 or higher, only failing grades (Table 1).

Table 1
Frequency distribution of students according to whether they had experienced failure or success in their academic subjects

Experience	Frequency	Percentage
Failure/Failing Grades Only	7	6.1
Success/High Grades Only	54	47.4
Both Success &	53	46.5

Failure		
TOTAL	114	100

Subject Areas Where Students Failed

Figure 1 shows the subject areas where the respondents got a failing grade. As shown in the data, a significant number (30 or 34.5 %) of them got a failing grade in *Psychology*, which is considered a major subject. This is quite a concern since they are expected to excel in their major subjects.

Looking at the other data, it is noted that both *Religious Studies and Philosophy* and *Social Sciences* subjects have the second most number of students (15 or 17.2%) who got a failing grade. Third in rank is *Mathematics* with 14 (16.2%) students. The other failing marks are distributed in the other subjects as shown.

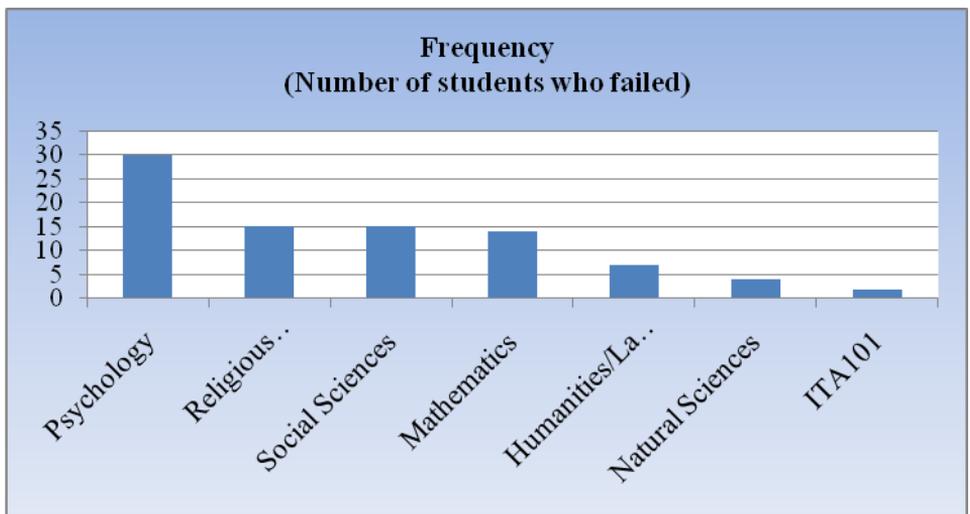


Figure 1 Frequency distribution of students who failed in their academic subjects.

Based on the frequency counts of respondents in the specific Psychology subjects where they obtained a failing grade, it can be seen that most of them reported failure in *Theories of Personality* (8 or 22.2 %) followed by *General Psychology* (7 or 19.4 %). These are pre-requisite subjects offered in their freshmen year where they are required to obtain good remarks so that they can take higher Psychology subjects. In addition, a significant number of the respondents (4 or 11.1 %) also did poorly in *Developmental Psychology* which is also major subject for freshmen. Moreover, a considerable number of students also

got failing marks in their *Physiological Psychology* and *Cognitive Psychology* subjects which are both taken in their sophomore year (Figure 2).

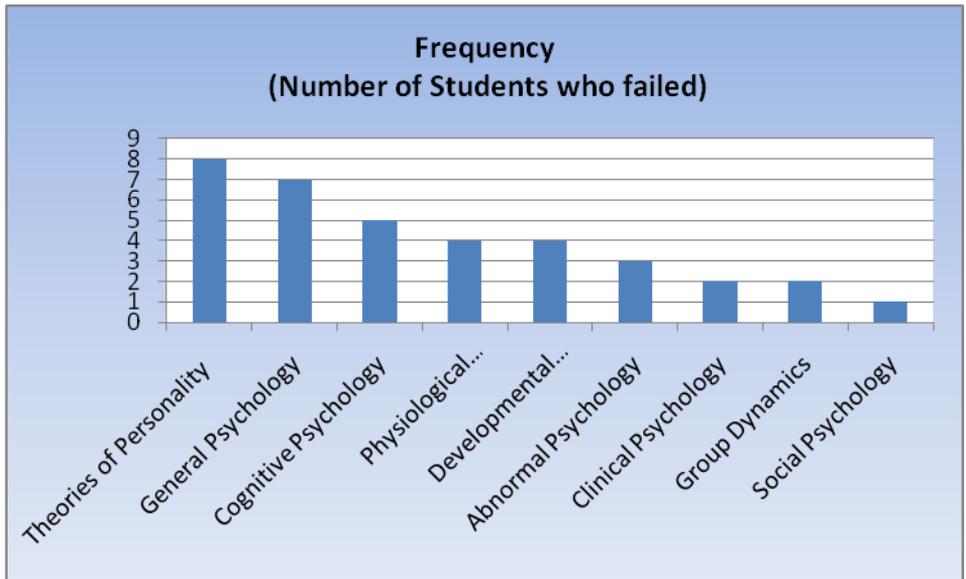


Figure 2 Frequency distribution of students who failed their major courses (psychology)

Reported Reasons for Getting a Failing Grade

Figures show that the three (3) main reasons expressed by the respondents in getting a failing mark are *lack of effort*, which constituted 60.4% of the population or 32 students followed by *lack of ability* (n=12 or 22.6%) and the least reported reason was *teacher factor* (professor) with 17.0% or 9 students (Figure 3).

Lack of effort, in this context, refers to not studying, being lazy to attend the class or to study, not complying with the course requirements, not attending the class regularly, not focusing on the subject, not prioritizing the subject, and not participating in class discussions. *Lack of ability*, on the other hand, refers to not having the knowledge or skills to do well in class, lacking in comprehension, and finding it difficult to cope with the lesson because of poor intellectual skills. Characteristics of professors which were considered a factor in failing the class were: being unreasonably strict, boring, having difficulty relating with students, no consideration, having poor teaching skills, unreasonable deadline for requirements, too many requirements, and too difficult examinations.

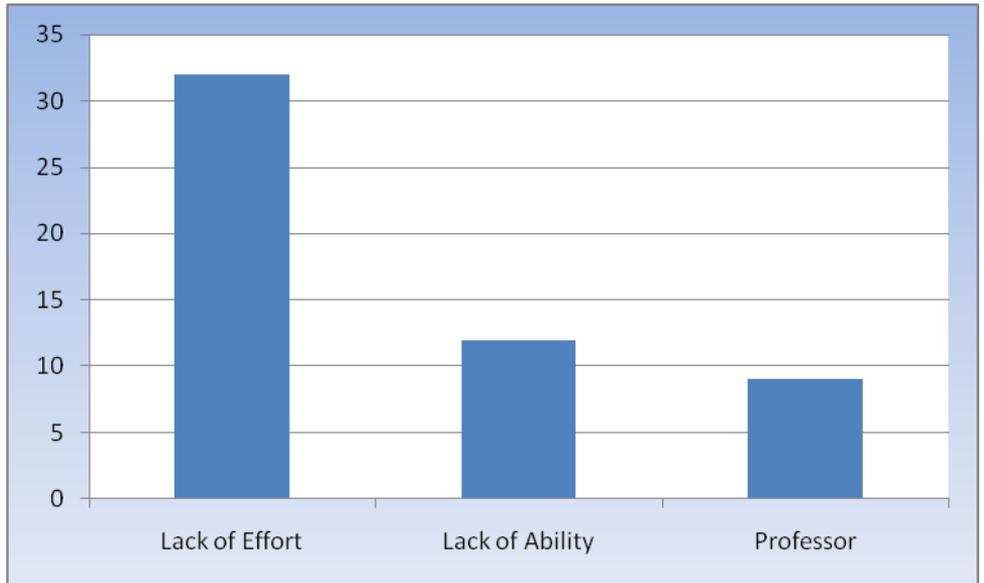


Figure 3 Reasons for getting a failing grade

As regards those students who obtained failing grades only, almost all of them (6 out of 7) likewise reported *lack of effort* as the main reason for not passing the subjects and only one (1) student attributed it to *teacher factor (professor)*. The respondents with both high and failing grades likewise expressed similar attribution for failure. The similarity between these groups is that they mentioned professor as one of the causal attributions. This suggests that students perceived professors as important factors in their poor performance. Their criticisms about their professors can be categorized according to: personal attribute of the teacher and their teaching style. Below are samples of what students have said:

Teaching style

- “I am studying very hard but I think my professor doesn't want us to pass his subject. His tests were complicated and he was the only one who can understand what he was saying.”
- Student 6
- “There’s this professor that makes things complicated, not that we don’t want to be challenged but what he’s doing is too much. We cannot relate very well to him and the subjects/topics were not explained thoroughly and simply. The activities are acceptable but when it comes to exams you can count through

your fingers the number of people who passed. We never failed to review; other sections find it easy but we are so stressed out with him.” - Student #7

- “There's this professor that I got an unsatisfactory score from and I think the reason for that is because he only gives information without discussing them.” - Student #9
- “Lack of respect for teachers’ way of teaching.” - Student #23

Personal attribute of teachers

- “Teachers are boring.” - Student #24
- “High standards of the professor.” - Student #68
- “Unreasonable behavior of professor.” - Student #72
- “The teacher was biased against us, his students.” - Student #91

Internal versus External Causal Attribution for Failures

The majority of reasons for failure were internal to the learner: *lack of effort*. Even the second in line, *lack of ability*, is also an internal factor. This simply shows that regardless of whether students have experienced success or not, their causal explanation for their failure in their academic subjects is still internal to them. This implies that students do not have a self-enhancing attribution style. They consider the professors, an external factor, as one of the causal explanations for failure though its not the top most reason. In addition, professors were the only external factor mentioned among their causal attributions

Subject Areas Where Respondents Obtain High Grades

Table 2 shows the distribution of the respondents in the different subjects where they got high grades. Respondents were allowed multiple answers on this item and frequencies were taken but were not grouped according to year level.

The data reveals that a good number (58 or 54.20%) did well in the *Humanities/Languages*, followed by *Psychology* (44 or 41.12%). An almost equal percentage is distributed in *Mathematics*, *Physical Education*, and *Social Sciences*. The least is evident in their *Computer* (ITA101) and *Natural Sciences* subjects with only 3 (2.80%) and 8 (7.48%) of the respondents having a high grade, respectively. Reasons for such minimal number of Psychology students passing the said subjects should likewise be looked into so that proper monitoring would be extended.

Table 2
Frequency distribution of students according to areas where they succeeded

Subjects	Frequency
Humanities/Languages	58
Psychology	44
Mathematics	25
Physical Education (P.E.)	23
Social Sciences	20
Religious Studies and Philosophy	13
Natural Sciences	8
ITA101	3

Reported Reasons for Obtaining High Grades

When the respondents were asked to explain the reasons for obtaining high grades, majority of them reported *putting much effort* as the main factor for such success. Regardless of whether they got both high and failing grades or just high grades, they attributed their success to effort. As regards those who have high grades only, the second most common reason for performing well was *ability* (18.5%), while for those who have obtained both high and failing grades, *professor* came in second (26.4%) followed by *interest/motivation* (10 or 18.9%).

Table 3
Respondents' reported attributions for getting a high grade

Reasons	Experienced Success Only	Experienced both Failure & Success
Putting much effort	32 (59.2%)	21 (39.6%)
Ability	10 (18.5%)	4 (7.5%)
Interest/Motivation	5 (9.3%)	10 (18.9%)

Reasons	Experienced Success Only	Experienced both Failure & Success
Professor	6 (11.1%)	14 (26.4%)
Peers	0	2 (3.8%)
Luck	0	1 (1.9%)
God	1 (1.9)	1 (1.9%)
TOTAL	54 (100%)	53 (100%)

It is interesting to note that those who obtained failing marks perceived professors as having more contribution to their good performance than their *ability or interest/motivation* for the subject/s. Their good comments about their professors can be categorized into teaching styles and personal attribute. What follows are samples of what respondents appreciated about their professors.

Teaching Styles

- “My professors in these subjects (English & Filipino) were very good and professional in terms of teaching the subjects.”
- Student #6
- “I like the teaching styles of professors in P.E., IT, & Communication Skills and so I found the subjects to be interesting and fun.”
- Student #38
- “The professors in Guidance & Counseling, Speech Communication, and Social Psychology explained the lesson very well so it was easy to understand.”
- Student #66
- “The professors in Industrial Psychology, General Psychology, Developmental Psychology, College Algebra, Technical Writing, and Humanities were really good at explaining the lesson and they make the subject more interesting by adding information that is not included in the subject matter.”
- Student #100

- Professors in College Algebra, Industrial Psychology, General Psychology, and Developmental Psychology had great teaching techniques.” - Student #101

Personal attribute of professors

- “Teachers in Politics & Governance, Economics, all English subjects, Logic, Philo, and Algebra were strict but just.” - Student #23
- “The professors in General Psychology, History, Filipino, & Algebra were awesome.” - Student #58
- “There is a great interest in the subject matter because the professors in Speech Communication, Technical Writing, Rizal, Kasaysayan, General Psychology, Theories of Personality, Developmental Psychology, Social psychology, and Group Dynamics were considerate and they motivated us instead of threatening us.” - Student #67
- “The teachers in these subjects: Cognitive Psychology, Statistics, & English were easy going, not too strict, and they did not shower us with things to do.” - Student #91

Internal versus External Causal Attribution for Success

Regardless of whether students had experienced success only or both success and failure, the majority of reasons given for success are internal in nature. In fact, for those who have not experienced a failing grade, only seven (7) of them attributed it to external factors (Table 4).

Table 4
Classification of attributions for succeeding in the academics

Group	Internal Factors	External factors	TOTAL
Obtained high grade only	47	7	54
Obtained both high and failing grade	35	18	53
TOTAL	82	25	107
($\chi^2 = 6.59$; $df = 1$; $p = .0103$)			

The chi-square analysis showed that since the computed chi-square (6.59) is greater than the tabular value, it can be said that there is a significant association ($p < .05$) between the groups and the identified attributions. Further, it can be said that those who have obtained *high grades only* attributed their success more likely to *internal* rather than *external* factors than those who got *both high and failing* grades.

Moreover, due to a very few number of respondents who got failing grades only, they were not included in the chi-square table but almost all of them (6 out of the 7) attributed their poor performance to internal but unstable factors also.

Individuals Attributed for Students' Failure

When the respondents with failing grades were asked to whom they could attribute their poor academic performance, a very significant percentage of them (76.7%) admitted that *they are* responsible for such occurrence (Table 5). This supports the top 2 reasons for failing indicated in figure 3 which are *lack of effort* and *lack of ability* which are both internal attributes. Looking at the spread of percentages, only few of those who got failing grades have attributed their poor performance to *Professor and Me* (15%), *Professor* (6.7%), and *Parents and Me* (1.6%).

Table 5
Identified Individuals Attributed for Students' Failure

Individuals	Frequency	Percentage
Me	46	76.7
Professor & Me	9	15.0
Professor	4	6.7
Parents & Me	1	1.6
TOTAL	60	100.0

Individuals Attributed for Students' Success

Table 6 shows the respondents' identified individuals who were vital in their academic success. It is noted that they attributed much of the responsibility to themselves. This supports previous data showing internal factors as the topmost causal attribution for success. In fact,

most of them (65.7%) reported that they put so much effort in their studies supplementing their innate abilities and internal motivation as illustrated in Table 3.

The pattern of responses is similar to how they attribute their failure or poor performance in school. The only difference is the presence of other individuals like *parents and friends* and some even attributed their success to God.

Table 6
Identified Individuals Attributed for Students' Success

Individuals	Frequency	Percentage
Me	67	65.7
Professor & Me	15	14.7
Professor	10	9.8
Parents, Friends & Me	7	6.9
God	3	2.9
TOTAL	102	100.0

Advice to New Students

Respondents were also asked about their advice to new students regarding academic life in college. The majority of their advice was to put much effort into their studies (N=101; 89%) and only eight percent (7%) had something to do with professors, such as befriend the professor, listen to the professor, chose professor wisely, and try not to have conflict with the professor. The other three percent (3%) was about trying to have fun and one percent (1%) was about praying or asking for God's help.

These pieces of advice reflect the previous responses of students. Given that effort or lack thereof was seen as the main cause of failure or success in their academics, their advice to new students revolved around this factor, too.

DISCUSSION

Results of the study showed that the majority of the psychology students attribute both success and failure to effort or lack thereof. In

Weiner's model of attribution, students' causal attribution fall under internal locus dimension which is relatively unstable but something which students have high degree of control (Anderman & Anderman, 2009; Bruning, et al. 2011). According to the theory, attributions to unstable and controllable factors can result in high expectations for future performance (Anderman & Anderman, 2009; Bruning, et al, 2011). This suggests that students who attribute failure or poor performance to lack of effort may be motivated to put forth additional effort when preparing for subsequent examinations (Anderman & Anderman, 2009). This explains why psychology students are resilient. Many of those students who failed General Psychology during their First Semester in San Beda College Alabang (SBCA) can still be seen in the department. Some are still struggling to complete the course while some have defied expectations and have even graduated on time. Although not tested directly, attributional style may have an effect in making decisions as to whether to shift to another course of study or to remain in the department.

Weiner's model of attribution showed that the type of attributions that individuals make influence their subsequent behaviors in predictable ways (Anderman & Anderman, 2009). Research outcomes have shown that individuals' academic performance is enhanced when learners attribute academic outcomes to factors such as effort and the use of appropriate study strategies; in contrast, academic achievement is hindered when learners attribute their failure to internal factors which are relatively stable such as ability and chronic health problems and external factors like luck (Anderman & Anderman, 2009). As shown in the results, the majority of the respondents attributed both their success and failure to internal factors which is similar to findings of previous study done by Brown, et al. (2005). Attributing success to internal factors such as effort and ability can give individuals a sense of pride and confidence (Bruning, et al., 2011). Thus, they will be motivated to do the same in the future to replicate their previous success. Attributing failures to a factor such as lack of effort, on the other hand, gives students a sense of hope for the outcome of their future academic performance because effort, according to Weiner's model of attribution, is something which can be remedied.

Duval and Silvia (2002) had also found evidence that somehow supported the abovementioned argument. In their research, they found out that for highly self-focused people, when they feel that failure can be remedied, they will attribute it to self but when the likelihood of improvement seems low, they will attribute it to external factors. Although not tested directly, respondents in this study may have perceived that their failures can be remedied, thus they attributed it to internal factors or to self.

It is also interesting to note that the external factor that was mostly mentioned by respondents were professors. In fact, among the three causal explanations for failure, professors came in third in rank. In Weiner's model of attribution, professors are considered as external factors because they are external to the learners (Anderman & Anderman, 2009; running, et al., 2011). This implies how much value students give to their teachers. According to Anderman & Anderman (2009), teachers can communicate vital attributional information to their students through feedback on assignments, exams, and class discussions. This feedback may have contributed to respondents' attributional style.

The results also suggest that psychology students did not have a clear-cut self-enhancing attributional style (Assessing Women in Engineering Project, 2005) or self-serving bias (Duval & Sylvia, 2002; Kalat, 2011; Newstrom, 2007; Shepperd et al., 2008) because they accepted responsibility not only for academic success but also for failure. In fact, when asked as to who was responsible for both successes and failures, they considered themselves as mainly responsible for both. Although professors were mentioned as one of the causal attributions, they were a far second or third in rank. In this respect, respondents were more similar to Westerners in their attributional style – relying more on internal attributions rather than external ones (Kalat, 2011). They were so unlike the Asians in Nisbett and colleagues' study (cited in Kalat, 2011) who focused more on the situation rather than on individual personality. One of the reasons for this could be our culture which is heavily influenced by Western cultures. Thus, we showed many tendencies that are similar to Westerners than to other Asians like us.

With regard to whether the sample had a positive or negative attributional style as defined by Scott (2012), it seemed leaning towards the positive. It could be noted that the majority attributed their performance to internal factors, specifically effort. Based on Weiner's model of attribution, effort is relatively temporary or unstable. Attributing poor performance to lack of effort gives one a great deal of hope that when they improve their effort on that particular subject, they will be able to improve performance as well. However, if they attribute it to ability or relatively stable causes, there may be little hope for individuals to improve future performance.

Previous research (Ciarrochi et al., 2007; Cortez-Suarez & Sandiford, 2008; Gibb et al., 2002) had shown that attributional style has a great impact on academic performance. For Ciarrochi et al. (2007), for instance, they were able to get significant positive correlation between positive attributional style and academic achievement. For Gibb et al. (2002), they have shown that negative

attributional style when coupled with high levels of academic ability led to enhanced academic performance. Although not tested directly, students' attributional style may have contributed to their resilience. As shown in the results, many students failed their major psychology subjects; however, almost all of them are still in the department.

Although correlating attributional style and academic performance was not done in this study, based on the qualitative data gathered, respondents seemed to be leaning towards positive attributional style. As mentioned previously, the majority attributed both their poor and good performance to *effort*. This implies that most respondents believed that they have a high degree of control over their performance. Controllability, according to Weiner's model of attribution, has a great impact on individuals' motivation for future performance (Anderman & Anderman, 2008; Bruning et al, 2011). Those who believed they can do something about the outcome of their performance are more likely to exert more effort than those who believed otherwise.

In comparison with previous studies, this research is consistent with findings of Brown et al.'s (2005) and Lei's (2009). Respondents in the study also tend to attribute both success and failure to internal rather than external causes.

The differences between the result of this study and those mentioned in Kalat (2011), could be due not really to the attribution process as Jen & Lien (2009) had suggested in their study but to the content of the attribution. Asians and Westerners in Nisbett and colleague's study (cited in Kalat, 2011) may be responding to questions with different context.

CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATION

Results had shown that psychology students tend to attribute both success and failure to internal rather than external causes. This indicates that they accepted responsibility for both failure and success. It also shows that they believed they have control over their academic performance since the internal factor that was used to explain their performance was effort. Weiner's model posits that this controllability dimension is vital to determine individuals' subsequent motivation to engage in a particular behavior (Anderman & Anderman, 2009; Bruning et al., 2011).

Although respondents did not really attribute failures to external factors, there were still a number who blamed their professors for such poor performance. According to Anderman & Anderman (2009), professors themselves can help change these students' attributional style because they can communicate vital information to them and help the

latter improve how they attribute their performance. Through feedback on students' assignments, examinations, and graded recitation, teachers can help students improve their cognitive processing of academic outcomes. In fact, according to research, specific feedback can help students form adaptive attributional beliefs which can greatly enhance their future academic performance (Anderman & Anderman, 2009). Instead of simply saying "good job" or "needs improvement" on students' output, professors can give a specific comment such as: "I am confident that you can do better than this; you need to spend more time studying" when they know that a student has not been putting forth enough effort (Anderman & Anderman, 2009). When teachers are able to communicate to students that failures are due to lack of effort or inappropriate study strategies, learners are likely to be motivated to try harder or to explore appropriate study techniques.

For future studies, it is recommended to include students' grade point average and a quantitative measure of attribution style in order to find out whether, indeed, attributional style is correlated with performance just as Ciarrochi et al. (2007), Gibb, et has suggested.

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