

Motivating EFL Students by Using Tangible Reinforcers

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***Abstract:** Motivation plays a fundamental role in the process of learning a foreign language. It connects students' willingness to engage in lesson and learning activities and the reasons for doing so. Students motivation can come from the inside (intrinsic motivation) and or from the outside (extrinsic motivation). Those students who own intrinsic motivation feel that learning is enjoyable. However, in fact, many EFL students do not have motivation towards learning. Moreover, they think that English is difficult to be learnt. Students feel depressed when they are not able to do such task, therefore teachers need to give them such stimulus to engage them towards learning (extrinsic motivation). Such stimulus can be in the form of tangible reinforcers which are effective to attract students motivation. Moreover, due to the tangible reinforcers, the students behavior slowly changes to be more active in participating the teaching. This paper will be divided into sub topics dealing with introduction, the related literature review, the procedures of the activity and the expected results.*

***Keywords:** motivation, EFL students, tangible reinforcers*

INTRODUCTION

Motivation plays a vital role in the process of learning a foreign language. Brophy (2004:2) claims that motivation is influenced by personal feelings and focused on the reasons behind the choices and action. It means that motivation connects students' willingness to engage in lesson and learning activities and reasons for doing so. In addition, Saeed and Zynger (2012:253) state that in the classroom setting, student motivation refers to the degree a student's attempts into and focus on learning in order to attain successful outcomes. Therefore, motivation is needed by students to keep them focus on learning in order to get successful results.

However, many students are not consciously aware of their motives behind their actions. Sometimes students do not have exact reasons and purposes why they are participating in the class. They just do what they have to. As Saaed and Zynger (2012:254) say that each students is not always intrinsically motivated towards particular tasks. Thus, because they do not have strong motivation, students may be lazy participating the learning activities which can influence on their learning results.

For this problem teachers can give students positive reinforcement to arouse their motivation. Teachers can give tangible reinforcers as it is powerful to motivate students in participating the language learning. Lavay et al (2006:78) state that tangible reinforcers are consumable or material objects an individual wants, such as food, stickers, medals, or certificates used as consequences to increase the desired behavior. Therefore, this paper will highlight tangible reinforcers as the stimulus to motivate students' behavior towards learning.

STUDENTS MOTIVATION IN EFL CLASS

Every person needs to have motivation in order to achieve their goals. According to Ormrod (2012:426), motivation is an internal state that generates us to action, pushes us in certain directions, and keeps us engaged in certain activities. Especially for students, there are many aspects in school that they have to accomplish, therefore students' motivation is needed

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to keep them focused. Brophy (2004:4) says that in the classroom context, the concept of student motivation is used to explain the degree to which students invest attention and efforts in various pursuits, which may or may not be the ones desired by their teachers.

However, each student may bring different motivation with them to the classroom. It can be in the form of intrinsic and or extrinsic motivation. According to Ormrod (2012:428), extrinsic motivation occurs when the source motivation comes from the outside of the individual or the task being performed. For example, students want to learn English because in order to fulfill or to please their parents, sometimes students want to get a good score to get reward, or sometimes students complete the assignment simply because they do not want to get punished.

In contrast, intrinsic motivation occurs when the source motivation lies within the individual and task because the person thinks the task is enjoyable and worthwhile (Ormrod, 2012:428). For example, some students want to learn English because they think English is interesting and they like to get to know new knowledge because of it. It means that when students have the intrinsic motivation, they have the purpose and beliefs of the language learning. Many behaviorists agree that intrinsic is powerful to motivated students to engage in the teaching learning process because they pursue a task by their own initiative and experience the pleasure of learning.

Unfortunately, even though motivation is valuable in language learning, in fact, not all students have it. In fact, many EFL students actually are difficult to find motivation to learn English. Bahous (2011:33) argues that motivating EFL students to develop the target language is difficult and quite complex since in many cases students find difficulties in learning English and they are quite often demotivated to learn. Nevertheless, teachers should not be worry when their students do not have the motivation because teachers cannot ask students to be intrinsically motivated. Instead, teachers should be able to arouse students' motivation extrinsically with effective strategies. To support this, Ormrod (2012:457) says that extrinsic motivation can promote learning and increase students' sense competence and self-determination. Teachers can give such tangible reinforcers that can extrinsically motivate students to learn the language. In other words, if students do not own intrinsic motivation to learn, then it is more suitable for teachers to activate students motivation extrinsically especially by using tangible reinforcers, in which this paper is focused on.

TANGIBLE REINFORCERS AS POSITIVE REINFORCEMENT

In the classroom context, teachers want their students to be motivated in participating teaching learning process therefore they give students something that can attract them to do such behavior. Thus, this kind of action is called reinforcement. According to Ormrod (2012:51), reinforcement is the act of following a response with a stimulus that enhances the frequency of a response it follows. In addition, Lavay et al (2004:74) define positive reinforcement as offering something valued as a result of a desired behavior which consequently can increase the frequency of that behavior.

In the implementation of positive reinforcement, teachers can give some forms of reinforcers. Ormrod (2012:55) gives five types of positive reinforcers which are as follows.

1. *Tangible reinforcer* is an actual object which can be highly effective in changing behavior. Food and toy are the example of tangible reinforcers.

2. *Social reinforcer* is a gesture or sign that someone gives to another to communicate positive regard, such as smile, thumbs up, and applause.
3. *Activity reinforcer* is a chance to engage in a favorite activity. It means that students can do their favorite activity after they accomplish their task. For example, the students can go home earlier if they finish doing their task.
4. *Positive feedback* is certainly to bring about the behavior changes without looking whether or not students have done good work in accomplishing the task.
5. *Intrinsic reinforcer* is an internal good feeling of someone has after completing the task, such as feeling successful after solving a difficult puzzle.

The focus of this paper is the use tangible reinforcers. The teacher gives the students star stickers and snacks as the tangible reinforcers when the students are able to complete the task well. Such rewards are used because according to Brophy (2004:258), the effects of rewards might be considered with respect to immediate task effort or performance, changes in attitudes toward the task, or changes in subsequent motivation to perform the task voluntarily when future opportunities arise.

IMPLEMENTING TANGIBLE REINFORCES TO MOTIVATE EFL STUDENTS

Tangible reinforcers can effectively attract students' motivation towards learning. As the reinforcers are appealing for students, they use the opportunity to participate in the teaching learning process and compete with each other in order to get such rewards. In this case, the tangible reinforcers are in the form of rewards particularly star stickers and snacks. To implement the tangible reinforcers in the class, teacher uses the following steps.

Firstly, teacher gives each student a name card and a pin. The name card is round with fifteen centimeters of diameter. Students are asked to write down their name on the name card with big sized font or big enough to be seen by the teacher from in front of the classroom (see picture 1).



Picture 1. The sample of a student name card and star stickers as the rewards.

Secondly, teacher tells the students about the rules of the rewards giving which are; (1) students raise their hands before answering the question; (2) if students are able to complete the requested task very well or answer the questions from the teacher correctly, they

will get the star sticker and stick it to their name card (see picture 1); (3) students collect the star sticker. Then when they have collected five stickers, teacher will give them a snack.

Thirdly, the teacher should limit the reward giving depends on the activity in each meeting. For example, when it is a group activity, the teacher gives the star sticker only for the best group. Or, if it is individual activity, the teacher can give five stars for five students who got best scores. By doing this limitation, it makes the students are motivated to do better job whenever there is opportunity for them.

As conclusion, tangible reinforcement can be done continuously for a month. It is done in such period of time in order to make students get used to being active in the class. Then, by giving tangible reinforcers, the teacher emerges students' competition in the classroom in positive way. The students try to do the task as well as possible in order to get the rewards. However, these reinforcers cannot be done forever. At a certain point, the teacher should stop the treatment because it makes students bored. Besides, it takes time for the teacher because the teacher has to prepare the rewards in advance.

CONCLUSION

By using tangible reinforces in the teaching learning process, students behavior continuously change. Students are likely more active and motivated towards the learning. The star stickers and snacks attract students so that they compete with each other in order to get such rewards. This means that the tangible reinforcers successfully bring out the extrinsic motivation from the students. Then as the treatment goes on, the students are get used to actively participate in the teaching learning process. In addition, getting the rewards can make students proud of themselves and satisfied with their learning improvement. Therefore, it is possible if the students keep on motivating themselves to engage in the teaching learning process even though the teacher stops giving the rewards. In other words, by using the tangible reinforcement, teacher can transform students from demotivated into extrinsically motivated then intrinsically motivated.

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