

ENCOURAGING STUDENTS' MOTIVATION WITH PRAISE IN AN EFL CLASSROOM

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Abstrak

Mendorong motivasi siswa sangat penting untuk meningkatkan kinerja dan keterlibatan mereka dalam kegiatan kelas. Prestasi akademik, perilaku yang tidak pantas, dan ruang kelas yang tidak produktif semuanya terkait dengan masalah motivasi. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mendeskripsikan bagaimana pujian dapat memotivasi siswa di kelas EFL. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode deskriptif. Data dikumpulkan melalui kuesioner yang dikelola sendiri. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan pujian memang mendorong motivasi siswa.

Kata Kunci: Pujian, Motivasi, Kelas EFL

Abstract

Encouraging motivation of students is essential to increase their performance and involvement in classroom activities. Academic performance, inappropriate behavior and unproductive classrooms are all related to motivation issues. This study aims to describe how praise can motivate students in an EFL classroom. This study used descriptive method. Data was collected through self-administered questionnaire. The results of the study indicate praise does encourage students' motivation.

Keywords: Praise, Motivation, EFL classroom

INTRODUCTION

In recent decades, one of major problems faced by teachers is how to build up students' motivation. Encouraging motivation of students is essential to increase their performance and involvement in classroom activities. Academic performance, inappropriate behaviour and unproductive classrooms are all related to motivation issues. Motivation is needed to promote students' interest and attitude in order to help them realize their potential and improve their desire to study hard. To deal with this problem, praise is examined as a useful instrument to encourage students' spirit when it is implemented appropriately in a classroom. Praise is defined as revealing a sense of pride by giving encouraging statements on performance (Brophy, 1981). Forms of praise are written or spoken expressions to appreciate appropriate behaviour of students (Gable, Hester, Rock & Hughes, 2009). However, praise has been criticized in terms of manner and timing. Motivation can be adversely affected by inappropriate praise. This essay will explore four main reasons why praise is fundamental for people in general, including children, teenagers and adults. It will also consider the importance of 'behaviour-specific praise'. Behaviour-specific praise (BSP), it is defined as praise that provides students with oral feedback and acceptance of their social or academic performance (Thompson et al, 2012). BSP enhances student motivation, thus they comprehend precisely that they have performed or done something properly (Sutherland, Wehby, Copeland, 2000).

Praise can leads to good psychological effects

Regarding the psychological effects, it has been argued that giving praise for ability can weaken students' motivation (Mueller & Dweck, 1996). This is because students may feel nervous and worried about making errors. As a result, they might feel

anxious about finishing a project that is not good enough (Mueller & Dweck, 1998). Moreover, Conroy et. al (2009) find that students might feel stressed if they do not live up to teacher expectations. Conroy et. al (2009) indicate that praise for cleverness may set students up for disappointment and weaken their ability to tackle new challenges. Conroy et. al (2009) also state that when students perceive that they are appreciated due to their ability, they might over concentrate on the things making them look brilliant, particularly their scores on tests. Furthermore, the students who get praise owing to evaluation may become perfectionists (Willis, 2014). This means that students who get praise due to their intelligence or ability may feel uncomfortable psychologically because it creates a burden. This argument is weak however, in view of the studies and data that show how important praise is.

Mueller & Dweck (1996) throw light on praise for skill, specifically, is assumed as a vital part in students' impression of their capacity and inspiration to advance. Briggs (1970) also demonstrates that students will feel motivated if they get compliments. As a result, compliments can lead to increase their interest and persuade them to learn. To illustrate this, Burnett (2001) observes that based on a study, a majority of Australian students (91%) are keen on getting compliments for being intelligent and capable at their assignments (ability feedback). Moreover, it will be better if praise is concentrated on students' progress and tough study since they are likely to feel ready to concentrate on the improvement of their skills through understanding of new materials (Mueller & Dweck, 1998). In other words, giving praise for effort of students may lead them to exhibit good performance after making mistakes (Mueller & Dweck, 1998). For instance, Burnett (2001) shows that 84 % of the Australian students enjoyed getting praise for their hard work. It is clear then that students tend to get praise due to their ability and their effort as well. Consequently, they will feel motivated psychologically.

Praise can create a constructive classroom environment

In terms of creating the constructive classroom environment, actually giving praise to motivate students can be done not only by teachers but also by students. The effects of students to student praise are it can lead to strong social energy, create a new perspective of others, give students motivation to take part in class and be established in their memory. To begin with, if there is a problem discussed in a class and students find good solutions to solve the problem, teachers should encourage their students to praise each other. Interestingly, Kagan (2007) identifies that praise among classmates can lead to strong social energy which is good for learning environments. Praise can create a strong social energy because it enhances students' respect for one another and lead them to enjoy collaborating on group learning (Kagan, 2007). Moreover, by praising each other in classroom activities, students have a tendency to create a new perspective of others (Kagan, 2007). Therefore, they are educated to appreciate and respect others. Furthermore, students are more motivated to participate in class. In addition, they are ready to deal with the challenges given by teachers. Interestingly, McGaugh (2003) demonstrates that when students give praise to one another, praise could be established in their memory. Recent brain research observes that what students and their classmate peers do by congratulating each other can emerge emotion as a sign to the brain that an impressive moment is precious to be remembered. This means that teachers have made a transformation related to the classroom ethics. Indeed, a successful praise given in a classroom activity can expand positive relationships between educators and pupils. Burnett (2002) explains his research that a constructive classroom environment was created due to appreciation of teacher by giving appropriate praise and declining negative responses to students. Therefore, to build up a constructive classroom climate, praise is

useful to encourage student motivation and it could be delivered by teacher and students as well.

Conversely, opponents confuse the fact that praise might bring about rivalry among students (Conroy, et. al, 2009). This is because praise can show differences among students based on their ability levels (Conroy, et. al, 2009). This means that if a teacher gives praise by delivering messages that their classroom peer's project is better than theirs, it has a tendency to create problems among them. Nonetheless, to prevent this, it is wiser for teachers to recognize students' progress by comparing their current improvement to their last assignments (Willis, 2014). Also, it is more beneficial to give encouraging feedback on assignments rather than verbal praise in class. As a result, it will be helpful and effective because students recognize that they have made better progress than their last assignment or test, instead of contrasting with classmates.

Praise is beneficial to enhance students' academic and behavioural performance

Concerning praise as beneficial feedback to enhance students' academic and behavioural performance, Beaman & Wheldall, 2000; Flora, 2000; Sawka-Miller & Miller, 2007 indicate that praise is a powerful and free approach to improve students' academic and social behaviour, but it is commonly less used, not applied, and fails to be appreciated by teachers. For instance, in Indonesia, generally teachers are not accustomed to give compliment to motivate and to encourage students. Nevertheless, Chalk & Bizo, 2004; Simonsen et. al, 2008 explain that by studying, practicing how to praise successfully and learning how to expand and manage their rates of praise, teachers can encourage positive change in the social and academic engagement of students. For instance, Sutherland et. al (2000) surveyed the impact on intensifying the number of teacher's behaviour-specific praise. The result is when teachers use behaviour-specific praise and intensify implementing it, it influences students on-task behaviour and upgrade from about 50% to nearly 86%. However, in terms of inefficient praise, Bayat (2011) proposes that praise must be delivered honestly. To illustrate this, when praise is inessential and excessive, it will lose its efficacy. Students will also feel when it is a manipulation, if the praise is dishonest. Moreover, Maclellan (2005) finds that if students haven't done their project well, it is important to think carefully before giving praise. They might feel sensitive and misinterpret praise given as an expression of pity for their failure. Therefore, it is important for teachers to comprehend the effective ways and the right time to give a compliment. Interestingly, getting unexpected praise frequently can boost their mood up. When praise is delivered appropriately, students can become more motivated and interested in class activities.

Praise can decrease the amount of disruptive behaviour in the classroom

Lago-Delello (1998) describes that students who have behavioural issues experience a high rate of teacher instructions and complaints from their teachers due to their bad behaviour. In contrast, if teachers do not focus on this behaviour, students will attract teachers' attention by performing well (Lago-Delello, 1998). This shows that occasionally teachers do not back up good performance of students with positive input. This case can cause a tendency for students to express their unsocial behaviour which could lead them to do the negative things repeatedly, especially if they just get responses when they do something wrong (Moffat, 2011).

However, the compliment will become a trigger to motivate students to behave well. Since commonly students are looking for teachers' attention. In the classroom activities, unexpected praise has been demonstrated to enhance student involvement (Acker & O'leary, 1987; Sutherland, Wehby, & Copeland, 2000). Research has shown that a decline in the number of troublesome actions when teachers upgrade praise for ethical behaviour. Sutherland et. al (2002) conducted the research in an urban primary

school in the southeastern United States in a classroom for students with EBD (emotional and behavioral disorders). They assessed the achievement of basic education and training given to ten teachers about how to deliver effective praise and how to upgrade the rates of praise. The result of the education and training demonstrated that the achievement can be seen by showing that the greater the rates of efficient praise, the greater decline in rates of inappropriate behaviour of disruptive students. Stormont et. al (2007) also shows that students who had behavioural issues began to show improvement after teachers utilized precorrective sentences and built up their specific praise for students. This progress is significant because problem students started to behave better in class and educators involved in the research expanded their utilization of specific praise.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study uses a descriptive approach. It is expected that by using this approach, the context can be understood and described. Also beliefs, behaviors and meaning in context-specific settings can be explained.

The subject of this research was 25 students in Diploma IV in English at the Faculty of Languages and Literature, Universitas Negeri Makassar. This study uses self-administered questionnaire where the subjects filled in in a specific timeline.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Motivation is important to get the students attention in learning especially in an EFL classroom. In order to encourage motivation, one way is by giving praise which is seen as useful strategy. Interestingly, 92% of the respondents wanted to be praised, however only 76 % wanted to be praised quietly and 4 % wanted to be praised loudly in front of their peers.

Constructive Classroom Environment

The respondents are young adults in their fourth semester. Most of the students (96 %) agreed that lecturers should be praising them for completing assignments and achieving goals. A few noted that their effort put into work should also be appreciated.

This is written down by one of the respondent:

“Kadang ada dosen yang bisa menghargai dengan memberi pujian untuk yang rajin. Kalau saya lebih suka jika usaha yang saya lakukan juga diperhatikan karena kadang tugasnya itu cukup sulit dan butuh usaha untuk menyelesaikan. Kadang bukan cuma pujian dibutuhkan tapi juga feedback dan tidak semua dosen memberikan ini.”

“Sometimes there are lecturers that appreciate those that are diligent. I prefer if my hard work is identified because often the assignment is quite difficult and need hard work to complete it. Sometimes not only praise is needed but also feedback and not all lecturers provide this.”

This is in line with Kagan (2007) that praising classroom activities contribute to more participation in the classroom. This activity also lead to constructive classroom environment where students appreciate and respect others. While this situation, lecturer praising students for their ability, may cause rivalry, lecturer’s role hold an important role to prevent such things to happen. As stated by Willis (2014) it is better to recognize students based on their improvements.

Enhance Academic and Behavioural Performance

Results of the study also showed that praise is beneficial to enhance students' academic and behavioural performance. Praise should be given and used wisely or it will lose its efficacy. Most of the students (96 %) agrees that praise should not be given if a student did not complete their task well. This is also stated by one of the respondent: *"Pujian jangan diberikan terlalu sering. Apalagi kalau itu mahasiswa ternyata tidak selesai tugasnya. Kan lucu dan aneh."*

"Praise should be given too often. Especially when the students didn't finish their assignment. It'll be funny and strange."

Another student also wrote:

"Kadang bisa dibaca jika dosen ini memberikan pujian dengan tulus atau hanya sekedar lip-service."

"Sometimes we can read if the lecturer is being sincere in giving the praise or just a lip-service"

Another student also wrote:

"kalau tiba-tiba dipuji tanpa disangka gitu, ada perasaan mau berusaha lebih baik lagi di tugas berikutnya atau mata kuliah ini. Ada perasaan bersemangat dan percaya diri kalau saya bisa kerjakan dengan baik."

"When being praised unexpectedly, there is a feeling to try harder on the next task or other courses. I feel motivated and confident that I can do well."

The students' responses goes in line with Bayat (2011) that stated the importance of giving honest praise in order for students not feeling any manipulation. The increased academic engagement is a positive influence of praise. This is supported by Sutherland et al (2000) that found that on-task behaviour increased to nearly 86% after the teacher applied behaviour-specific praise.

Good Psychological Effects

Careful consideration should be taken into account when giving praise. A number of students (80%) agrees that a few lecturers did get personal in terms of giving time to get to know the students well and often interact with them outside class. Therefore, it is assumed that because of the interaction, lecturer notice students and praised them and students found this helpful. One student wrote:

"Beberapa dosen berusaha mengenal kita lebih dekat. Saya termasuk introvert dan dengan sering interaksi dengan dosen, bahkan dalam beberapa kesempatan bisa menceritakan masalah kuliah dan pribadi, saya menjadi lebih percaya diri. Jika diberikan pujian dikelas, saya yakin ada hubungannya karena saya sering berinteraksi dengan dosen tersebut."

"A few lecturers tried to know us well. I am an introvert and by interacting occasionally with a lecturer, and even in some opportunities I can tell about my college and personal problems, I became a bit more confident. If given praise in class, I believe there is a correlation with the interactions I made with that particular lecturer."

Another wrote:

"Saya pikir masalah mau dekat dengan dosen atau tidak tidak berpengaruh. Dosen harus melakukan tugasnya dan memperlakukan mahasiswa dengan sama dan rata."

“I think being close or not with a lecturer does not influence anything. The lecturer had to do their job and treat their students the same and fair.”

While some studies suggest negative impact of praise such as Willis (2014) that put forward that students may make the praise as a burden and became uncomfortable. However, Mueller and Dweck (1996); Briggs (1970); and Burnett (2001) found otherwise. They assert that if praise focused on students' progress, there will be improvement in their academic performance.

Decrease Disruptive Behavior

This fourth item is also related with the previous factors. Compliment may become a trigger for students to behave well. This is shown by Acker and O'leary (1987) that unexpected praise has shown to enhance students' involvement in the classroom. This is also stated by one of the respondent:

“Kalau sudah dipuji, berarti dosen mengenal kita. Tentunya segan untuk berbuat yang kurang baik. Saya juga ingin hasil kuliah saya baik.”

“When you have been praised, it means that the lecturer knew us. I will feel reluctantly to do something bad. I want to do well in my course.”

CONCLUSION

To summarize, this study has highlighted the importance of giving praise to students based on four main reasons namely praise can give good psychological effects, praise can increase the constructive classroom environment, praise is beneficial to enhance students' academic and behavioural performance and praise can decrease the amounts of disruptive behaviour in the classroom. Furthermore, it has been discussed that students will feel motivated if they are complimented. Also, if the teachers appreciate their hard work in assignments, they will feel motivated psychologically. Moreover, researchers demonstrate that praise among classmates enhances strong social bonds because students begin to respect one another. As a result, it will create an enjoyable classroom environment. Praise is a powerful and free approach to improve students' academic and social behaviour. Indeed, when teachers use behaviour-specific praise, students will demonstrate good behaviour and their academic performance can increase. In addition, when the rates of efficient praise are increased, it will lead to a decrease in the amount of inappropriate behaviour of disruptive students. Therefore, realizing that praise is fundamental to encourage motivation of students when it is expressed in a good way, teachers have to learn, train and evaluate themselves about how to express their feeling appropriately through praise. They can help students to be better individuals for their future.

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