

“It’s Their Responsibility, Not Ours”

Stereotypes About Competence and Causal Attributions for Immigrants’ Academic Underperformance

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Abstract. In many countries, there is a gap in academic performance between native-born students and students with certain immigrant backgrounds. Based on ultimate attribution error theory, we examined the stereotypes and causal attributions that German student teachers use to account for immigrants’ underperformance. By including both Turkish-origin and Italian-origin migrants, we assessed whether these judgments are group-specific. A pilot study ($N = 70$) showed that Turkish-origin migrants were viewed more negatively than either Germans or Italian-origin migrants. Studies 1 ($N = 65$) and 2 ($N = 54$) showed that negative stereotypes moderated judgments of internal responsibility for both immigrant groups. Study 2 also showed that negative stereotypes moderated external attributions for the underperformance of Turkish-origin, but not Italian-origin, migrants.

Keywords: stereotypes, ultimate attribution error, academic underperformance, Turkish-origin migrants, Italian-origin migrants

Western societies have become increasingly heterogeneous and ethnically diverse as a consequence of migration (e.g., Claval, 2001). In the EU-27 states, for example, 9.4% of the population is foreign-born (Vasileva, 2011). Many researchers and policy makers contend that integrating immigrants is one of the greatest societal challenges of the 21st century (e.g., Deaux & Verkuyten, 2014). Educational systems are often targeted as a key arena for integration efforts, yet the evidence suggests that these systems still present considerable obstacles for certain groups of immigrants. For instance, in 2010 the Migrant Integration Policy Index (MIPEX), which assesses integration policies and their implementation in the European Union on a scale of 0–100, yielded a score of 43 for the education sector for the 27 member states combined. This suggests that there is considerable room for improvement in the educational domain (Huddleston, Niessen, Chaoimh, & White, 2011). In many European countries, some immigrant groups perform worse on average than the ethnic majority group of that country: For example, immigrants from Turkey and Italy in Germany (e.g., Kahraman & Knoblich, 2000; Schmid, 2014) and immigrants from Turkey and Morocco in the Netherlands (e.g., Shewbridge, Kim, Wurzburg, & Hostens, 2010). The present work considers psychological factors that might act as barriers to the successful performance of immigrant groups in the educational system. Specifically, we examine the stereotypes endorsed by members of the host society regarding the academic competence of

underperforming immigrant groups as well as the causal attributions made for their low performance.

Stereotypes About Immigrants and Causal Attributions for Their Underperformance

Stereotypes are “beliefs and associations that link a whole group of people with certain traits or characteristics” (Kassin, Fein, & Markus, 2011, p. 148). Within a given society, people tend to agree on stereotypes about different nationalities and ethnicities (Peabody, 1985). When negative stereotypes about a group, and in particular beliefs about that group’s intellectual competence, are widespread, the activation of these stereotypes can have a negative impact on the performance of members of the stereotyped group in achievement situations, as research on stereotype threat has shown (e.g., Steele & Aronson, 1995). In a recent meta-analysis, Appel, Weber, and Kronberger (2015) documented stereotype threat effects for various immigrant groups in Europe.

The degree to which ethnic majority members endorse negative stereotypes about underperforming immigrant groups is expected to be associated with their perceptions of the causes of immigrant groups’ low academic performance. Ultimate attribution error (UAE) theory (Pettigrew, 1979), which is an extension of the fundamental attribution

error (Ross, 1977) to the intergroup level, describes a systematic pattern of causal attributions for the behavior of in- and out-group members. Specifically, the negative behavior of out-group members is likely to be attributed more to internal characteristics and less to external characteristics. This attributional bias is hypothesized to be moderated by negative stereotypes about the out-group, that is, it is expected to be more pronounced for individuals who more strongly endorse the negative stereotypes (Pettigrew, 1979).

Applied to the case of education, we expect ethnic majority group members to attribute the low academic performance of immigrant groups more to internal causes and less to external causes to the extent that they endorse negative stereotypes about the competence of those immigrant groups. To date, work on UAE theory has focused mainly on comparisons of causal attributions made for positive and negative behaviors of in-group versus out-group members (e.g., Hewstone, 1990). However, in the specific case of school performance, members of the ethnic majority group, on average, do not show the negative behavior (i.e., underperformance). Thus, our focus is not on a comparison between the native majority and immigrant groups (i.e., in- and out-group), but between two different out-groups (i.e., immigrants), both of whom exhibit the same negative behavior, namely, low academic performance, but who differ in other critical ways.

Most studies drawing on UAE theory have used scenarios describing how in-group versus out-group members perform positive or negative behaviors. Similar to Doosje and Branscombe (2003), who investigated attributions for a group's negative historical behavior, our interest is in perceptions of the immigrant groups in general, rather than judgments of individuals who have a certain group membership.

Immigrants in the German Educational System

Within the European Union, Germany has the largest proportion of immigrants: 20% of the residents have a migration background (i.e., they, or at least one of their parents, have been born in another country; Migration Report 2012; Federal Ministry of the Interior [Bundesministerium des Inneren], 2013). In Germany, as in Europe, immigrants come from very diverse origins, and some groups of immigrants are less successful in the educational system than others (e.g., Stanat, Rauch, & Segeritz, 2010).

Turkish-Origin Migrants

Turkish-origin migrants are the largest group of immigrants in Germany (18.3% of all immigrants), and on average they show the lowest academic performance (Statistisches Bundesamt [Federal Statistical Office], 2012). For example,

57% of Turkish-origin students are on the lowest track of the German school system (Hauptschule) compared to 28.3% of German students; in contrast, only 27.8% of Turkish-origin students are on the middle track (Realschule) compared to 34.5% of German students, and even fewer (15.2%) on the highest track (Gymnasium) compared to 37.4% of German students (Baier, Pfeiffer, Rabold, Simonson, & Kappes, 2010). Not only do Turkish-origin students underperform on standardized tests and in the educational system compared to Germans, but they also perform worse than other immigrant groups (e.g., Stanat et al., 2010).

The available empirical evidence suggests that Germans typically hold negative stereotypes about Turkish-origin migrants. In one study by Kahraman and Knoblich (2000), German participants generated an equal number of negative statements about Germans and Turkish-origin migrants, but made significantly fewer positive statements about Turkish-origin migrants than about Germans. A study of societal groups in Germany by Asbrock (2010), framed in terms of the stereotype content model (e.g., Fiske, Cuddy, Glick, & Xu, 2002), found that Germans believed Turkish-origin migrants to be low in both warmth and competence.

The existence of negative stereotypes about competence, as well as evidence for the effect of these stereotypes on performance, is seen in the report of stereotype threat effects for Turkish-origin high-school students in both verbal (Froehlich, Martiny, Deaux, Goetz, & Mok, 2015) and mathematical domains (Martiny, Mok, Deaux, & Froehlich, 2015). Based on these results, we assume that the underperformance of Turkish-origin migrants in the German educational system can partly be explained by the presence and activation of negative stereotypes about competence.

Italian-Origin Migrants

Although Turkish-origin migrants perform worse in school than other immigrant groups, they are not the only immigrant group in Germany that performs worse than native Germans and that is a potential target of negative stereotypes. In the present work we consider not only the possible differences between evaluations of an in-group versus an out-group (i.e., in-group favoritism; e.g., Brewer, 1979; Scheepers, Spears, Doosje, & Manstead, 2006), but also the question of whether there are differences in the evaluations of two different immigrant out-groups. In other words, we ask whether “we” versus “they” is the only distinction to be made, or whether UAE theory might also offer a basis for predicting differential outcomes as a result of different stereotypes about two out-groups. For this reason, we included a second group for comparison: Italian-origin migrants.

Similar to Turks, Italians were mainly recruited as guest workers by the German government between the 1950s and 1970s (Babka von Gostomski, 2010); at present, they constitute 4.6% of immigrants in Germany (Statistisches Bundesamt [Federal Statistical Office], 2012). Although

the overall proportion of Italians in the population is relatively small, the distribution throughout the country is uneven and the presence of Italian-origin migrants is high in some federal states. In Baden-Wuerttemberg, where data for the present studies were collected, Italian-origin migrants are the second-biggest immigrant group after Turkish-origin migrants and constitute 9% of the immigrant population (Consolato Generale d'Italia [Report of the General Italian Consulate in Baden-Wuerttemberg], 2007; Eckelt, 2014) and are thus a highly visible ethnic group. Like Turkish-origin students, Italian-origin students perform significantly lower than Germans, although to a lesser degree (e.g., Baier et al., 2010; Schmid, 2014; Segeritz, Walter, & Stanat, 2010; Walter, 2008). However, in contrast to Turkish-origin migrants, who are likely the most negatively evaluated immigrant group, Italian-origin migrants are viewed less negatively and are believed to be better integrated into German society (Baier et al., 2010; Schmid, 2014). Drawing on this work, we not only expect German participants to show in-group favoritism (i.e., they will rate both immigrant groups as less competent than Germans) but we also expect differences in their evaluations of the two immigrant groups (i.e., Turkish-origin migrants will be seen as less competent than Italian-origin migrants).

The Present Research

The present research investigates UAE theory in the educational context. It aims to expand the knowledge about stereotypes in Germany concerning Turkish- and Italian-origin migrants and to empirically investigate the theoretically assumed moderation of the attributional bias by stereotypes (Pettigrew, 1979). We predict that Germans will attribute immigrants' underperformance more strongly to characteristics of the immigrants themselves and less strongly to characteristics of the educational system to the extent that they endorse negative stereotypes about the immigrant groups. Further, because Turkish-origin migrants are stereotyped more negatively than Italian-origin migrants, we predict that the attributional bias will be stronger when judging the former group.

We tested these predictions with a sample of students who were studying to become teachers. Although UAE theory predicts that the attributional bias is a general process that increases with prejudice (Pettigrew, 1979), we believe it is particularly relevant to investigate it among prospective teachers. Student teachers will be an integral part of the educational system in the future and will be teaching increasingly heterogeneous classes. Therefore, it is important to investigate what stereotypes student teachers actually endorse and how they explain the performance of different ethnic groups of students that they are likely to encounter. The extent to which they assign responsibility to the

immigrants themselves versus to German society and the educational system is likely to predict how much effort they would make to improve immigrants' performance in school.

We first conducted a pilot study to establish the content and valence of stereotypes about Germans, Turkish-origin migrants, and Italian-origin migrants. We then conducted two studies to assess causal attributions for the performance of the two immigrant groups and the relation between attributions and stereotypes about the groups' competence.

Pilot Study: Stereotypes About Germans, Turkish-Origin Migrants, and Italian-Origin Migrants

The purpose of the pilot study was to determine what stereotypes are believed to be widespread in German society by our population of interest (i.e., German student teachers) with regard to three specific ethnic groups (Germans, Turkish-origin migrants, and Italian-origin migrants), and the extent to which stereotypes about these groups differ. In particular, as a basis for the following research, we considered whether competence is an important dimension of the stereotypes, thus establishing the relevance of ethnic stereotypes about competence to causal attributions made for academic performance of the immigrant groups.

Method

Seventy-nine university students studying to become teachers for the highest German school track ("Gymnasium") participated in the study during class. Students were informed that their participation was voluntary and that data would be treated as anonymous and confidential; they then gave their written consent. After the data from nine non-German participants were excluded, the final sample consisted of 70 participants ranging in age from 19 to 42 years ($M = 22.41$, $SD = 3.90$); 53 were female (75.7%).

On the questionnaire, participants were asked "which stereotypes – meaning attributes, behavior, or roles – are associated with individuals living in Germany who belong to the following ethnic groups." They listed up to seven stereotypical statements about each of three groups: Germans, Turkish-origin and Italian-origin migrants. Importantly, participants were requested not to indicate their personal beliefs, but to share their knowledge about ethnic stereotypes widespread in German society. To control for sequence effects, questions for the three groups were presented in randomized order. In addition, participants provided demographic information (i.e., age, gender, major field of study, and ethnicity). They were then debriefed and thanked for their participation.¹

¹ In order to distract from the purpose of the study, stereotypical statements were assessed also for the following groups: Resettlers, boys, and girls. Additional questions on contact quantity and quality were included for exploratory purposes, but are not relevant to the present analysis.

Table 1. Frequencies of stereotypical statements about Germans, Turkish-origin migrants, and Italian-origin migrants (pilot study)

	N (%)	Valence		
		Positive	Negative	Neutral
Germans				
Family and culture	75 (22)	1	7	67
Social behavior and traits	218 (62)	106	94	18
Competence	40 (11)	32	2	6
Miscellaneous	19 (5)	2	2	15
Total (%)	352 (100)	141 (40)	105 (30)	106 (30)
Turkish-origin migrants				
Family and culture	152 (45)	13	31	108
Social behavior and traits	113 (34)	19	70	24
Competence	37 (11)	3	32	2
Miscellaneous	35 (10)	0	8	27
Total (%)	337 (100)	35 (10)	141 (42)	161 (48)
Italian-origin migrants				
Family and culture	125 (37)	29	11	85
Social behavior and traits	177 (52)	63	36	78
Competence	13 (4)	3	5	5
Miscellaneous	23 (7)	2	4	17
Total (%)	338 (100)	97 (28)	56 (17)	185 (55)

Results

Table 1 presents a descriptive summary of the stereotypical statements. On average, participants generated approximately equivalent numbers of statements for each of the three target groups: Germans: $M = 5.03$, $SD = 1.56$; Turkish-origin migrants: $M = 4.81$, $SD = 1.09$; and Italian-origin migrants: $M = 4.82$; $SD = 1.36$. The means did not differ significantly, $F(2, 138) = 0.88$, $p = .417$, suggesting that the student teachers had equally developed images of the three groups of interest.

Valence of Stereotypes

Statements were coded into three valence categories (i.e., positive, negative, and neutral) by two independent raters (Cohen's Kappa for Turkish-origin migrants: .86; for Germans: .89; for Italian-origin migrants: .78). We conducted a 3 (Group: German, Turkish-origin, Italian-origin) \times 2 (Valence of stereotype: positive, negative) repeated-measures ANOVA. The dependent variable was the relative number of statements (number of statements in each valence category divided by the total number of statements about the respective groups per participant). Neutral statements were not considered further, except as they contributed to the denominator of the positive and negative proportions. The analysis revealed a significant main effect of group, $F(2, 68) = 23.47$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .41$, which was qualified by an interaction of group and valence, $F(2, 68) = 41.37$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .55$. Contrast analyses showed that participants made significantly more positive statements about Germans than about both immigrant groups

(Germans, $M = .41$, $SD = 0.28$, vs. Turkish-origin migrants, $M = .11$, $SD = 0.15$; $t(69) = 9.59$, $p < .001$; Germans vs. Italian-origin migrants, $M = .28$, $SD = 0.27$; $t(69) = 3.07$, $p < .001$). Also, significantly more negative statements were made about Turkish-origin migrants, $M = .41$, $SD = 0.27$, than about Germans, $M = .30$, $SD = 0.25$; $t(69) = 2.62$, $p = .033$. Somewhat surprisingly, this result was reversed for Italian-origin migrants: significantly fewer negative statements were made about them, $M = .18$, $SD = 0.22$, than about Germans; $t(69) = -3.07$, $p = .009$. Participants also made significantly fewer positive, $t(69) = -6.03$, $p < .001$, and significantly more negative statements, $t(69) = 6.34$, $p < .001$, about Turkish-origin migrants than about Italian-origin migrants.

Content of Stereotypes

Raters used a stepwise empirically-based approach to categorize statements on the basis of content. First, the statements were split up into units of meaning. Then, after reading all units, raters generated three categories, based on similarity of the content. These categories were labeled *family and culture*, *social behavior and traits*, and *competence*. Finally, each unit was assigned to one category (Cohen's Kappa for Turkish-origin migrants: .72; for Germans: .86; for Italian-origin migrants: .93). The category of *family and culture* contains statements about attitudes toward family, family size, parenting style, traditions, religion, outward appearance and clothing, and regional cuisine. The category of *social behavior and traits* contains statements regarding social interactions, individual behavior, integration, xenophobia, and descriptions of traits and

general attitudes. The category of *competence* contains statements about education, stereotypical professions, attitudes toward work, working environment, and language skills. Ninety-five percent of the statements could be classified into one of the three categories, while the remaining 5% were classified as *miscellaneous*. Because frequencies of statements in the three categories were low in several cells, further quantitative analyses of differences between categories were not possible. Considering variations between groups in descriptive terms, Turkish-origin migrants elicited more negative than positive statements in all three content categories. Italian-origin migrants elicited more positive than negative statements in the categories of *family and culture* and *social behavior and traits*, while the number of statements about their *competence* was very low overall (less than 5% of the total number of statements about Italian-origin migrants).

Implications of Pilot Study Results

In an open-ended format, participants generated statements about Germans, Turkish-origin migrants, and Italian-origin migrants that they believed to represent stereotypes present in German society. Statements of competence were frequently mentioned, warranting a separate coding category and indicating that competence is an important dimension of stereotype content. Results further showed that Turkish-origin migrants are clearly stereotyped more negatively than are Germans. In contrast, the picture is more ambivalent for Italian-origin migrants: There were fewer positive but also fewer negative statements about them than about Germans. Stereotypes about Turkish-origin migrants were generally less favorable than for Italian-origin migrants. Although small cell sizes did not allow for statistical analyses of group differences in valence for the separate content categories, the descriptive data presented in Table 1 does suggest differences in the use of categories between target groups.

The prominence of competence in the open-ended stereotype assessment is consistent with the stereotype content model (e.g., Cuddy, Fiske, & Glick, 2007), for which competence (i.e., efficacy and independence) is one of the two major dimensions. This model's second dimension, warmth (i.e., trustworthiness and likability), is less distinctive in our open-ended responses, although many aspects of warmth are contained within our broader category of social behavior and traits. In general, Turkish-origin migrants are regarded as low on both warmth and competence (Fiske et al., 2002; see also Asbrock, 2010), while Italian-origin migrants might be considered an ambivalent case of low competence-high warmth (e.g., Cuddy et al., 2009). In these open-ended judgments, however, competence is apparently not a salient dimension when stereotypes of Italian-origin migrants are envisioned, rather than being a negative feature of the stereotype. This finding is in line with earlier research (e.g., Schmid, 2014) showing that Italian-origin migrants are not viewed as a problematic group in Germany, despite their low educational performance. Because

competence is the most relevant attribute for educational performance, in Studies 1 and 2 we assess evaluations of the three groups in terms of competence alone.

Study 1: Stereotypes About Competence Moderate Internal Attribution of Academic Underperformance

The pilot study provided a broad overview of the content and valence of societal stereotypes about Germans, Turkish-origin migrants, and Italian-origin migrants in three content domains. Having established that competence is a core element of ethnic stereotypes, we move to a test of UAE theory's predictions about the relationship between personal endorsement of negative stereotypes and attributions for low academic performance. In line with the pilot study's findings, we expected that Germans would be regarded as more competent than either Turkish-origin or Italian-origin migrants. In addition, we expected that Turkish-origin migrants would be evaluated as less competent than Italian-origin migrants and that internal attributions for their underperformance would be stronger. We further predicted that student teachers who more strongly endorse negative stereotypes about immigrants would be more likely to make internal attributions for the immigrant group's underperformance.

Method

Participants and Procedure

Seventy-six university students studying to become teachers for the highest German school track ("Gymnasium") participated in a questionnaire study. Eleven students were excluded from further analyses (seven because they were non-German, three because they did not comply with the instructions, and one because of suspicions about the study's goal). The final sample of 65 participants ranged in age from 19 to 39 years ($M = 21.86$, $SD = 2.68$); 41 participants were female (61.2%).

Students gave written consent to participate in the study, which was administered during class. Participants were informed that their data would be treated as anonymous and confidential. In the first part of the questionnaire, participants were instructed to rate the three groups of German, Turkish-origin, and Italian-origin students separately on multiple competence-related items. The second part of the questionnaire focused on only the two immigrant groups. Participants first read a statement about immigrant groups' underperformance and then indicated their agreement with two internal attributions for the underperformance for each immigrant group separately. In addition, they provided demographic information (i.e., age, gender, major subject

of study, and ethnicity).² Finally, they were debriefed and thanked for their participation.

Measures

As a measure of *perceived competence*, participants rated the three groups of students (German, Turkish-origin, and Italian-origin) on a set of adjectives that were mentioned most frequently in the category of competence in the pilot study. These adjectives were: reliable, orderly, gifted in science, ambitious, gifted in languages, competent, willing to learn, educated, and intelligent (Cronbach's α s = .86 for each of the three groups). Answers were indicated on 5-point Likert scales ranging from 1 = *little* to 5 = *very*.

Internal attributions for the academic underperformance of the two immigrant groups were assessed by two items. After reading the statement "Research shows that the following groups of students perform worse in school than Germans," participants indicated their agreement with two internal attributions for the underperformance, made separately for Italian-origin and Turkish-origin migrants. The two items were: "This is because they do not make enough effort" and "This is because they do not adapt well enough" ($r = .55$ for Italian-origin migrants and $r = .71$ for Turkish-origin migrants). Answers were provided on a scale ranging from 1 = *do not agree* to 5 = *completely agree*.

Results

Competence Evaluations and Internal Attribution of Underperformance

A repeated-measures ANOVA was conducted to investigate differences between the average evaluations of the three groups. Group (Germans, Turkish-origin migrants, Italian-origin migrants) was the repeated-measures factor and competence evaluation was the continuous dependent variable. Because the assumption of sphericity was violated, a Greenhouse-Geisser correction was applied. Results showed that participants evaluated the groups differently, $F(1.58, 60) = 59.42, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .50$. As expected, contrast analyses showed that participants evaluated the competence of German students ($M = 3.67, SD = 0.40$) as significantly higher than the competence of Turkish-origin students ($M = 3.09, SD = 0.46$), $F(1, 60) = 73.38, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .55$, and significantly higher than that of Italian-origin students as well ($M = 3.20, SD = 0.43$), $F(1, 60) = 68.09, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .53$. Furthermore, Turkish-origin students were rated significantly lower on competence than Italian-origin students, $F(1, 60) = 7.10, p = .009, \eta_p^2 = .11$.

With regard to attributions for underperformance, a paired t -test showed that on average participants attributed

Turkish-origin students' underperformance significantly more to internal causes ($M = 3.21, SD = 1.24$) than they did the underperformance of Italian-origin students ($M = 2.52, SD = 0.98$), $t(62) = 6.12, p < .001, d = .61$.

Stereotypes About Competence Moderate Internal Attribution of Underperformance

According to UAE theory, internal attribution of an out-group's undesirable behavior (in this case, academic underperformance) will be influenced by a person's negative stereotypes about the group. To test this prediction, the scale of competence ratings was inverted to reflect negative judgments of less competence (i.e., a higher score indicates judgments of less competence). Because the same participants answered items on both Turkish-origin and Italian-origin migrants, a hierarchical linear regression analysis with a random-intercept model was conducted in which measurements (Level 1) were nested in participants (Level 2). Internal attribution was the dependent variable; fixed L1 predictors were group (dummy-coded: 0 = Italian-origin migrants, 1 = Turkish-origin migrants), stereotypes about competence (the continuous variable of competence judgments), as well as the two-way interaction of group and stereotypes. Stereotypes about competence were z -standardized to provide a meaningful zero point (i.e., the grand mean) for interpretation of the intercept. The regression equation was as follows:

$$Y [\text{Internal attribution value of measurement } t \text{ of participant } i], \\ = \beta_{00} + \beta_{01} (\text{Group}) + \beta_{02} (\text{Stereotypes}) \\ + \beta_{03} (\text{Group} \times \text{Stereotypes}) + r_{0i} + e_{it}. \quad (1)$$

Regression results are shown in Table 2. In the model, the coefficient for the intercept (β_{00}) is to be interpreted as the mean attribution score for Italian-origin migrants for mean-level stereotypes. The variance of the Level-2 intercept (r_{0i}) was significant, indicating variation between participants in attribution means when the effect of stereotypes was partialled out. The coefficients for the group dummy (β_{01}) and for stereotypes (β_{02}) were positive and significant. As predicted, the interaction coefficient of group and stereotypes (β_{03}) was also positive and significant, qualifying the two main effects. Simple slopes analyses (Aiken & West, 1991; Shacham, 2009) shown in Figure 1 revealed that for both immigrant groups, the more strongly participants endorsed negative stereotypes of competence, the higher were their internal attributions for academic underperformance ($b = 0.32, SE = .12, t(118) = 2.65, p = .010$ for Italian-origin migrants and $b = 0.75, SE = .12, t(118) = 6.30, p < .001$ for Turkish-origin migrants). A simple slopes difference test (Preacher, Curran, & Bauer, 2006) was significant ($b_{\text{diff}} = 0.43, SE_{\text{pooled}} = .12,$

² Stereotype endorsement was also assessed for the groups of Resettlers, boys, and girls. In addition, the following variables were assessed, but no analyses are reported in the present research: immigrants' willingness to integrate, proportion of immigrants in participants' classrooms, quantity and quality of contact, and perceived lack of parental support for immigrant students.

Table 2. Hierarchical linear regression results for internal attribution of academic underperformance (Study 1)

Fixed effects	Coefficient	SE	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Intercept (β_{00})	2.50	.12	20.66	< .001
Group (β_{01})	0.64	.09	7.01	< .001
Stereotypes (β_{02})	0.32	.12	2.65	.010
Group \times Stereotypes (β_{03})	0.43	.11	3.79	< .001
Variance component	Coefficient	<i>df</i>	χ^2	<i>p</i>
Intercept L2 variance, $\text{var}(r_{0i})$.78	62	384.69	< .001

Notes. Group was coded 0 for Italian-origin migrants and 1 for Turkish-origin migrants. $N = 122$ at Level 1 and $N = 65$ at Level 2.

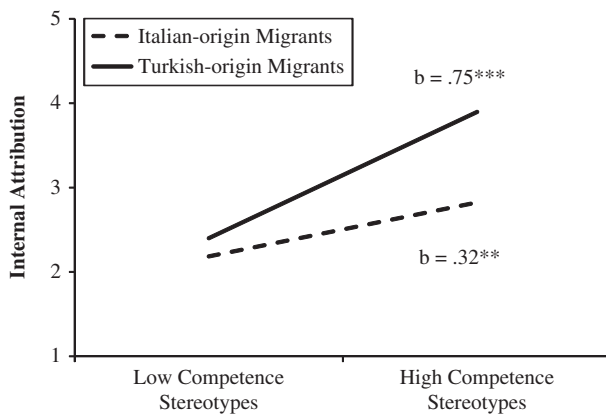


Figure 1. Simple slopes for stereotypes about competence predicting internal attributions of academic underperformance (Study 1). Stereotypes were plotted ± 1 SD above and below the mean.

$t(234) = 3.56, p < .001$, indicating that the relationship was stronger for Turkish-origin migrants than for Italian-origin migrants.

Discussion

In Study 1 we investigated German student teachers' beliefs about the competence of Germans, Turkish-origin migrants, and Italian-origin migrants. Both immigrant groups were rated as less competent than Germans, but Turkish-origin migrants were rated as even less competent than Italian-origin migrants. This result further supports our hypothesis that Turkish-origin migrants in Germany are especially subject to negative stereotypes about their competence. Further, not only do the evaluations made by German participants reflect in-group favoritism, but there is also a differential evaluation between particular immigrant out-groups.

Study 1 further showed that the more negatively participants evaluated the academic competence of immigrant groups, the more strongly they attributed their underperformance to internal causes. Student teachers who held more negative stereotypes about the competence of immigrant groups agreed more strongly with statements indicating that the immigrants themselves are responsible for their low

academic performance. Again, Turkish-origin migrants were viewed more negatively than Italian-origin migrants in that their academic underperformance was attributed more strongly to internal factors and the relationship between negative stereotypes about competence and internal attributions was stronger. Thus, stereotypes about competence not only potentially contribute to ethnic differences in students' performance (i.e., stereotype threat effects, e.g., Steele & Aronson, 1995), but they also shape student teachers' perceptions of responsibility for underperformance.

In Study 1 we assessed only internal attributions for academic underperformance. However, UAE theory also speaks to external attributions. Specifically, the theory predicts not only that the negative behavior of out-groups will be attributed more internally to the degree that individuals endorse negative stereotypes about the group, but also that attributions to external factors will be less strongly endorsed in the same circumstances (e.g., Hewstone, 1990; Pettigrew, 1979). Therefore, in Study 2 we further investigated the attributional pattern by assessing causal attributions for the academic underperformance of Turkish-origin and Italian-origin migrants on both internal and external dimensions. In our case, the external dimension was defined in terms of the responsibility that teachers, employers, or the educational system in general have for immigrants' academic underperformance. Because student teachers will be part of the educational system, the extent to which they see the educational system and teachers as responsible for immigrants' underperformance is likely to be predictive of efforts made to reduce the performance gap.

Study 2: Stereotypes About Competence Moderate Internal and External Attributions

Building on the results of Study 1, we predicted that the endorsement of negative stereotypes about competence would be related to internal and external attributions for both immigrant groups. We also wanted to further explore possible differences in attribution patterns between the two different out-groups and again predicted that the relationship between stereotypes and attributions would be stronger for judgments of Turkish-origin students than for Italian-origin students.

Table 3. Statements and attributions in Study 2

Italian-origin/Turkish-origin students show lower academic performance compared to German students. This is because...
...they have lower intellectual abilities (<i>internal/stable</i>)
... they are disadvantaged in the German educational system (<i>external, stable</i>)
...they do not study enough for school (<i>internal, variable</i>)
Italian-origin/Turkish-origin students attend the highest school track less frequently than German students. This is because...
...with similar performance they get a teacher's recommendation for the highest track less frequently (<i>external, stable</i>)
...they are overwhelmed intellectually by the academic level of the highest school track (<i>internal, stable</i>)
...they do not make enough effort to aspire to the highest school degree (<i>internal, variable</i>)
Italian-origin/Turkish-origin migrants hold a school-leaving certificate less frequently than Germans. This is because...
...they have insufficient knowledge to pass the final examination (<i>internal, variable</i>)
...educational success is less important to them (<i>internal, stable</i>)
...they are less integrated into the German educational system (<i>external, stable</i>)
Italian-origin/Turkish-origin migrants are unemployed more frequently than Germans. This is because...
... they present themselves worse in job interviews (<i>internal, variable</i>)
...the employers like to hire Germans more than immigrants (<i>external, stable</i>)
...they lack the abilities required in assessment centers (<i>internal, stable</i>)

Note. Agreement to attributions was indicated on a 5-point Likert scale.

Method

Participants and Procedure

Sixty university students studying to become teachers for the highest school track ("Gymnasium") participated in an online questionnaire study. Six students were excluded from further analyses because they were non-German. The final sample of 54 participants ranged in age from 19 to 28 years ($M = 23.07$, $SD = 2.18$); 38 participants were female (70.4%).

Participants were assured that their data would be treated as anonymous and confidential. Student teachers were asked to provide their opinions on reasons for lower educational performance of two specific immigrant groups compared to Germans. First, they indicated their agreement with internal and external attributions for the academic underperformance of Italian-origin and Turkish-origin migrants. Then, they rated both immigrant groups on multiple competence-related items.³ Finally, they provided demographic information (i.e., age, gender, major subject of study, and ethnicity), after which they were debriefed and thanked for their participation.

Measures

To assess *internal and external attributions*, participants were presented with four statements about the underperformance of Italian-origin and Turkish-origin migrants compared to Germans in education (see Table 3). Identical statements and attributions were presented for Italian-origin and Turkish-origin migrants; immigrant groups were presented in randomized order to control for sequence effects. For each

statement, participants indicated their agreement with three different explanations for the underperformance of the immigrant groups compared to Germans. The three explanations reflected internal/stable, internal/variable, and external/stable attributions for each statement (Weiner, 1974). The dimension of external/variable attributions was not included, because it seems implausible to attribute group-level failure to variable external reasons such as bad luck. Answers were provided on a Likert scale ranging from 1 = *do not agree* to 5 = *completely agree*. *Competence evaluations* of Italian-origin and Turkish-origin migrants were assessed with the same nine adjectives used in Study 1.

Results

Responses to the nine competence adjectives were inverted and aggregated to scales reflecting negative stereotypes (Cronbach's $\alpha = .67$ for Italian-origin migrants and $.85$ for Turkish-origin migrants). Agreement with the eight items measuring internal/stable and internal/variable attributions was combined in a single scale of internal attribution (Cronbach's $\alpha = .88$ for Turkish-origin migrants and $.86$ for Italian-origin migrants). Responses to the four items measuring external/stable attributions were aggregated to one scale of external attribution (Cronbach's $\alpha = .86$ for Turkish-origin migrants and $.84$ for Italian-origin migrants).

For the evaluation of Turkish-origin migrants, internal and external attributions were correlated negatively ($r = -.29$, $p = .033$). Unfavorable stereotypes about competence were positively associated with internal attributions ($r = .59$, $p < .001$) and negatively associated with external attributions for this group ($r = -.32$, $p = .018$). In contrast, internal and external attributions were not related for

³ In addition, we assessed quantity and quality of contact with the two immigrant groups. In Studies 1 and 2 the order of assessment of attributions and stereotypes was inadvertently reversed. However, results showed that stereotypes predicted internal attributions (which were assessed in both studies) irrespective of order of assessment.

Table 4. Hierarchical linear regression results for attribution of academic underperformance (Study 2)

Fixed effects	Coefficient	SE	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Intercept (β_{00})	2.75	.12	22.28	< .001
Group (β_{01})	0.29	.07	3.93	< .001
Dimension (β_{02})	-0.68	.15	-4.62	< .001
Stereotypes (β_{03})	-0.10	.11	-0.91	.366
Group \times Dimension (β_{04})	-0.08	.11	-0.74	.461
Group \times Stereotypes (β_{05})	-0.20	.09	-2.21	.028
Dimension \times Stereotypes (β_{06})	0.36	.11	3.16	.002
Group \times Dimension \times Stereotypes (β_{07})	0.42	.15	2.84	.005
Variance Component	Coefficient	<i>df</i>	χ^2	<i>p</i>
Intercept L2 variance, $\text{var}(r_{0i})$.14	53	114.13	< .001

Notes. Group was coded 0 for Italian-origin migrants and 1 for Turkish-origin migrants, Dimension was coded 0 for external and 1 for internal attribution. $N = 216$ at Level 1 and $N = 54$ at Level 2.

Italian-origin migrants ($r = -.01$, $p = .997$). Further, unfavorable stereotypes about competence were positively associated with internal attributions ($r = .40$, $p = .003$), but not associated with external attributions for this group ($r = -.09$, $p = .511$).

We hypothesized that the moderation of internal and external attributions by negative stereotypes about competence will be stronger for Turkish-origin students than for Italian-origin students; thus, we expected a significant three-way interaction of group, dimension, and stereotypes on the endorsement of attributions. As in Study 1, a hierarchical linear regression analysis with a random-intercept model was conducted because measurements (Level 1) were nested in participants (Level 2). Endorsement of attribution was the dependent variable, while group (dummy-coded: 0 = Italian-origin migrants, 1 = Turkish-origin migrants), dimension (dummy-coded: 0 = external, 1 = internal), the continuous *z*-standardized predictor of stereotypes, all possible two-way interactions, and the three-way interaction of the predictors were entered as fixed Level-1 predictors. The regression equation was as follows:

$$\begin{aligned}
 Y [\text{Attribution value of measurement } t \text{ of participant } i] \\
 = & \beta_{00} + \beta_{01}(\text{Group}) + \beta_{02}(\text{Dimension}) \\
 & + \beta_{03}(\text{Stereotypes}) \\
 & + \beta_{04}(\text{Group} \times \text{Dimension}) \\
 & + \beta_{05}(\text{Group} \times \text{Stereotypes}) \\
 & + \beta_{06}(\text{Dimension} \times \text{Stereotypes}) \\
 & + \beta_{07}(\text{Group} \times \text{Dimension} \times \text{Stereotypes}) \\
 & + r_{0i} + e_{it}.
 \end{aligned}
 \tag{2}$$

Regression results are shown in Table 4. In the model, the coefficient for the intercept (β_{00}) is to be interpreted as the mean attribution score for Italian-origin migrants on the external dimension for mean-level stereotypes. The variance of the Level-2 intercept (r_{0i}) was significant, indicating variation between participants in attribution means

when the effect of stereotypes was partialled out. The coefficient for group (β_{01}) was significant, as well as the coefficient for dimension (β_{02}), the coefficients for the two-way interactions of group and stereotypes (β_{05}) and of dimension and stereotypes (β_{06}).

The main effects and two-way interactions were qualified by the predicted significant three-way interaction (β_{07}). Simple slopes analyses (Aiken & West, 1991; Shacham, 2009), as shown in Figure 2, revealed that participants who more strongly endorsed negative stereotypes about the competence of Italian-origin migrants made stronger internal attributions for their academic underperformance ($b = 0.26$, $SE = .08$, $t(208) = 3.44$, $p < .001$). Similarly, in judgments of Turkish-origin migrants, stronger endorsement of negative stereotypes was associated with stronger internal attributions ($b = 0.48$, $SE = 0.09$, $t(208) = 5.57$, $p < .001$). Further, a simple slopes difference test (Preacher et al., 2006) between the slopes of internal attributions for the two immigrant groups was significant ($b_{\text{diff}} = 0.22$, $SE_{\text{pooled}} = .08$, $t(414) = 2.72$, $p = .007$), indicating that the relationship was stronger for Turkish-origin migrants than that for Italian-origin migrants.

With respect to attributions made to external causes, participants who more strongly endorsed negative stereotypes about Turkish-origin migrants made weaker external attributions ($b = 0.30$, $SE = 0.09$, $t(208) = 3.35$, $p < .001$). For Italian-origin migrants, the simple slope for external attribution was not significant ($b = -0.10$, $SE = .11$, $t(208) = 0.91$, $p = .366$). A simple slopes difference test between the slopes of external attributions for the two immigrant groups was significant ($b_{\text{diff}} = 0.20$, $SE_{\text{pooled}} = .10$, $t(414) = 1.99$, $p = .048$).

Discussion

Study 2 replicated the results of Study 1 in showing that student teachers who held more negative stereotypes about the competence of immigrants more strongly attributed their underperformance to internal causes. Also consistent with the results of Study 1, this relationship was stronger for judgments of Turkish-origin migrants than for

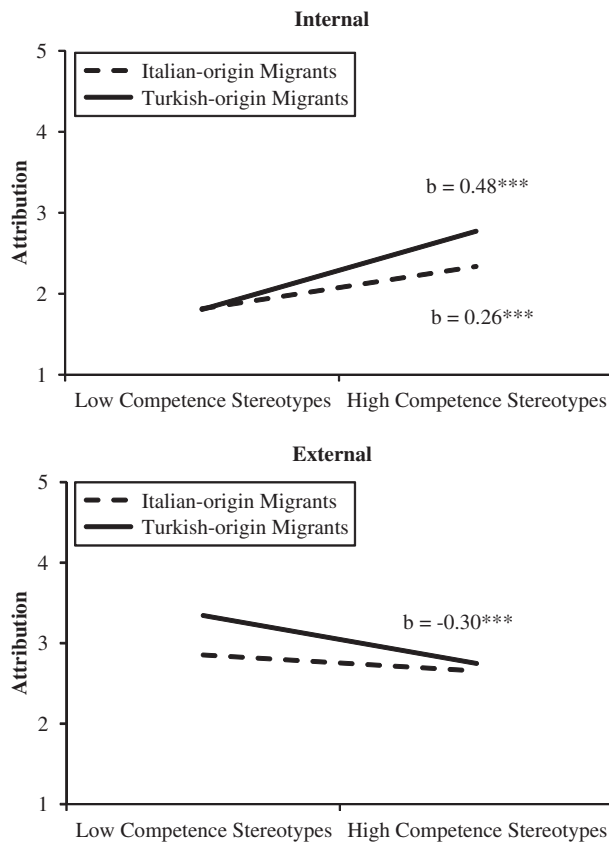


Figure 2. Simple slopes for stereotypes predicting internal and external attributions for academic underperformance (Study 2). Stereotypes were plotted ± 1 SD below and above the mean.

judgments of Italian-origin migrants. Study 2 further tested predictions of UAE theory by considering external as well as internal attributions. Results showed that stronger endorsement of negative stereotypes about competence predicted weaker external attribution of underperformance, but only for judgments of Turkish-origin migrants and not for Italian-origin migrants. Again it seems that the pattern of stereotypes about competence and attributional bias is more unfavorable for Turkish-origin migrants than for Italian-origin migrants. This result is in line with UAE theory, which predicts that the intensity of the attributional bias varies across intergroup situations and is greatest when there are negative stereotypes about the groups involved (Pettigrew, 1979). Future research should investigate whether additional factors are related to the more unfavorable causal attributions for Turkish-origin compared to Italian-origin migrants. For example, in German society and media, Turkish-origin migrants could be perceived as a more cohesive group whose members are more uniformly associated with low competence. Alternatively, Turkish-origin migrants could be perceived as more culturally distant and foreign than Italian-origin migrants and thus be evaluated more negatively (e.g., Mullen, 2001).

In Study 2, external attributions were operationalized by statements indicating that immigrants are disadvantaged because they are not sufficiently integrated into educational institutions (e.g., schools) by members of the host society (i.e., teachers, employers). If prospective teachers attribute immigrants' underperformance to external causes, this suggests that they see their own in-group of teachers as at least partially responsible for the problems. In the case of Italian-origin migrants, external attributions were not predicted by stereotypes about competence; these external attributions were, however, comparatively strong and always greater than attributions to internal causes. In contrast, judgments of Turkish-origin migrants showed a link between endorsement of negative stereotypes and a lower likelihood of using external attributions to explain the low performance. In other words, the negative stereotypes that German student teachers held about the academic competence of immigrants were directly linked to a lesser use of external attributions – specifically, their own and the institution's responsibility – for the low performance of Turkish-origin students, but were unrelated to external attributions used to account for Italian-origin students' performance.

General Discussion

The present research showed that negative stereotypes about Turkish-origin migrants are considered to be widespread in German society and that student teachers endorse these stereotypes in their own judgments of immigrant groups as well. These negative stereotypes about competence are particularly strong for judgments of Turkish-origin migrants, though they exist in lesser form for Italian-origin immigrants as well. In line with UAE theory, the endorsement of negative stereotypes about competence is related to stronger internal attributions for the academic underperformance of both Italian-origin and Turkish-origin migrants (Studies 1 and 2). The parallel prediction of weaker external attributions for underperformance holds true only for the group of Turkish-origin migrants (Study 2).

These results contribute to current discussions about the limited integration of immigrants into European educational systems. The more negatively members of the ethnic majority group evaluate the academic competence of immigrants, the more likely they are to see the immigrants themselves as responsible for their lower performance. This attributional pattern could be an important antecedent of low effort exerted to integrate certain groups of immigrants into the educational system, as majority group members are likely to perceive their own options to advance integration as limited (e.g., Berkowitz, 1969; Schopler & Matthews, 1965; Weiner, 1980).

The present studies were conducted with students who will become teachers and who thus will be central figures in the educational system in the future. They will influence the intellectual development and the academic performance of a considerable number of students, many of whom will have migration backgrounds. UAE theory assumes that

the attributional bias is a general phenomenon that increases with the degree of prejudice, but it could be the case that the association of stereotypes and causal attributions is even stronger within the sample of student teachers investigated in the present research. Because student teachers will in the future be personally involved in the educational system, their judgment and behavior can contribute to the academic failure or success of students from particular immigrant groups. Very likely, the more they hold underperforming immigrants responsible, the more they also expect them to change or assimilate to improve their academic performance. Alternatively, the more they perceive the educational system as responsible, the more likely they are to view themselves as able to contribute to the reduction of the ethnic performance gap.

Our results generally support the predictions of UAE theory (Pettigrew, 1979; Hewstone, 1990). When participants evaluated two out-groups performing a negative behavior (i.e., academic underperformance), the predicted attributional bias occurred. This bias was stronger for evaluations of Turkish-origin migrants, a group that is stereotyped more negatively in German society than the comparison group of Italian-origin migrants. Thus, our research shows that UAE theory predicts not only intergroup attributions involving in-group and out-group, but can also predict the differential attributional patterns for the negative behavior of different out-groups. We further show that UAE theory can be applied to societal group perceptions in the educational domain and characterizes not only judgments of specific individuals who belong to out-groups, but also judgments of out-groups in general (e.g., Doosje & Branscombe, 2003).

Limitations

The present studies were correlational, and therefore we cannot draw definite conclusions about the causal direction of the observed relationship between stereotypes about competence and causal attributions for underperformance. We found evidence supporting the hypothesis that stereotypes moderate causal attributions, as it was theoretically assumed by UAE theory. However, with the present data, alternative causal directions cannot be ruled out, and the relationship could in fact be reciprocal; that is, it is possible that causal attributions also shape stereotypes.⁴ Therefore, future research should investigate the direction of the relationship with experimental and longitudinal designs. If indeed stereotypes and causal attributions mutually influence each other, then interventions could be designed to change causal attributions. Because research has shown that stereotypes are very hard to change due to, for example, sub-stereotyping and illusory correlations (for a review, see Smith & Mackie, 2007), designing interventions that aim at changing causal attributions would be a promising

approach to achieve a more equitable educational system in the future.

Conclusion

In the German educational context, Turkish-origin migrants not only show the lowest academic performance, but as a group they also seem to be confronted with a very unfavorable pattern of stereotypes about competence and attributional bias by German student teachers. In contrast to Italian-origin migrants, who show comparable underperformance, Turkish-origin migrants appear to be judged more harshly: They are held more responsible for their academic underperformance and the educational system is held less responsible, both in proportion to the strength of the negative stereotypes held concerning their competence. This attributional bias on the part of future teachers could contribute to the continuing underperformance of Turkish-origin migrants in the German educational system.

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⁴ UAE theory clearly predicts a causal path from stereotypes to attributions, and our analysis is consistent with that theoretical model. However, as it is plausible to test the reverse direction, we did so and found that internal, but not external, attributions significantly predicted stereotypes for both immigrant groups.

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