

Chinese EFL Learners' Attribution Beliefs and Self-Efficacy in English Reading as a FL

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Abstract

This paper reports a study of attribution beliefs and self-efficacy in FL with 159 Chinese EFL learners. They answered two questionnaires and their English reading achievement was tested. Data were analyzed using multiple regression and one-way ANOVA. The results showed that they had different attribution beliefs to success and failure of English reading; attribution and self-efficacy explained about 17% of variance in FL reading; and both attribution beliefs and self-efficacy differed among high-, medium-, and low-achieving readers. Discussions of the results are articulated.

Keywords

Attribution beliefs, self-efficacy, FL reading

1 Introduction

Among theories of motivation, Weiner's (1985) attribution theory and Bandura's (1977) self-efficacy theory have been two influential theories in explaining language learning performance (e.g. Hsieh & Kang, 2010) and L1 reading performance (e.g. Law, 2009). However, there is a lack of research about the two theories in FL reading.

2 Literature review

2.1 Attribution theory

Attribution is defined as beliefs hold by individuals to interpret and explain the reasons for their success and failure (Weiner, 1985). The main reasons to which individuals attribute success and failure include one's ability, effort, task difficulty, mood, and luck, which again can be classified into three groups, namely, locus of control, stability, and controllability. Studies of attribution belief in language learning found that the learners tended to attribute their language learning success to external factors such as teacher's role rather than internal factors such as the effort one puts in or one's language learning strategies (Williams & Burden, 1999).

2.2 Self-efficacy

According to Bandura (1977), self-efficacy refers to the belief that an individual holds about his/her competence

to complete a specific task. Research in areas of self-efficacy consistently showed that self-efficacy is a positive indicator of one's academic performance (e.g. Bong, 2002).

2.3 Research questions

What are the factors do Chinese EFL learners attribute to their FL reading success and failure?

How do FL reading attribution beliefs and self-efficacy predict FL reading performance?

To what extent do attributions and self-efficacy vary among readers with different FL reading proficiency?

3 Research methods

3.1 Setting and participants

The study was conducted in a provincial university specialized in Business in China. A total of 159 second-year students with an average age of 20, voluntarily participated in the study.

3.2 Instruments

A reading test was administered to collect information on students' reading proficiency. Two questionnaires were used to elicit participants' attribution beliefs and self-efficacy in FL reading.

3.3 Data analysis

Descriptive statistics were used to answer the first research question. In order to answer the second research question, a multiple regression analysis was conducted. For the last research question, the participants were first grouped into high-, medium- and low-achieving FL readers and one-way ANOVA and post-hoc analysis were performed.

4 Results

4.1 Results for research question 1

For the success of reading comprehension for English reading, the most three frequent factors Chinese EFL learners attribute to are the effort one puts ($M=3.78$, $SD=0.80$), the reading strategies ($M=3.34$, $SD=0.94$), and the teacher factor ($M=3.14$, $SD=0.92$). For the reasons of failure in English reading, Chinese university

students believe that the most frequent factor is bad luck (M=3.86, SD=0.76), followed by poor English teaching (M=3.45, SD=0.83) and difficulty of the reading tasks (M=3.43, SD=0.98). In terms of the dimensions of attribution beliefs, the results show that the participants tend to attribute their reading comprehension to personal (M=3.44, SD=0.87) and internal control (M=2.87, SD=0.76) rather than external controlled (M=1.58, SD=0.69) and stability (M=1.71, SD=0.86).

4.2 Results for research question 2

Table 1: Results of Multiple Regression Analysis

Variables	β	R^2	p	f^2
self-efficacy	.20	.10	.02	.11
attributions to strategies	.23	.14	.00	.03
attributions to mood	-.19	.17	.01	.04
stability dimension of attributions	-.12	.17	.12	---

From table 1, we can see altogether the four predictors explained approximately 17% of the variance in the students' FL reading performance ($F=9.27$ $p<.05$). Among the four predictors, both self-efficacy and attributions to strategies positively predicted students' English reading results, and self-efficacy and attributions to strategies explained about 9.8% and 4.2% of the variance of the English reading test scores respectively ($\beta =.20$, $p<.05$, $f^2=.11$ for self-efficacy, and $\beta=.23$, $p<.05$, $f^2=.03$ for attributions to strategies). Attributions to mood negatively predicted students' English reading and explained about 3.0% of the variance of the reading results with a small effect size ($\beta=-.19$, $p<.01$, $f^2=.04$). Although the stability dimension of attributions is negatively associated with English reading achievement, it did not appear to be a significant predictor to reading achievement ($\beta =.20$, $p=.12$).

4.3 Results for research question 3

Table 2: Results of One-way ANOVA

Variables	levels	M	SD	F	p	η^2
self-efficacy	high	3.31	0.61	6.36	.00	.08
	medium	3.04	0.53			
	low	2.84	0.57			
attribution to strategies	high	3.21	0.61	5.65	.00	.07
	medium	3.00	0.61			
	low	2.73	0.48			
stability dimensions of attributions	high	1.39	0.55	4.35	.02	.05
	medium	1.82	0.80			
	low	1.77	0.81			

Table 2 shows that statistically significant differences in self-efficacy: $F(2, 154)=6.36$, $p<.05$, $\eta^2=.08$, attributions to strategies: $F(2, 154)=5.65$, $p<.05$, $\eta^2=.07$, and stability dimension of attribution: $F(2, 154)=4.35$, $p<.05$, $\eta^2=.05$ with different levels of reading achievement. No significant differences were found in other causal reasons of attributions as well as dimensions of

attributions. Tukey's HSD post-hoc tests were performed and the results show that high-achieving FL readers have more confidence in performing different English reading tasks than medium-achieving FL readers (MD=0.28), and low-achieving FL readers (MD=0.48) FL readers. There is no difference between medium and low-achieving students for the self-efficacy. Additionally, high-achieving FL readers tended to attribute to English reading to the use of reading strategies more than low-achieving readers (MD=0.48), and there is no difference between medium and low-achieving students. In terms of the stability dimensions of attributions, readers in high-achieving group believed reading performance can be changed over time more often than readers in low-achieving group (MD=0.43), whereas no difference were found between medium-achieving and low-achieving groups.

5 Discussion and conclusion

The results of the present study is illuminating in terms of the practice value for English language teachers who actively want to find out motivational reasons behind different achievement of students' reading performance. For those with lower self-efficacy and negative attribution beliefs, it is timely for teachers to help them to realize their own motivational factors, and foster more confidence learners with positive attributions, so that foreign language reading can be more successful.

6 References

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