

THE IMPACT OF REWARDS AND PUNISHMENT IN LEARNING ENGLISH AS SECOND LANGUAGE: A CASE STUDY

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ABSTRACT

Background: This study explores the impact of rewards and punishment on English language learners' motivation, engagement, and language proficiency. Given students' diverse abilities and backgrounds, the research evaluates how these pedagogical strategies influence learning outcomes in a language learning context.

Methods: Employing a case study approach within a calligraphy class, data were collected through classroom observations, surveys, and questionnaires. This methodology facilitated a detailed assessment of the immediate and extended effects of rewards (such as verbal praise, certificates, and privileges) and punishments (including extra assignments and exclusion from activities).

Results: The findings reveal that rewards significantly enhance student motivation and engagement, improving the educational experience. Conversely, punishments show mixed effects, underlining the need for a carefully balanced approach. The study emphasizes the critical need to align disciplinary measures with students' emotional well-being and cultural backgrounds to ensure these strategies are fair and effective.

Conclusions: The results advocate for developing educational programs that optimize rewards and minimize punitive measures' detrimental impacts. Such programs should foster a positive and supportive learning environment conducive to language acquisition. However, the study also cautions educators about the potential pitfalls of over-reliance on these strategies, recommending a reasonable and reflective application to avoid adverse outcomes.

BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

In my calligraphy class, students hail from diverse backgrounds, displaying a range of personalities and varying levels of ability. While some students are lively and occasionally mischievous, others tend to be reserved and may hesitate to engage or ask questions. Some quickly master the artistry and techniques of calligraphy, showing strong aptitude, whereas others may struggle with basic concepts and require additional time and guidance to progress.

As an educator, I have found that a balanced approach of rewards and punishments can significantly enhance student learning outcomes. Rewards often boost enthusiasm and motivation, encouraging students to persevere, set goals, and enhance their skills. Conversely, punishments play a crucial role in reinforcing behavioral norms and maintaining classroom order, which is essential for a conducive learning environment. Punishments also provide opportunities for students to learn from their mistakes, fostering the development of self-discipline.

This dual strategy not only helps in managing classroom discipline but also supports an efficient teaching process. The insights from this case study in my teaching practice have led to several conclusions about the effectiveness of combining rewards and punishments in educational settings. I hope these findings can be beneficial to fellow educators in enhancing student engagement and success.

This research focuses on how these strategies affect English language learners' motivation, engagement, and language proficiency. Using a case study approach, we gather data from learners who experience rewards and punishments during their language education. The outcomes provide valuable insights into the dynamics of using these motivational tools in language learning, thereby aiding educators in designing more effective programs. Additionally, the impact of rewards and punishments on learning English as a second language is explored through behavioral psychology and motivation theory, revealing the complex interplay between positive and negative reinforcement and their effects on language acquisition.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This literature review delves into the study of rewards and punishment in the context of learning English as a Second Language (ESL), exploring how these strategies impact students' learning experiences and outcomes.

Impact on Motivation: The review investigates how rewards and punishment influence students' intrinsic and extrinsic motivation to learn English. Research suggests that while rewards can temporarily boost motivation, their effects may diminish over time, and punishment can sometimes undermine intrinsic motivation. This section explores the balance between rewarding effort and achievement versus the potential demotivating effects of punitive measures (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Skinner, 1957).

Reward and Punishment in Classroom Teaching: Rewards motivate students and enhance their learning experience. Transactional rewards, such as grades or tangible prizes, can incentivize students to achieve academic goals. Relational rewards, such as verbal praise or recognition, can also impact students' motivation and self-esteem (Deci et al., 1999; Kasser & Ryan, 1999). Educators must balance both reward types for effective classroom management and long-term engagement.

Academic Performance and Language Proficiency: The review assesses studies measuring the direct effects of rewards and punishments on students' educational outcomes and language skills in ESL settings. While rewards can enhance immediate performance, they may not contribute to long-term retention of language skills. Punishment is generally seen as less effective and can be detrimental to student confidence and participation (Kohn, 1993; Bandura, 1977).

Psychological and Emotional Impact: This section explores the psychological and emotional consequences of using rewards and punishments on ESL learners. While rewards can create positive emotions and enhance commitment to language study, they can also lead to anxiety and competition. Punishments can cause fear, anxiety, and a decrease in self-esteem, inhibiting the learning process (Ryan & Deci, 2000; Krashen, 1982).

Practical Implementation in ESL Classrooms: The review analyzes how rewards and punishments are implemented practically in ESL classrooms, considering

cultural sensitivities and educational norms. Practical implications include establishing clear criteria for rewards and consistent, fair application of disciplinary actions (Harmer, 2007).

By examining these areas, this review provides a comprehensive overview of the role of rewards and punishments in ESL education, highlighting the need for further research and improved practices for better educational outcomes.

Research Methodology

1. Population and Sample

The study was conducted at St. Paul University Manila, targeting two distinct groups within the university: students and faculty members. A purposive sampling method was employed to select participants, consisting of 10 students and 10 faculty members. Additionally, an in-depth interview was conducted with a Chinese teacher to provide qualitative insights into the topic.

2. Instrument

The primary instrument used for data collection was a paper-based questionnaire. The questionnaire included ten statements designed to gauge the opinions of students and faculty regarding the impact of rewards and punishment in learning English as a second language (ESL). Respondents were asked to indicate their level of agreement with each statement using a Likert scale, ranging from "Strongly Agree" to "Strongly Disagree."

3. Data Collection

Data collection took place over one week, from November 6 to November 12, 2023. Participants were given the paper questionnaires and asked to complete them at their convenience. The responses were then collected and recorded for analysis. In addition, on-site audits of courses, both in person and online, were conducted to observe how educators employ punishment and how students respond to these motivators in real educational settings. An interview with a Chinese teacher complemented this observational data to gather in-depth qualitative insights.

4. Data Analysis

The data were presented and analyzed using both quantitative and qualitative methods. Quantitative data from the questionnaires were analyzed using descriptive statistics, calculating each statement's mean and standard deviation. The results were interpreted qualitatively to understand the general trends in opinions among students and faculty members.

Qualitative data from classroom observations and the interview with the Chinese teacher were transcribed and analyzed thematically to identify key themes and insights related to the impact of rewards and punishment on ESL learning. This mixed-method approach provided a robust analysis, combining numerical data with qualitative context to enhance the validity and reliability of the findings.

RESULTS

I. Opinion Towards the Reward and Punishment

The finding in Table 1 revealed the following

1.1 Positive Impact of Rewards and Balanced Approach.

The overwhelming agreement among students and faculty highlights the recognized importance of rewards in motivating students. Strong support for a balanced approach incorporating rewards and punishments for effective language education and classroom management exists. This suggests that while rewards are crucial, a mix of strategies is believed to be most effective for motivation and classroom management.

1.2 Negative Impact and Avoidance of Punishment

There is a clear consensus against using punishment as a motivational tool, with significant concern about its detrimental effects on students' emotional well-being. Both students and faculty largely agree that punishment should be minimized, indicating a preference for more positive and supportive disciplinary strategies. Consistent punitive measures are generally not supported in maintaining classroom discipline.

1.3 Cultural Influence and Motivation Types

There is mixed opinion on the impact of extrinsic motivators on

intrinsic motivation, indicating that while many recognize the potential downsides, a significant number still see value in extrinsic rewards. Strong disagreement exists with the notion that cultural backgrounds do not influence how students respond to rewards and punishment, suggesting that cultural factors are crucial in designing effective motivational strategies. The preference for extrinsic rewards over intrinsic motivation is not universally accepted, highlighting the need for a balanced approach that considers both types of motivation.

1.4 Impact on Self-Esteem and Confidence

There is a strong consensus that rewards and punishment significantly impact students' self-esteem and confidence. This underscores the importance of carefully considering motivational strategies' emotional and psychological effects in educational settings.

II. Reward and Punishment Strategies.

The findings from the interviews and observations shed light on the methods for reward and punishment strategies, as follows.

2.1 Reward Strategies

2.1.1 Verbal Praise and Encouragement: Teachers can provide verbal recognition and praise for students' efforts and achievements in English language learning.

2.1.2 Stickers and Tokens: Especially effective with younger learners, teachers can use stickers, tokens, or stamps as tangible rewards. These items can be collected and exchanged for small prizes or privileges, creating a sense of accomplishment and motivation.

2.1.3 Certificates and Awards: Teachers can present certificates or awards to students who excel in English language studies. These certificates can recognize achievements such as improved language skills, outstanding performance, or participation in language-related activities.

2.1.4 Extra Privileges or Responsibilities: Teachers can reward students with extra privileges or responsibilities. For example, students who excel in English may be given leadership roles in class, such as assisting the teacher or leading language-related activities.

2.2 Punishment Strategies

2.2.1 Symbolic punishment: Based on the data of the observation, the teacher gives symbolic punishment to the students with a total amount of 3. The teacher provides symbolic punishment to the students in the form of decreasing students' points or scores.

2.2.2 Extra Assignments or Homework: Teachers can assign additional language-related tasks or homework to students who fail to complete their regular assignments or exhibit disruptive behavior. This additional work can result from not adhering to classroom expectations.

2.2.3 Loss of Participation or Group Activities: Students who consistently disrupt the class or engage in negative behavior may be excluded from group activities or discussions. This can serve as a punishment while encouraging students to reflect on their actions.

2.2.4 Parent-Teacher Communication: In more severe cases, teachers may contact parents or guardians to discuss a student's behavior and the need for corrective measures. Open communication with parents can be an effective way to address ongoing behavioral issues.

Analysis of the questionnaire reveals a strong preference for positive reinforcement and balanced motivational strategies that consider both rewards and punishments. There is considerable concern about the negative impacts of punishment, particularly on emotional well-being. Cultural factors are recognized as necessary in how students respond to motivational strategies, and there is a nuanced view of the balance between extrinsic and intrinsic motivation. Effective classroom management requires a combination of approaches, strongly emphasizing supporting students' self-esteem and confidence.

Table 1

Opinions of Students and Teachers toward the Impact of Rewards and Punishment in Learning English as a Second Language

Statements	Group	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly Disagree		mean	SD	Level
		n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%			
1. Rewards always have a positive impact on students' motivation in learning English as a second language.	Student	4	40.0	5	50.0	1	10.0	0	0.0	3.3	0.65	A
	Faculty	7	70.0	3	30.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	3.7	0.46	SA
	Total	11	55.0	8	40.0	1	0.50	0	0.0	3.5	0.57	A
2. Punishment should be avoided entirely as a motivational tool in language learning.	Student	5	50.0	2	20.0	2	20.0	1	10.0	3.1	1.10	A
	Faculty	1	10.0	6	60.0	3	30.0	0	0.0	2.8	0.78	A
	Total	6	30.0	8	40.0	5	20.5	1	0.5	2.95	0.94	A
3. Extrinsic motivators, such as rewards, may lead to a decrease in intrinsic motivation for language learning.	Student	1	10.0	4	40.0	4	40.0	1	10.0	2.5	0.85	A
	Faculty	0	0.0	4	40.0	5	50.0	1	10.0	2.6	0.70	A
	Total	1	0.5	8	40.0	9	90.0	2	10.0	2.55	0.77	A
4. Using punishment in ESL classrooms can have detrimental effects on students' emotional well-being.	Student	5	50.0	5	50.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	3.5	0.50	SA
	Faculty	1	10.0	9	90.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	3.10	0.30	A
	Total	6	30.0	14	70.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	3.3	0.40	A

Table 1

Opinions of Students and Teachers toward the Impact of Rewards and Punishment in Learning English as a Second Language (Contd.)

Statements	Group	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly Disagree		mean	SD	Level
		n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%			
5. A balanced approach to rewards and punishment is essential for effective language education.	Student	7	70.0	2	20.0	1	10.0	0	0.0	3.6	0.64	SA
	Faculty	9	90.0	1	10.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	3.9	0.03	SA
	Total	16	80.0	3	15.0	1	0.5	0	0.0	3.75	0.49	SA
6. Students' cultural backgrounds have no influence on how they respond to rewards and punishment.	Student	1	10.0	1	10.0	5	50.0	3	30.0	2.0	0.82	DA
	Faculty	1	10.0	0	0.0	8	80.0	1	10.0	2.1	0.30	DA
	Total	2	10.0	1	0.5	13	60.5	4	20.0	2.05	0.56	DA
7. Extrinsic motivators, such as rewards, are always more effective than intrinsic motivation in language learning.	Student	2	20.0	6	60.0	2	20.0	0	0.0	3.0	0.63	A
	Faculty	0	0.0	6	60.0	3	30.0	1	10.0	2.6	0.84	A
	Total	2	10.0	12	60.0	5	50.0	1	10.0	2.8	0.73	A
8. Punishment should be employed consistently for all students to maintain discipline in the classroom.	Student	2	20.0	1	10.0	4	40.0	3	30.0	2.2	1.05	D
	Faculty	0	0.0	2	20.0	6	60.0	2	20.0	2.2	0.84	D
	Total	2	10.0	3	15.5	10	50.0	5	20.5	2.2	0.94	D

Table 1

Opinions of Students and Teachers toward the Impact of Rewards and Punishment in Learning English as a Second Language

Statements	Group	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly Disagree		mean	SD	Level
		n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%			
9. Rewards and punishment can impact students' self-esteem and confidence in language learning.	Student	4	40.0	6	60.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	3.4	0.48	A
	Faculty	6	60.0	4	40.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	3.6	0.48	SA
	Total	10	50.0	10	50.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	3.5	0.48	SA
10. Effective classroom management requires a combination of rewards and punishment.	Student	3	30.0	7	70.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	3.3	0.48	A
	Faculty	4	40.0	6	60.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	3.4	0.52	A
	Total	7	30.5	13	60.5	0	0.0	0	0.0	3.35	0.50	A

Note: 1.0 to 1.49: Strongly Disagree (SD); 1.5 to 2.49: Disagree (D); 2.5 to 3.49: Agree (A); 3.5 to 4.0: Strongly Agree (SA)

Discussion

The study's findings illuminate the intricate dynamics of rewards and punishments in ESL learning settings, revealing a solid consensus among students and faculty on the positive impact of rewards on student motivation, consistent with prior research (Deci et al., 1999). This underscores the effectiveness of rewards in enhancing motivation and engagement. Moreover, the endorsement of a balanced approach, integrating both rewards and punishments, demonstrates an appreciation of motivation and behavior management's multifaceted nature. While rewards can serve as potent motivators, they may not always suffice on their own; punishments can effectively deter undesirable behavior and reinforce positive learning habits (Skinner, 1953).

The study also uncovers a nuanced understanding of how cultural influences shape motivation and behavior. Disagreements regarding the impact of extrinsic motivators on intrinsic motivation suggest an awareness of how individuals from different cultural backgrounds may respond diversely to motivational strategies. This underscores the need to tailor strategies to fit diverse cultural contexts, emphasizing the importance of cultural considerations in designing effective motivational strategies for multicultural learning environments (Dörnyei, 2005; Ushioda & Dörnyei, 2017).

The study's findings regarding rewards and punishments' impact on self-esteem and confidence emphasize the importance of educators carefully considering the psychological and emotional effects of their disciplinary practices. While rewards can bolster students' confidence and self-esteem, punishments can potentially damage their self-perception and motivation (Deci et al., 2001).

Dörnyei's research on motivation in second language learning (Dörnyei, 1998) is pivotal in discussing reward and punishment strategies. It stresses the necessity of a balanced approach that incorporates both intrinsic and extrinsic motivators (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Strategies such as verbal praise and encouragement, stickers and tokens, certificates and awards, and extra privileges or responsibilities effectively motivate students in ESL environments. However, it's vital to acknowledge that what is effective for one cultural group may not be as effective for another, highlighting the importance of adapting strategies to suit diverse cultural contexts (Dörnyei, 2005).

Various psychological theories and research are crucial in discussing reward and punishment strategies in ESL environments. Allport's work on personality growth patterns (Allport, 1961) provides insights into how individuals develop and respond to different motivational strategies. Bandura's social learning theory (Bandura, 1977) is relevant as it underscores the role of observation and modeling in learning behavior, suggesting that others' behavior, including teachers, may influence students.

Brophy's research synthesis on motivating students to learn (Brophy, 1988) offers valuable insights into effective motivational techniques, emphasizing the importance of creating a supportive and challenging environment, providing opportunities for success, and encouraging intrinsic motivation through meaningful tasks. These findings align with the study's emphasis on the positive impact of rewards on student motivation and the need for a balanced approach that considers both rewards and punishments in promoting desirable behavior and learning habits.

Punishment strategies, such as symbolic punishment, extra assignments or homework, loss of participation or group activities, and parent-teacher communication, should be used judiciously and alongside positive reinforcement. Skinner's behaviorism theory (Skinner, 1953) supports the notion that punishments should be sparingly and constructively applied to deter undesirable behavior and reinforce positive learning habits. This balanced approach aligns with the study's findings, emphasizing the importance of considering cultural factors in designing effective motivational strategies for multicultural learning environments (Dörnyei, 2007).

The findings of this study shed light on the complex dynamics surrounding the use of rewards and punishment in ESL learning environments. The results indicate a strong consensus among students and faculty regarding the positive impact of rewards on student motivation. This aligns with previous research highlighting the effectiveness of rewards in enhancing motivation and engagement in learning contexts (Deci et al., 1999).

Furthermore, the support for a balanced approach, incorporating both rewards and punishments, reflects an understanding of the multifaceted nature of motivation and behavior management. While rewards can be powerful motivators, they may not

always be sufficient on their own. Punishment can deter undesirable behavior and reinforce positive learning habits (Skinner, 1953; Skinner, 1954).

The study also reveals a nuanced understanding of cultural influences on motivation and behavior. The disagreement regarding the impact of extrinsic motivators on intrinsic motivation suggests a recognition of the diverse ways in which individuals may respond to different motivational strategies based on their cultural backgrounds. This underscores the importance of considering cultural factors in designing effective motivational strategies in multicultural learning environments (Dörnyei, 2005; Ushioda & Dörnyei, 2017).

The findings related to the impact of rewards and punishment on self-esteem and confidence highlight the need for educators to carefully consider the psychological and emotional effects of their disciplinary practices. While rewards can boost students' confidence and self-esteem, punishments can have the opposite effect, potentially damaging students' self-perception and motivation (Deci et al., 2001).

In discussing reward and punishment strategies, it's essential to consider Dörnyei's work on motivation in second language learning (Dörnyei, 1998). His research emphasizes the need for a balanced approach that considers both intrinsic and extrinsic motivators (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Verbal praise and encouragement, stickers and tokens, certificates and awards, and extra privileges or responsibilities are all effective ways to motivate students in ESL learning environments. However, it's crucial to remember that what works for one cultural group may not work for another, highlighting the importance of tailoring strategies to fit diverse cultural contexts (Dörnyei, 2005).

In discussing reward and punishment strategies in ESL learning environments, it's important to consider various psychological theories and research. Allport's work on the pattern of personality growth (Allport, 1961) provides insights into how individuals develop and respond to different motivational strategies. Bandura's social learning theory (Bandura, 1977) is also relevant, as it emphasizes the role of observation and modeling in learning behavior, suggesting that students may be influenced by the behavior and reactions of others, including teachers.

On the other hand, punishment strategies such as symbolic punishment, extra assignments or homework, loss of participation or group activities, and parent-teacher communication should be used judiciously and in conjunction with positive reinforcement. Skinner's work on behaviorism (Skinner, 1953) supports the idea that punishments should be applied sparingly and constructively to deter undesirable behavior and reinforce positive learning habits. This balanced approach aligns with the findings of the study, which emphasize the importance of considering cultural factors in designing effective motivational strategies in multicultural learning environments (Dörnyei, 2007).

The study by Fischer, Malycha, and Schafmann (2019) explores how intrinsic motivation and synergistic extrinsic motivators influence creativity and innovation. They likely investigate how the satisfaction of learning and mastering new skills, as intrinsic motivators, can enhance creativity and innovation. This aligns with the discussion on motivation strategies in ESL learning environments, which emphasizes creating a supportive and challenging environment to foster intrinsic motivation. Fischer et al.'s consideration of synergistic extrinsic motivators, such as rewards and recognition, also resonates with the discussion's focus on the positive impact of rewards on student motivation. Both discussions underscore the importance of motivational strategies that encourage creativity and innovation in educational contexts.

SUGGESTIONS

1. Enhance Reward Systems by implementing diverse reward strategies and recognizing consistent efforts. Utilize a variety of rewards such as verbal praise, certificates, extra privileges, and tangible rewards like stickers and tokens to keep students motivated. Regularly acknowledge not just achievements but also consistent efforts and improvements, fostering a positive and motivating classroom environment.

2. Judicious Use of Punishment. To create a positive disciplinary approach, minimize punitive measures and emphasize restorative practices. Punishment should be used sparingly and constructively, with restorative practices encouraging students to reflect and take responsibility, fostering inclusivity and supportiveness in the learning environment.

3. Balance Extrinsic and Intrinsic Motivation. To boost motivation, include intrinsic motivation strategies like offering choices and fostering autonomy. Ensure extrinsic rewards are tied to meaningful activities, not overshadowing the learning process.

4. Support Emotional Well-being. To cultivate a safe learning environment, prioritize positive reinforcement and open communication. Build a classroom atmosphere where students feel supported, providing emotional support as needed, and celebrate their positive behavior and achievements to enhance their self-esteem and confidence.

5. Adopt a Balanced Approach. Create clear, fair rewards and punishment policies involving students and faculty. Provide teachers with professional development on effective motivational strategies, including cultural sensitivity.

6. Cultural Sensitivity. To ensure effective motivational strategies, tailor approaches to fit diverse cultural backgrounds. Engage with families and communities to understand their perspectives, aligning school practices with cultural expectations.

By implementing these suggestions, educators can create a more effective and supportive learning environment that motivates students while considering their emotional and cultural needs.

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