

STUDENTS' AND TEACHERS' PERCEPTION ON THE USE OF PRAISE
AND FEEDBACK IN THE ENGLISH LESSON

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**STUDENTS' AND TEACHERS' PERCEPTION ON THE USE
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A Project Report submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for
the award of the degree of Master of Education (TESL)

Faculty of Education
University Teknologi Malaysia

2012

Dedicated to my beloved family and friends,

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I am forever grateful to Lord, the Almighty. For without HIS blessings I would not have been able to complete this study.

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to the UTM Staff for making this work a success. Especially to my supervisor, Dr Hanita Hassan, who has been assisting me and monitoring my work from the beginning. You have been very helpful, caring and understanding and I really appreciate the time spent and the sharing of opinions and ideas in the process of completing this study.

To all my colleagues who have been very supportive towards my journey as a postgraduate student, I could not thank you more. Not forgetting my dear friends who have always believed in me when at times I found it is hard to believe in myself.

To my best friend, Matthew Thomas Stanfill, thank you for the faith you have in me. You are the drive that keeps me motivated.

Last but not least, my deep sincere gratitude to my parents, Mazlan and Fadzilah and my family members for being supportive. They have always been my number one inspiration. Without their unconditional love and support I would not have made it this far.

ABSTRACT

The primary purpose of this study was to investigate students' and teachers' perception towards the use of praise and feedback in the English lesson. Apart from that, this study seek to identify the type of feedback that students prefer and the type of feedback that is most likely to be used by the teachers. Moreover this study also examined teachers' use of praise and feedback in their English lesson. By using the semi structured interview, the researcher collected data from year 5 students and the English teachers' perceptions on the use of praise and feedback. The students' interview mainly seeking how the students feel about praise, how they prefer to be praised and how they like to be praised. On the other hand, teachers' interview mainly seeking their perceptions about the use of praise, how they praise the students and for what behaviour the students are likely to be praised for. In addition, the result on the types of praise and feedback used in the classroom was attained from the classroom observation checklist.

The findings from the students' interview indicated that the respondents liked to be praised. However, they had different preferences on the types of feedback. The teachers interview gathered teachers' perception and they way they used praise vary according to individual. The teachers' interview also depict that teachers have knowledge on the use of feedback and praise as a source of motivation. This study also demonstrated the types of feedback actually occur in the classroom. It was suggested in the findings that changes should be made in terms of providing feedback in the language classroom so the students will be able to evaluate their own learning.

ABSTRAK

Tujuan utama kajian ini adalah untuk menyiasat persepsi pelajar dan guru-guru terhadap penggunaan pujian dan maklum balas dalam pelajaran Bahasa Inggeris. Selain daripada itu, kajian ini bertujuan untuk mengenal pasti jenis maklum balas yang lebih disukai pelajar dan jenis maklum balas yang paling mungkin digunakan oleh guru. Selain itu kajian ini juga mengkaji penggunaan pujian dan maklum balas oleh guru-guru dalam pelajaran Bahasa Inggeris mereka. Dengan menggunakan temubual separa berstruktur, penyelidik mengumpul data daripada pelajar tahun 5 dan persepsi guru-guru Bahasa Inggeris pada penggunaan pujian dan maklum balas. Pelajar ditemuduga untuk mengetahui pendapat mereka tentang pujian, bagaimana mereka lebih suka dipuji dan bagaimana mereka suka supaya dipuji. Sebaliknya, temubual guru terutamanya menyelidik tentang penggunaan pujian, bagaimana mereka memuji pelajar dan apakah tingkah laku pelajar mungkin dipuji. Di samping itu, keputusan mengenai jenis pujian dan maklum balas yang digunakan di dalam kelas telah dicapai dari senarai semak pemerhatian dalam bilik darjah.

Hasil dari temubual pelajar menunjukkan bahawa responden suka dipuji. Walau bagaimanapun, mereka mempunyai keutamaan yang berbeza pada jenis maklum balas. Dapatan daripada temuduga dengan para guru, pujian adalah bergantung kepada individu. Temuduga guru juga menunjukkan bahawa para guru mempunyai pengetahuan mengenai penggunaan maklum balas dan pujian sebagai sumber motivasi. Kajian ini juga menunjukkan jenis maklum balas yang sebenarnya berlaku di dalam kelas. Dapatan dari kajian ini, didapati bahawa perubahan perlu dibuat oleh para guru dari segi pujian dan

pemberian maklum balas di dalam kelas bahasa supaya pelajar akan dapat menilai pembelajaran mereka sendiri.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER	TITLE	PAGE
	DECLARATION	ii
	DEDICATION	iii
	ACKNOWLEDGEMENT	iv
	ABSTRACT	v
	ABSTRAK	vi
	TABLE OF CONTENTS	viii
	LIST OF TABLES	xii
	LIST OF APPENDICES	xiii
1	INTRODUCTION	1
	1.1 Introduction	1
	1.2 Background of the Study	3
	1.3 Statement of Problem	6
	1.4 Research Objectives	7
	1.5 Research Questions	8

1.6	Significance of the Study	8
1.7	Scope	9
1.8	Theoretical Framework	10
1.9	Operational Definition of Terms	11
1.9.1	Motivational Feedback	11
1.9.2	Praise	11
1.9.3	Effort Feedback	12
1.9.4	Ability Feedback	12
2	LITERATURE REVIEW	13
2.1	Characteristics of Young Learners	14
2.2	The 5 Hypotheses Model	16
2.2.1	Affective Filter Hypothesis	19
2.3	Classroom Culture	22
2.4	Motivating Young Learners	25
2.4.1	Motivational Feedback	26
2.4.1.1	Praise	27

2.4.1.2	Ability Feedback	28
2.4.1.3	Effort Feedback	29
3	RESEARCH METHODOLOGY	30
3.1	Introduction	30
3.2	Research Design	30
3.3	Research Participants	31
3.4	Research Instruments	32
3.5	Data Analysis	34
3.6	Research Procedure	34
3.7	Conclusion	37
4	FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION	38
4.1	Introduction	38
4.2	Findings of the Study	38
4.3	Findings form the Students' Interview	39
4.3.1	Students' Perceptions on the Use of Praise and Feedback	39
4.4	Findings from the Teacher's Interview	43
4.4 .1	Teachers' Perceptions on the Use of Praise	43

	and Feedback	
4.5	Findings from the Classroom Observations	46
4.5.1	Types of Praise and Feedback Used in the Classroom	46
5	CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS	49
5.1	Introduction	49
5.2.1	Students' Perceptions on the use of Praise and Feedback	50
5.2.2	Teachers' Perceptions on the Use of Praise and Feedback	51
5.2.3	Types of Praise and Feedback Used in the Classroom	52
5.3	Future Recommendations	52
5.4	Limitations of The Study	53
	REFERENCES	54

LIST OF TABLES

TABLE	TITLE	PAGE
4.1	Students' preference on praise	68
4.2	Students' feelings towards praise	68
4.3	Students' preference on effort or ability feedback	69
4.4	Students' assumption	69
4.5	Students' feelings for being praised in class	70
4.6 & 4.7	Students' observation towards teacher's praise	70 & 71
4.8	Types of feedback used in the classroom	73

LIST OF APPENDICES

APPENDIX	TITLE	PAGE
A	Interview Questions for Teachers	60
B	Interview Questions for Students	67
C	Structural Observational Checklist	72

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

The English language is not an easy language to learn and to be speaking in the language or to reply in the language itself is considered trying to become English. That is the mindset of most the locals in Malaysia. Apart from that, since the language is considered difficult, many students feel intimidated and insecure to give an answer or when appointed. Students are also afraid of the English teacher for the misleading notion that teachers will be angry if they give incorrect answers and this is associated with the Malaysian culture (Lee, 2004). By being afraid to try, there is a very low possibility for teachers to provide feedback or praise for students' improvement.

Teachers' role has developed tremendously. New teachers and those who went to pedagogical courses are encouraged to apply new

teaching and motivational strategies in the classroom. However, the misleading notion of students' mindset seems to affect their participation and confidence level in the classroom. Thus, over the years, these students went on attending secondary school have high affective filter towards the English language. As a result, not only their proficiency is low but they also do not feel confident on their ability to acquire the language what more to enjoy learning it. It was pointed out that many high school leavers have difficulty to use the language in interviews (Lee, 2004) resulting to failing getting a job. Perhaps using different motivational influences can be the drive for one to be confident and motivated to not only master but also use the language confidently.

In acquiring a second language, one of the main concerns is to have the learners to learn and at the same time to be able to understand and communicate in the target language. This is one of the problems faced by any language learners. Learners not only have to learn the vocabulary and the mechanics of the language, but also string the words to make meaningful sentences and engage in interactions. In the process of having to know whether or not they are performing, learners need validation from the authority of the classroom, which is the teacher. Constant validation, or in other words, praise and feedback would enable learners to confirm their efforts and perhaps seek to perform better. Therefore this research aims to identify year 5 students' and teachers' perception on the use of praise and feedback in the English lesson.

This study is looking into teachers' perception in the use of

praise and feedback in their English language classroom. Also, the year 5 students' perception regarding praise and feedback will be taken into account. The types of praise and feedback favored by the teachers and the students will also be looked at.

In this chapter, the areas covered are the background of study, statement of problems, objectives of the study, research questions, and significance of the study, and the operational definition of terms.

1.2 Background of the study

Learning a foreign language is a long and drawn out process and for one to be fluent does take a while. People are always afraid of foreign language due to their insufficient vocabulary or skills to master the target language. Perhaps the most excruciating part of the process is to understand the grammar, the language rules and sentence structure. This is the most important part of any language learning. Without the knowledge of grammar one would be left to repeat memorized phrases and single words which could lead to ineffective communication. For example, some foreign languages such as French, Spanish and Arabic, have masculine and feminine nouns, verbs and adjectives, while Mandarin, Korean and Japanese have different characters. However, in this study, the researcher will be focusing on the English language, which has different set of grammar compared to the national language, Bahasa Malaysia.

The fact that the structure of the English language is different from the national language, somehow make the students assume that it is difficult. Once this has been established mentally, making the students to enjoy learning a foreign language is not an easy task. Moreover, one cannot force the other to like learning a language if the other person does not have the interest towards the language or see the significance of learning it. When the affective filter is high, motivating students and sustaining their motivation can be complicated (Krashen, 1985). Perhaps, the answer to the success of learning a foreign language is not just the knowledge of the target language but also lies in motivation. Students need to see that they are capable to master it and it is the extrinsic value apart from intrinsic value that keeps them going.

From my experience as a teacher in Malaysia and as a practical teacher in the U.K., I notice there are differences in the classroom teaching culture. Praise is a common technique in the U.K and is highly encouraged during a lesson, but it is uncommon in Malaysia. According to Anuar Ahmad's article '*Pelajar Rindu Pujian Guru*', praise is rare due to praise is something which is uncommon in Malaysian classrooms (Utusan Malaysia, 2010). Adding on, Ford (1992) explains that praise and feedback are essential piece of information in helping one makes progress.

There have been tremendous motivational strategies to motivate students learning a foreign language. In the field of language study, the passion towards the language is just at the beginning stage.

It requires a psychological approach and a positive attitude from the teacher, although at times frustration arises. Frustration usually occurs when teaching a foreign language to students who do not yet see nor have the interest in the foreign language itself. In other words, a teacher's task is not only to teach the language, but also to ensure that students find approaches in the language class are interesting and motivating. According to Dornyei (2001) motivation is the key determinant to success or failure in any learning situation. Learning a foreign language can be intimidating for children and most of the times terrifying, unless the keenness towards it has been ingrained.

In motivational strategies for a language classroom, there are three common types of motivational influences; feedback, praise and grades (Dornyei, 2001). In the process model of learning motivation in the L2 classroom as devised by Dornyei, which will be explained in detail in chapter 2, feedback and praise are considered as two of the three main motivational influences in the final stage of the model. For the purpose of this research, only feedback and praise will be taken into account. Feedback is an essential part of learning whereby without it, people cannot continue to make progress (Ford, 1992). Furthermore, Raffini (1993) states that praise has a gratifying effect where it lifts one's satisfaction and learning spirit. Both play an important role in language learning.

However there have been very few studies regarding praise and feedback, since they are a small part under the umbrella term motivational feedback. Zahorik (1970), defines praise as 'oral remarks about the adequacy or the correctness of a pupil's statements solicited

or initiated in the development of subject matter ‘ (p.106). According to Hattie (1992) praise is defined as a warm verbal approval and that is spoken than written. Hence, in the context of this study, praise is, a spoken approval on the subject matter. Feedback is defined as ‘to direct students in ways to improve by providing information concerning students’ ability to understand or in ability to understand’ (Burnett, 2002; 6). Thus this research is looking at the use of praise and feedback by teachers and how students perceive these during the English lesson. This is crucial as both play important roles to trigger the liking towards the English language as well as a motivational drive for students to progress.

Chalk and Bizo (2004) did a study on the effect of praise on students’ on-task behavior, academic self concept and numeracy enjoyment. Burnett and Mandel (2010) on the other hand did a case study which looked into the types of feedback preferred to be used by the teachers in the classroom and how it should be used generally. As a result from both, this study decided to investigate teachers’ and students’ perception on the use of praise and feedback, but focusing on the English lesson.

1.3 Statement of the Problem.

In Burnett and Mandel’s study (2010), the uses of praise and feedback shown to have positive effect on the classroom environment. The specific praise during the numeracy hour in a study done by

Chalk and Bizo (2004) showed that it helped students to be more engaged in the task. From these two studies, the researcher was interested to investigate what Malaysian students feel towards the use of praise and feedback in the English lesson. Thus the researcher carried out a qualitative study to investigate teachers' and students' perceptions towards praise and feedback and to observe the types of feedback that teachers use in their English lesson.

This study concentrates on the types of praises and feedback used and preferred by the teachers and students in the lesson. The praises and feedback were categorized in the classroom observation checklist as general praise, negative, ability and effort (Table 4.8). This study also discussed the findings from other research conducted previously. The details on the types of praise and feedback and their role in affecting students' participation during the English lesson were also discussed. This study aimed to tackle all the research questions listed. Lastly, the 'trying to on the switch' predicted to produce confident and active students during the English lesson.

1.4 Research Objectives

The purpose of this study is to qualitatively investigate students' and teachers' perceptions of feedback and to observe teachers' use of praise in feedback in the classroom. Students' preference on feedback also will be explored.

The research objectives are:

1. To inquire students' perception on the use of praise during the English lesson.
2. To inquire teachers' perception on the use of praise during the English lesson.
3. To investigate the types of praise and feedback used during the English lesson.

1.5 Research Questions

This study aims to answer:

1. What are students' perception on the use of praise during the English lesson?
2. What are teachers' perception on the use of praise during the English lesson?
3. What are the types of praise and feedback used during the English lesson?

1.6 Significance of The Study

This study will be a significant endeavour in promoting the use of feedback and praise in the classroom. It will also perhaps assist teachers

to strategize how and when to employ this motivational feedback strategy. Students will benefit from this study when teachers employ effective deliverance of the praise and feedback. By understanding the needs of the students and benefits of praise and feedback, students' participation in the lesson could increase and affective filter towards the English language could perhaps subside. Thus, it is giving the students a sense to believe in themselves that learning English is not as difficult as they thought.

This study will be helpful for teachers and researchers to look into different aspects of motivational feedback in the area of language teaching. It will serve as a future reference for researchers in the subject of motivation and teaching methodology. Most importantly, this study will help to make teachers aware that praise and feedback are as essential as knowing the knowledge on the subject matter.

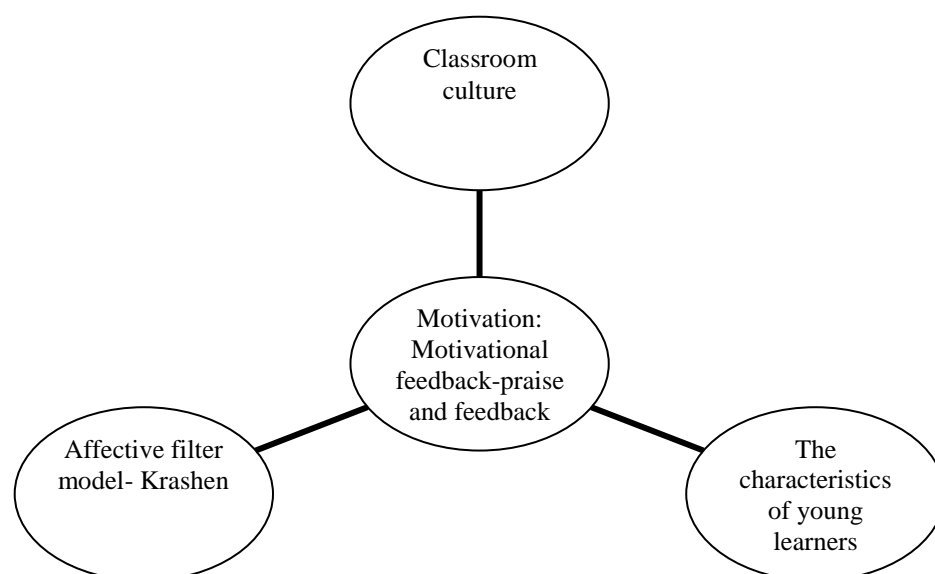
1.7 Scope

The scopes for this study were the aspects of motivational feedback, praise and feedback, young learners and culture.

The study was conducted in a semi rural school in the district of Kulai, Johor. A structured interview was carried out to 10 year five students and all English teachers from the participating school. The 10 selected students were 5 female and 5 male whereby each pair

represented each year 5 classes. Classroom observations were conducted twice to two year five classes.

1.8 Theoretical framework



Theoretical framework for this study was mainly focusing on the 5 hypotheses model of language learning by Krashen. One of the 5 hypotheses, which is the Affective filter hypothesis, will be elaborated further in the next chapter. A part of motivation will be explained on how it is linked to the affective filter hypothesis and how this is important in the language classroom especially to young learners.

1.9 Operational definition of terms

Terms that are related to this study are as follows:

1.9.1 Motivational feedback:

In this study, motivational feedback is ‘information with which a learner can confirm, add to, overwrite, tune, or restructure information in memory, whether that information is domain knowledge, meta-cognitive knowledge, beliefs about self and task, or cognitive tactics and strategies’ (Winnie and Butler, 1994:5740).

1.9.2 Praise:

Is to mean to value highly (Shepell, 2000) and involves commending the worth of an individual or expressing admiration or approval (Blote, 1995).

(Excellent)

(Well done)

1.9.3 Effort feedback:

According to Mueller and Dweck, (1998), effort feedback by teachers is associated with students' interest in a learning task.

(You're working hard on your reading, Someone has been doing their homework)

(Good try)

1.9.4 Ability feedback:

According to Mueller and Dweck, (1998), ability feedback by teachers is associated with students' interest in performing tasks.

(You're really smart)

(Congratulations on getting that)

(You got that correct)

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