EFL classrooms in the Indonesian context: How do eleventh-grade students perceive rewards in EFL instruction?

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ABSTRACT  
Perception is a cognitive process when a person interacts with their surroundings while accepting information from the brain. Students perceive of rewards during English as a foreign language instruction is important because perception can affect their learning ability. However, the eleventh-grade students perceive of rewards in EFL instruction was still unclear, this research aimed to investigate the perception of rewards among eleventh-grade students in a vocational high school in EFL instruction. The approach of this research was quantitative. With the help of Microsoft excel, eighty-one students in the eleventh grade were chosen randomly to answer the questionnaire, and 10% of them were chosen to be interviewed. A questionnaire and interview were employed to get the data about the eleventh-grade student’s perceptions of rewards in EFL instruction. Then, the interview data were analyzed using Miles and Huberman data analysis, which consists of data condensation, data display, conclusion, and verification. Meanwhile, the data collected through a questionnaire was analyzed using descriptive statistics. The results showed that rewards in EFL instruction could increase students’ motivation in learning as well as make them happy and excited during the learning process. Besides that, students picked words of praise as the reward that could make them happy and followed by any tangible rewards the teachers gave. Several suggestions for future research follow the findings of this study.

KEYWORDS  
Students’ perception; Rewards; EFL instruction

Introduction  
In the context of education, rewards have been demonstrated to be effective in motivating students to study and ensuring that they behave responsibly while learning (Jones & Jones, 1986; Nugroho, 2006; Putri & Refnaldi, 2020). In addition to denoting something given to increase one’s motivation to achieve something, reward also refers to making students feel joyful, thrilled, willing, and desirous (Purwanto, 2011). Rewarding students is vital for nurturing their desire to study, which is one of the most effective strategies and is commonly used by educators in educational settings (Winkel, 1989). Despite the fact that rewards play an important role in educational settings, it is unclear how students perceive this, particularly in English as a foreign language (EFL) classroom. According to the literature, perception is the behavior of the human brain in receiving information from the environment through the identification, organization, and generation of stimuli in conjunction with the brain’s continuous activity (Slameto, 2010). Students' perceptions of the taught information are vital to the learning process because they have the power to alter students' expectations, motivations, and attitudes toward language acquisition (Richards et al., 1994). In other words, students who have a poor attitude of a subject will lack motivation to learn it. Using rewards (and punishments) in the classroom could push students to perform better.

It is widely accepted that using rewards to motivate students to participate in academic activities is effective. Some studies also show that when students receive rewards for finishing a task, their intrinsic motivation to complete the assignment rises; but, when they stop receiving rewards, it is asserted that their intrinsic motivation to finish the task falls and even deteriorates (Matera, 2009). Moreover, a method for suitably rewarding students in the classroom can also be developed by teachers to increase their motivation and behavior. Thus, rewards have a favorable impact on students’ learning behavior (Jabeen et al., 2015; Putri & Refnaldi, 2020; Schaffner, 1985). As clearly stated by Akramah, (2021) and Noermanzah & Syafryadin, (2020), rewards can increase students’ motivation in learning as well as improve their learning outcomes in the EFL learning as they can have better mastery of language skills. Besides, the findings also show that rewards make students become more active and responsible in their studies. This indicates that rewards have a variety of effects (Ilegbusi, 2013).

Studies have shown that rewards have a favorable impact on students’ learning in educational settings. However, little is known about the perceptions of rewards among students learning EFL in vocational high schools.
Therefore, the goal of this study was to ascertain how students in the eleventh grade at a vocational high school in the Indonesian context who were taking EFL classes perceived rewards.

**Literature review**

EFL, defined by Harmer (2001) refers to situations in which students were learning English in order to communicate with other English speakers or users anywhere in the world — for example, when they were tourist or conducting business. EFL is taught in schools, and it is typically widely taught, but it does not play an important role in the learner’s national or social life (Broughton et al., 2002). In Indonesia, English is a foreign language. Although it is not used for daily communication, it is one of the subjects taught in schools.

As was previously stated, rewards play an important role in educational contexts, including when learning EFL. Sidin (2021) asserts that rewards serve as a strategy for boosting student’s interest and motivation in their studies and helping them succeed. A well-deserved reward also provides positive reinforcement for school children. It will peak students’ attention and encourage them to participate in daily classroom chores and obligations. Hill (1965) stated that; a reward might be symbolic (gold stars, medals, or honor rolls), material (a piece of candy, an amount of money, or the opportunity to engage in student activities), or psychological (a sense of progress, a sense of adequacy, or a sense of progress toward sufficiency)

Regarding rewards in EFL instruction, it is not clear, to our knowledge, how students perceive rewards in their EFL learning. As part of the cognitive process of perception, a person engages with their environment and takes in information from the brain

Perception is a cognitive process in which a person interacts with his or her surroundings while accepting information from the brain (Slameto, 2010). Perception is a group of processes that enable us to take in, arrange, and respond to environmental inputs (Barry, 1998, as cited in Wijayanti, 2019). According to Walgito (2004), perception—the act of a person thinking about a certain phenomenon—begins with the feeling of an organ. This process is connected to the brain’s acceptance of a message or piece of information. A person engages with their environment utilizing all five senses during this process, including vision, hearing, taste, smell, and touch

**Methods**

**Participants**

This study adopted a quantitative approach to provide quantitative data regarding the students’ perception of reward and punishment in their English learning motivation from eleventh grade students from a vocational high school in Lampung Province, Sumatra Island, Indonesia, with 81 participants taking part in the current study.

**Instruments**

The instruments used in this study were a 5-point Likert Scale questionnaire and interviews. The Questionnaire is consisted of two sections, the first section is about students’ perception of rewards and punishments and the second part of the questionnaire is about the students’ learning motivation. We developed a perception questionnaire, while the motivation questionnaire was adopted from Khodadady & Ashrafborji’s (2013) Motivations Underlying English Language Learning (MUELL). For the validity and reliability of the questionnaire, we did a pilot study with 35 students out of samples prior to the distribution of the questionnaire. Results showed that the items of the questionnaire were valid and reliable.

**Data analysis**

The data collected through interview was qualitatively analyzed using Miles & Huberman (2014) data analysis that consists of three activities that occur simultaneously: data condensation, data display, conclusions and verification, meanwhile the data collected through questionnaire was quantitatively analyzed using descriptive statistics.

**Results**

We interviewed eight students to learn more about how they perceive rewards in EFL instruction. After examining the questionnaire and interview data, we found that rewards are crucial to EFL instruction because they may spur learners to work more and earn the benefits teachers deliver in class. The questionnaire was used to determine the students’ perceived rewards in EFL instruction. They were asked to fill out a questionnaire about their perception of rewards. Below are the data of students’ questionnaire answers:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No</th>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>I am happy with compliments like &quot;wow, you are so smart!&quot;, &quot;what a great job, keep it up&quot;</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(2.5%)</td>
<td>(7.4%)</td>
<td>(56.8%)</td>
<td>(33.3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>I am happy when my teacher gives me encouragements like &quot;you are doing awesome!&quot;</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(1.2%)</td>
<td>(3.7%)</td>
<td>(45.7%)</td>
<td>(49.4%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3. I am happy if my teacher praises me with good words like "Perfect!" 2 3 47 29
"Excellent!" "amazing!" when I do the assignment correctly. (2.5%) (3.7%) (58%) (35.8%)
4. I am happy with gold start given by the teacher on my book when I can answer the questions correctly. 0 7 43 31
5. I am happy when my name is displayed on the bulletin board in front of the class as an outstanding student. 4 6 26 45
(4.9%) (7.4%) (32.1%) (55.6%)
6. I am happy with the stars that can be exchange with plus points when I can answer the questions from the teacher correctly. 1 5 35 40
(1.2%) (6.2%) (43.2%) (49.4%)
7. The teacher gives things such as, book, and pen to the students who have good behavior. 5 7 42 27
(6.2%) (8.6%) (51.9%) (33.3%)
8. If the teacher provides 10 notebooks, 5 ballpoint pen, 5 pencils and some money for outstanding students, then I am interested in being an outstanding student. 3 9 38 31
(3.7%) (11.1%) (46.0%) (38.3%)
9. Because I think gifts can increase the spirit of learning, I will ask the teacher to apply giving gifts in class so that I and friends are passionate about learning. 6 16 33 26
(7.4%) (19.8%) (40.7%) (32.1%)

Description: 4 = strongly agree 3 = agree 2 = disagree 1 = strongly disagree

Item 1 has the same pattern as statements 3, 4, and 7, where the average or most students agree with this item and is followed by statements 8 and 9. Meanwhile, items 2, 5, and 6 have the same pattern where the average or most students strongly agree with the items mentioned above.

From the data of the questionnaire, it can be seen that most of the students are happy with the kinds of rewards that teachers provide during the EFL classes, with 56.8%, 49.4%, and 58% students being happy with any kind of praise or compliment words, 53.1% and 55.6% students are happy with any kind of symbolic rewards, 49.4% students are happy with token rewards, 51.9%, and 46.9% students are happy with kind of tangible rewards, and 40.7% students agree to ask the teacher to apply rewards in the class because they think that rewards can increase the spirit of learning.

To get more in-depth information about students' perceived rewards in EFL instruction, we conducted interviews with 10% of 81 participants, 8 participants. From the interview, almost all the students believed that:

From the interview, 6 out of 8 students said that rewards can make them feel motivated to learn harder and increase their enthusiasm during the learning process.

“I think giving rewards can increase enthusiasm to learn it and is a form appreciation in learning English.”(Student 1)

“It (rewards) can increase someone’s desire to learn English even more actively.” (Students 2)

“It (rewards) can be an encouragement to students to be more enthusiastic about learning.” (Student 3)

“When given a reward it is very motivating to keep really trying to learn English.” (Student 4)

“It’s a good thing because rewards can increase enthusiasm for learning.” (Student 7)

“It can motivate students to be active in learning English.” (Student 8)

From the interview, 2 out of 8 students said that rewards can make them happy and excited during the learning process.

“It is something that can make someone happy and more excited.” (Student 5)

“Rewards can make my heart happy.” (Student 6)

Moreover, from the interview, it can be known that the form of rewards that teachers usually use during EFL learning are words of praise and tangible rewards. The teachers usually said praise words such as, “Great, keep on learning!” and “You are diligent! You got a full score!”. Meanwhile, for tangible rewards, teachers usually give books, pens and money, and plus points to the students who get good scores or can answer the questions from the teacher correctly.

Discussion

Based on the findings of students’ perceive of rewards in EFL instruction, students who became participants gave positive responses regarding the application of rewards in the EFL classroom. The questionnaire result shows that the average of the students was happy with any form of reward that the teachers applied in the class. This finding is in line with Purwanto's (2011) statement stating that reward means making students feel happy, excited, willing, and wishful. Students' responses also support this finding, and students believed that rewards are something that can make them happy and excited in the EFL instruction.

Most of the students stated that rewards could increase their motivation in the learning activities as well as increase their enthusiasm during the learning process. This finding resonates with Aini (2015) research which found that rewards have a significant enough impact on students’ souls to motivate them to take positive and productive acts. Rewards can cause the students to be more active in the learning process and increase their motivation level in the EFL instruction. Supported by students' statements, the students stated that rewards could increase someone's desire to learn English even more actively and make them more enthusiastic about learning.
These results demonstrated how students’ positive perceptions of the rewards might be leveraged to increase their drive to study in a range of courses, including English. Students will be more motivated to learn if they positively perceive the learning activities as rewarding. It can be inferred that rewarding students for their hard work are one way to enhance their drive to study. According to research by Margolant et al. (2019), offering prizes has a favorable and substantial association with student motivation, contributing 10.2% of influences. According to Jabeen et al. (2015), rewards significantly positively impact students’ learning behavior. Another research by Hajrah (2018) and Marlina et al. (2021) discovered that rewards and penalties favorably impact students’ willingness to learn.

The use of rewards during learning activities is one strategy in the field of education. Rewarding students may have a positive and significant impact on their drive to learn. This is consistent with Hamalik (2020) statement that rewarding students affects their motivation to learn. Rewards that are logical and appropriate can naturally increase pupils’ willingness to study. According to Winkel (1989) in his book on teaching psychology, giving rewards to students is one of the most effective methods and has been widely used by teachers in educational institutions. Giving rewards to students is crucial for boosting their enthusiasm to study. However, Horner et al. (2009) expressed concern that children are unable to develop their intrinsic motivation, also referred to as self-managed motivation, as a result of the official use of rewards in schools, and Moberly et al. (2005) concurred that a reward can be used to manipulate intrinsic motivation.

Therefore, it can be stated that in eleventh grade in a vocational high school, students have a good perception of rewards in the EFL instruction as they stated that they were happy with any rewards in the EFL classroom. Besides that, they also stated that rewards could motivate them to learn harder and make them excited in the learning process. With the discussion above, the result of this research could be a concern for the teacher to apply the reward and punishment method in the class to improve or boost students’ learning motivation.

**Conclusion**

Choosing the right learning method can have an effect to the achievement of student learning achievement. To boost the students’ learning achievement in English, rewards method could be applied in the EFL classroom. According to the results of this research, rewards have contribution on students’ EFL learning motivation as it is clearly found that students have good perception of rewards, it makes them happy and excited during the learning process and it can increase their learning motivation.

The results showed that the perception of rewards among eleventh-grade students in a vocational high school is categorized as good. Students have a good perception of the application of rewards in EFL learning, as can be seen in how they are happy with the rewards the teachers applied in the classroom. They also stated that rewards could motivate them to work and learn harder in order to get the rewards as the appreciation of their result in learning. The form of rewards that the students like the most are words of praise followed by tangible rewards. Rewards can cause students to feel happy and excited and could increase their motivational level in learning English as a foreign language. It shows that giving rewards to the students is one of the means to improve their learning motivation.

For the future study, we suggested to enlarging the sample, using more variative instruments and more advanced data analysis. The same research could be done in a different context to see if the findings in this study are also applied to another geographical setting such as higher education or institution.

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