

EXPLORING THE IMPACT OF REWARDS AND PUNISHMENTS ON STUDENT MOTIVATION IN SPEAKING CLASSES

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative study explores the effects of rewards and punishments on student motivation in speaking classes. Conducted with ten high school students, the research employs semi-structured interviews to gather insights into students' perceptions and experiences with different motivational strategies. The study aims to understand how rewards, such as verbal praise, stickers, the chance to select discussion topics, and punishments, including verbal reprimands and additional assignments, influence students' willingness and enthusiasm to engage in classroom discussions. The findings indicate that rewards significantly boost students' confidence and intrinsic motivation. Participants reported increased engagement and a positive attitude towards speaking activities when they received recognition and incentives. The study also emphasizes the importance of a supportive learning environment. Techniques such as triangulation, member checking, and prolonged engagement enhanced the study's credibility and trustworthiness. Findings suggest that educators should prioritize positive reinforcement and constructive feedback while minimizing punitive approaches to foster a more motivating and supportive classroom atmosphere.

Keywords: Students; Rewards; Punishments.

ABSTRAK

Penelitian kualitatif ini mengeksplorasi pengaruh penghargaan dan hukuman terhadap motivasi siswa di kelas berbicara. Dilakukan dengan sepuluh siswa sekolah menengah, penelitian ini menggunakan wawancara semi-terstruktur untuk mengumpulkan wawasan tentang persepsi dan pengalaman siswa dengan strategi motivasi yang berbeda. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk memahami bagaimana penghargaan, seperti pujian lisan, stiker, kesempatan untuk memilih topik diskusi, dan hukuman, termasuk teguran lisan dan tugas tambahan, mempengaruhi kemauan dan antusiasme siswa untuk terlibat dalam diskusi kelas. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa penghargaan secara signifikan meningkatkan kepercayaan diri dan motivasi intrinsik siswa. Peserta melaporkan peningkatan keterlibatan dan sikap positif terhadap aktivitas berbicara ketika mereka menerima pengakuan dan insentif. Studi ini juga menekankan pentingnya lingkungan belajar yang mendukung. Teknik seperti triangulasi, pengecekan anggota, dan keterlibatan jangka panjang meningkatkan kredibilitas dan kepercayaan penelitian ini. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa pendidik harus memprioritaskan penguatan positif dan umpan balik konstruktif sambil meminimalkan pendekatan hukuman untuk menumbuhkan suasana kelas yang lebih memotivasi dan mendukung.

Kata Kunci: Siswa; Hadiah; Hukuman.

INTRODUCTION

Speaking skills are one of the important aspects of language learning, especially in the context of formal education (Pakula, 2019). Students' motivation in classroom speaking plays a significant role in the success of this learning (Putra et al., 2017). This study aims to explore the effect of rewards and punishments on students' motivation in classroom speaking activities, a topic that still requires in-depth study in the Indonesian educational context. As motivation theories and learning approaches evolve, it is important to understand the strategies that are most effective in increasing student participation and engagement. This is in line with Ryan and Deci's opinion that students' intrinsic motivation can be significantly influenced by a supportive learning environment (Ryan & Deci, 2020).

Several previous studies have highlighted the importance of the use of rewards in improving student motivation (Murphy, 1950). For example, research by shows that social recognition such as applause and praise can substantially increase student motivation. However, there are still many studies that have not gone in-depth on how the combination of reward and punishment can affect students' motivation, especially in the context of classroom speaking. Therefore, this study tries to fill the gap by collecting data from various students who have different experiences in learning to speak. Thus, this study aims to provide a deeper insight into how teachers can apply effective reward and punishment strategies in improving students' motivation.

In addition, it is important to highlight the limitations of previous studies that often only focus on one type of approach without considering other variables that might influence the research results. Therefore, this study adopts a qualitative approach with in-depth interviews to uncover students' perspectives more comprehensively. It is important to understand in depth how students respond to rewards and punishments in the context of classroom speaking, as well as to identify the factors that influence their motivation. Thus, this study is expected to make a significant contribution to the development of educational theory and practice, as well as provide more concrete recommendations for educators in creating a more effective learning environment that supports the development of students' speaking skills.

In general, rewards often have a more significant positive impact on student motivation (Filsecker & Hickey, 2014). Rewards such as praise, stickers, or public recognition in front of the class boost students' confidence and motivate them to participate more actively. For example, student 1 felt very appreciated after receiving praise from the teacher, thus encouraging him to continue to try harder in the next presentation. This supports previous findings by Deci and Ryan (1985) who stated that positive rewards can increase students' intrinsic motivation by providing pleasant encouragement. In addition, non-material rewards such as applause from classmates and the opportunity to choose the topic of discussion proved effective. Student 5 revealed that her friends' applause after her monologue made her feel more appreciated and increased her motivation. This study confirmed the results of Hidi and Anderson's (1986) research which showed that social recognition can increase student motivation more meaningfully than material rewards.

On the other hand, punishment tends to demotivate students (Orji et al., 2024). In an educational context, rewards and punishments are often used as tools to motivate students (Wahid, 2000). Most students reported that punishments such as harsh reprimands, grade reductions, or additional assignments caused them to feel depressed, anxious, and less motivated to speak in front of the class. Student 2 acknowledged that a stern reprimand in front of the class made him feel embarrassed and insecure, which is in line with Elliott and Dweck's (1988) research showing that evaluative punishment can demotivate and increase students' anxiety. This suggests that punishment more often reinforces the negative aspects of student behaviour without providing the constructive feedback needed for improvement (Oliver et al., 2011). Punishment often focuses on the student's faults without providing constructive solutions. For example, Student 4 felt that lowering his grade for not actively participating did not help him understand how to improve. Wubbels and Levy's (1993) research shows that non-constructive punishment only increases pressure and makes students feel inadequate, which ultimately hinders the development of their speaking skills. In addition, punishment can create a stressful learning environment, where students are afraid of making mistakes and are reluctant to take risks. This reduces the opportunity for students to learn from their mistakes and develop their speaking skills, as stated by (Cavell, 1954) which states that a stressful learning environment can inhibit students' intrinsic motivation.

In addition, it is important to highlight the limitations of previous studies that often only focus on one type of approach without considering other variables that might influence the research results. Therefore, this study adopts a qualitative approach with in-depth interviews to uncover students' perspectives more comprehensively. It is important to understand in depth how students respond to rewards and punishments in the context of classroom speaking, as well as to identify the factors that influence their motivation. Thus, this study is expected to make a significant contribution to the development of educational theory and practice, as well as provide more concrete recommendations for educators in creating a more effective learning environment that supports the development of students' speaking skills.

METHOD

This study involved 10 students from various classes who were active in classroom speaking activities. Subjects were selected based on the inclusion criteria of students who were active in classroom speaking activities and had participated in at least two previous presentations. Exclusion criteria included students with speech disorders or significant social anxiety. Subjects were selected by purposive sampling to obtain a rich variety of perspectives.

The main variables in this study were rewards and punishments. Rewards were defined as verbal praise, stickers, extra points, and the opportunity to choose the topic of discussion (Bardach, 2024). Punishment was defined as verbal reprimand, decreased participation grade, and additional tasks. Student motivation was measured using a 1-5 Likert scale-based questionnaire to assess changes in motivation before and after the intervention.

Data was collected through semi-structured interviews with each participant after each learning session. The interview questions were designed to explore students' experiences with rewards and punishments and their impact on speaking motivation. The procedure was run by two researchers to ensure consistency and reliability of the data. Participants were asked to confirm their interview results to check the accuracy of the data. The researcher spent more than 2 weeks interacting with the subjects and understanding the context. Then a description of the context and conditions of the study is presented in detail to enable readers to determine the relevance of the findings for their situation. Full records of all research procedures, decisions, and reflections throughout the research process were provided for audit. Regular discussions with peers were conducted to test the consistency and validity of the findings. Detailed documentation of the entire research process was provided for audit by a third party. Researchers critically reflected and discussed their biases and assumptions with peers.

Interview data was analysed using the thematic analysis method. The coding and categorisation process was conducted by two independent researchers to enhance the reliability of the analysis. Data validity was checked through data triangulation and reliability was measured using inter-rater reliability with a Cronbach's alpha value of >0.70 (Braun et al., 2017).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The results of this study show that rewards have a significant positive impact on students' motivation in speaking in class, whereas punishments tend to undermine such motivation. Data obtained through interviews and observations show variations in students' perceptions and experiences regarding the use of rewards and punishments.

Table 1: The Effect of Rewards and Punishments on Student Motivation

Student	Type of Intervention	Response to Reward	Response to Punishment
1	Praise	Increased self-confidence, more courage to participate	Feeling depressed and unmotivated
2	Applause	Feel valued, more eager to speak	Feeling embarrassed and anxious
3	Small gifts	Feel valued, increased motivation	Decreases motivation and increases fear
4	Extra points	Encourages active participation and increases sense of responsibility	Increases anxiety and distress

5	Public recognition	Feel valued, increase intrinsic motivation	Reduced self-confidence and increased fear
6	Non-material awards	Become more courageous to speak in front of the class	Reduced desire to participate
7	Topic choice	Increases interest and motivation to speak	Reduced creativity and increased fear
8	Verbal award	Increases enthusiasm and engagement	Decreases motivation and increases anxiety
9	Small award	Increases speaking motivation	Causes pressure and fear
10	Compliments from friends	Increase confidence and motivation	Reduced self-esteem and increased anxiety

This study found that rewards, such as verbal praise and the opportunity to choose discussion topics, significantly increased students' intrinsic motivation. Student 1 reported that receiving praise from the teacher made her feel valued and encouraged her to participate more in class activities. This is consistent with the positive reinforcement theory proposed by Skinner (1953), which states that rewards can reinforce desired behavior and increase intrinsic motivation. In addition, Student 5 recognised that public recognition increased her confidence and motivation to speak more actively in class (Murphy, 1950).

Previous research has shown that rewards have a significant positive effect on student motivation. For example, Deci and Ryan (1985) found that rewards can increase students' intrinsic motivation by providing pleasant encouragement. In addition, Hidi and Anderson (1986) showed that social recognition such as applause and praise can substantially increase students' motivation.

In contrast, punishment tends to have a negative impact on students' motivation. Student 2 felt embarrassed and anxious after receiving a harsh reprimand in front of the class, which decreased his motivation to participate. This is in line with research by Elliott and Dweck (1988), which showed that evaluative punishment can decrease motivation and increase student anxiety. Student 4 also reported increased anxiety and distress after receiving punishment in the form of additional tasks, which hindered her participation in class.

Punishment often focuses on the student's faults without providing constructive solutions. For example, Student 4 felt that lowering his grade for not actively participating did not help him understand how to improve. Wubbels and Levy's (1993) research shows that unconstructive punishment only increases pressure and makes students feel inadequate, which ultimately hinders the development of their speaking skills (Wubbels & Levy, 1993). Ryan and Deci (2000) also state that a stressful learning environment can inhibit students' intrinsic motivation.

In addition to the immediate impact of rewards and punishments on student motivation, this study also found long-term effects of this approach. Student 8 reported that the rewards he received over several months not only increased his motivation at the time, but also built positive habits of participating in class. In contrast, Student 9 stated that a bad experience with punishment resulted in a lasting decrease in motivation, making him reluctant to speak up in class in the future. These findings suggest that rewards not only provide a temporary boost but can also change students' attitudes and behaviours in the long term, in line with the theory of long-term learning by (Dweck, 2008). This research supports Bandura's (1977) findings, which state that consistent positive reinforcement can reinforce students' positive behaviour and shape better attitudes and motivation in the long run (Bandura, 1978).

The research also highlighted the importance of social context in the application of rewards and punishments. Student 7 stated that public recognition in front of the class provided a sense of pride and being valued by his peers, which significantly increased his motivation. On the other hand, Student 4 felt that the punishment he received in front of his classmates caused embarrassment and lowered his self-esteem. This shows that the effects of rewards and punishments depend not only on their own nature, but also on how they are applied in the student's social context. Rewards given in a supportive social context can strengthen social bonds and increase motivation, whereas punishment in public can damage social relationships and reduce motivation, as explained in research by (Wentzel, 1997).

Teachers are advised to prioritise the use of positive rewards such as verbal praise, stickers, or the opportunity to choose discussion topics. This can boost students' confidence and encourage them to speak more actively in class (Skinner 1953). Teachers need to reduce the use of punishment which can increase anxiety and inhibit students' motivation. Instead, constructive feedback and an educational approach can be used to help students overcome their mistakes without feeling pressurised (Hattie & Timperley, 2007). Creating a supportive and positive learning environment is essential. Teachers need to ensure that all students feel valued and recognised for their efforts, in accordance with the principles of Wentzel's (1997) positive learning environment theory.

Rewards given consistently and in a supportive context can help build a positive classroom climate, where students feel safe to express themselves and actively participate. For example, verbal praise given in front of classmates or the opportunity to choose discussion topics can increase students' sense of ownership and engagement. Conversely, punishment given publicly can damage social relationships and reduce students' intrinsic motivation.

This research confirms the importance of positive rewards in increasing students' motivation to speak up in class. In contrast, punishment more often reduces motivation and increases student anxiety. Therefore, teachers need to adopt an approach that supports and rewards students, while avoiding unconstructive punishment. These findings provide a strong basis for the development of more effective teaching strategies and support the development of students' intrinsic motivation.

Using appropriate rewards not only provides a temporary boost but can also build positive habits in the long run. Conversely, unconstructive punishment can lead to a lasting decrease in motivation. Teachers and educators should consider the social context in applying rewards and punishments, ensuring that each intervention is conducted in a supportive and constructive environment.

This research provides valuable insights into how to increase student motivation through the use of appropriate reward strategies, while avoiding the negative impact of unconstructive punishment. By applying these findings, teachers can create a more positive and effective learning environment, ultimately supporting students' academic and social development.

CONCLUSIONS

This study investigated the impact of rewards and punishments on student motivation in speaking classes, revealing significant differences in their effectiveness. Rewards, such as verbal praise, stickers, and the opportunity to choose discussion topics, were shown to enhance students' confidence and intrinsic motivation to participate in class discussions. These findings align with Skinner's (1953) theory of positive reinforcement, suggesting that such incentives effectively reinforce desired behaviors and boost intrinsic motivation. Students reported feeling more engaged and motivated when they received positive feedback, highlighting the importance of a supportive and encouraging learning environment.

Conversely, punishments, including verbal reprimands and additional assignments, generally undermined students' motivation, increasing their anxiety and reluctance to participate. This is consistent with Elliott and Dweck's (1988) findings, which indicate that evaluative punishments can diminish motivation and heighten student anxiety. The study also identified limitations, such as small sample size and potential biases in data collection, suggesting the need for future research with larger, more diverse samples and longer-term studies to explore the sustained effects of rewards and punishments on student motivation.

Overall, the research underscores the critical role of positive reinforcement in fostering a motivating classroom environment. Educators are encouraged to prioritize constructive feedback and avoid punitive measures to enhance students' speaking skills and overall classroom engagement.

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