



Exploration of Understanding Attribution Communication Theory Among Students of the State Islamic University of North Sumatera

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Abstract

This study aims to explore the understanding of students of the State Islamic University (UIN) of North Sumatera towards *the Theory of Attribution Communication* and its implications for academic motivation and social interaction. *Attribution Communication Theory* is a theory that explains how individuals understand and interpret the causes of behavior, both from themselves and others. This study uses a qualitative method with a descriptive approach, where data is obtained through in-depth interviews with UIN North Sumatera students. The results of the study show that students generally understand the difference between internal attribution (personal factors) and external (external factors). Internal attribution is often used to describe academic success, which is associated with higher motivation to learn. In contrast, external attribution is more used to explain failures, which tend to lower motivation. In addition, the religiosity factor plays a significant role in the attribution process, where students often associate academic outcomes with God's will. This study emphasizes the importance of understanding attribution in shaping students' motivation and social interaction, and recommends increasing awareness of the role of attribution in learning and group dynamics in the educational environment.

Keywords: *Attribution Communication Theory, internal attribution, external attribution*

Introduction

Communication is at the core of all human social activities, including in the academic environment. One of the theories that plays an important role in understanding interactions between individuals is *the Theory of Attribution*. This theory was originally introduced by Fritz Heider in 1958, and has since continued to be developed today in a broader context. Attribution theory explains how individuals provide explanations or reasons for the behavior of others or themselves, both internally (such as personal traits) and externally (such as situational factors) (Jones, 2018). In the last 10 years, this theory has been widely applied in various studies on social psychology and communication,

especially in the context of education.

In the world of education, students are actively involved in various communication situations that involve attribution, both in understanding lecturers' responses, assessing peer behavior, and interacting in groups. Students' understanding of this attribution process will affect how they interpret and respond to various social interactions on campus (Martinko, 2020). Attribution is also closely related to decision-making, perception formation, and attitudes in communication, all of which play an important role in students' daily lives.

In the last 10 years, *Attribution Theory* has been increasingly applied in various communication studies, including in

the field of education and social interaction among students (Martinko, 2020). One important aspect of this theory is how students attribute success and failure in academic and social contexts. This attribution process greatly affects students' motivation, self-perception, and interpersonal relationships. For example, a student who fails an exam may attribute the failure to lack of effort (internal attribution), or conversely, blame external factors such as ineffective lecturer teaching methods (external attribution) (Ross, 2019).

In the context of social interaction, *Attribution Theory* plays a key role in understanding the dynamics of communication between individuals. Students often rely on attribution to interpret the actions of others in various social situations, such as working in groups or participating in campus organizational activities. According to Kelley (2021), when students interact with their peers in discussion groups or group projects, they often make attributions regarding the contributions and behavior of group members. If someone is late for an assignment, other students may attribute the delay to a lack of individual responsibility (internal attribution) or due to high academic pressure (external attribution). This attribution not only affects the perception of others, but also how they respond to the situation.

The interaction between attribution communication theory and social interaction is evident in the pattern of interpersonal relationships in the campus environment. For example, students who often make internal attribution when facing interpersonal conflicts tend to have better communication skills because they are more reflective of their own behavior and try to improve the situation (Johnson, 2022). On the other hand, students who frequently make external attribution may be more likely to blame the situation or other parties, which could exacerbate the conflict.

The Qur'anic verses related to the concept of attribution and perception in communication can be related to how humans are encouraged to think positively,

seek good understanding, and avoid bad prejudice. This is particularly relevant to the theory of attribution, which deals with how we justify the behavior of others, as in surah Al-Hujurat verse 12:

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا اجْتَنِبُوا كَثِيرًا مِّنَ الظَّنِّ إِنَّ بَعْضَ الظَّنِّ إِثْمٌ وَلَا تَجَسَّسُوا وَلَا يَغْتَب بَّعْضُكُم بَعْضًا

It means: *"O you who believe, stay away from many prejudices! Actually, some prejudices are sin. Do not look for faults in others, and do not be among you gossiping about some others..."*

At the State Islamic University of North Sumatra (UIN North Sumatra), students come from diverse social, cultural, and religious backgrounds. This creates a complex environment of interaction, where the attribution process can vary depending on the individual's experience and the values espoused. Students at UIN North Sumatra are also in an environment that is heavily influenced by religious values, so it is important to explore how religious values affect the attribution they make to the behavior and events around them (Azmi, 2021).

The study of attribution in the context of higher education is also becoming increasingly relevant because it can help understand how students interpret the events they experience. For example, according to Sari's research (2020), students who have internal attribution to their success tend to have higher motivation and show better academic performance. On the other hand, students who often make external attributions to their failures tend to feel less confident and have difficulty in facing academic challenges. Thus, this study will try to reveal the extent of UIN North Sumatra's students' understanding of attribution communication theory, and how this understanding affects their interactions in daily life on campus.

In addition, attribution theory is also relevant in understanding how students adapt to social dynamics on campus, especially in the context of group work and interaction

with lecturers. A recent study conducted by Johnson (2022) found that college students who use internal attribution more often when interacting in a team tend to be more productive and have better relationships with their teammates. Therefore, it is important to understand whether UIN North Sumatra students are more likely to make internal or external attribution in their social interactions, and how this affects their relationships with fellow students and lecturers.

This research seeks to answer these questions by exploring the understanding of UIN North Sumatra students towards attribution communication theory. By analyzing the attribution patterns made by students, this research is expected to provide a deeper insight into how UIN North Sumatra students build perceptions of their social and academic interactions, as well as how this attribution affects their learning process and interpersonal relationships.

Research Methods

This study uses a qualitative method with an exploratory approach to understand the understanding of UIN North Sumatra students regarding *Attribution Communication Theory*. The design used is a case study, focusing on active students from various departments at UIN North Sumatra.

The research data consists of primary and secondary data. Primary data were collected through in-depth interviews to explore students' understanding of attribution theory. In addition, participant observation was carried out to observe attribution patterns in social interactions on campus. Secondary data comes from related literature, such as books, scientific journals, and relevant research articles.

Data collection was carried out by triangulation method, which was combining interviews, FGDs, and observations to increase the validity of the results. Data analysis uses thematic analysis techniques, where researchers identify the main themes of the data collection results. The research also adheres to ethical principles, such as maintaining the confidentiality of

participants' identities and obtaining consent before collecting data.

Results and Discussion

Research Results

Based on the results of in-depth interviews, most of the students of UIN North Sumatra have a fairly good understanding of Attribution Communication Theory. They understand that this theory is related to how a person explains the cause of a particular behavior or event. For example, one of the informants said:

"In my opinion, the theory of attribution is about how we assess the reasons behind someone's actions. For example, if a friend doesn't come to class, we can assume that he or she is lazy or maybe because he is sick. We assess the cause of his behavior based on the information we have." (Informant 1, Interview)

This shows that students tend to understand attribution in the context of social interaction on campus, especially when they have to explain the behavior of friends or lecturers. They also understand the difference between internal and external attribution. Some students tend to attribute their academic success to internal factors such as effort and hard work. One of the students stated:

"I feel that if I succeed in college, it is because of my own efforts. For example, if I get a good grade, I know it's because I studied hard." (Informant 3, Interview).

However, when experiencing failure, students more often associate it with external factors such as the environment or lecturers who are less supportive. One of the informants mentioned:

"If the grades are bad, I usually blame the learning conditions at home or sometimes the lecturers are too busy so they lack attention to students." (Informant 2, Interview).

The attribution that students make to their success and failure affects their motivation to learn. Students who frequently make internal attribution for

academic success, such as relying on results on effort and personal ability, show higher motivation. They feel they have control over their academic performance. One of the informants explained:

"I always think, if you want to succeed on campus, you have to do it from your own efforts. I tried to study harder, because I knew that if I tried, there would be results." (Informant 5, Interview).

On the other hand, students who often make external attribution tend to feel less motivated to improve themselves. They feel that outside factors are more dominant and beyond their control. One student admitted:

"Sometimes I think it's useless to try harder if the lecturer already has a very high standard, so whatever I do, the result must be the same." (Informant 6, Interview, 2024).

This shows that there is a significant difference in motivation between students who attribute their successes and failures more often internally and those who attribute them to external factors.

The discussion of the research results obtained above is as follows: Most of the students of UIN North Sumatra understand the basic concept of *Attribution Communication Theory*. Students associate attribution with how they explain the causes of other people's behavior as well as their own in a variety of situations, both academic and social. For example, when asked about the factors that affect academic success or failure, the majority of students attribute success to internal factors, such as hard work and learning ability, while failure is more often attributed to external factors, such as less supportive lecturer conditions or environmental factors such as the atmosphere of learning at home.

In the context of social interaction on campus, students also show a fairly good understanding of attribution, especially in group or organizational work situations. Most students admit that they often attribute the actions of others based on the situations they observe. For example, students who do not actively participate in group discussions are often externally attributed, citing a lack

of time or academic pressure they face, rather than attributing it to laziness or lack of responsibility. These findings are in line with the theory put forward by Kelley (2021), which states that individuals tend to make external attribution when they do not have complete information about the circumstances of others.

Students' understanding of *Attribution Communication Theory* seems to influence their motivation in academic and social contexts. Students who make more frequent internal attributions to their success, such as self-ability and effort, have higher motivation to learn. They feel they have control over their academic results and tend to be more optimistic in the face of challenges. On the other hand, students who more often attribute their failures to external factors show a decrease in academic motivation. They feel that success is out of their control, which makes them less eager to improve themselves or take on new challenges. These findings are consistent with Martinko's (2020) research, which states that internal attribution can improve individual motivation and performance, while external attribution often leads to decreased motivation.

In social interactions, students also show different attribution tendencies. Those who make more frequent internal attributions to interpersonal conflicts, for example, tend to be more reflective and try to improve the situation. Meanwhile, students who are more likely to blame external factors in the conflict, such as the behavior of others or environmental conditions, tend to exacerbate the situation and prolong the conflict. This shows that attribution not only affects academic motivation, but also students' ability to build and maintain good social relationships.

One of the important findings of this study is the influence of religiosity factors on the attribution process among UIN North Sumatra students. Because UIN North Sumatra is an Islamic educational institution, many students associate various events in their lives with religious factors, such as God's will or destiny. In interviews, some students stated that their success or failure

was not solely the result of personal effort or external factors, but was also the result of God's providence. This adds a spiritual dimension to the attribution process that is not always found in research in secular educational institutions.

Religious students tend to make a balanced attribution between internal, external, and spiritual factors. They recognize that personal effort is important, but the end result is part of God's predetermined destiny. This attitude tends to make students calmer in the face of failure and less emotionally affected. On the other hand, students who are less religious tend to focus more on internal or external factors only, without taking into account spiritual factors. These findings support the research of Azmi (2021), which found that religiosity has a significant influence on how Islamic higher education students make attributions to events in their lives.

Conclusion

UIN North Sumatra students have a varied understanding of *Attribution Communication Theory*. Most students understand the difference between internal attribution, which associates outcomes or behaviors with personal factors, and external attribution, which associates outcomes with external factors such as the environment or others. This understanding has a direct effect on how they assess academic outcomes and social behavior in campus life, both when describing success and failure.

Internal attribution that students often use to explain academic success is related to higher motivation to learn. Those who associate success with effort and personal ability tend to be more optimistic and proactive in facing academic challenges. In contrast, students who more often attribute failure to external factors, such as lecturers or environmental conditions, show a lower tendency to motivation, feel less responsible for the results obtained, and are often more passive in improving their academic performance.

The religiosity factor also plays an important role in student attribution. As part of Islamic educational institutions, many

students link their academic results to God's will, which provides a balance in the face of success and failure. This spiritual factor helps students accept failure more calmly, while still maintaining the motivation to keep trying. This combination of internal, external, and spiritual attribution demonstrates the complexity in students' understanding of attribution theory, which has implications for their academic and social behavior on campus.

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