

The Importance of Intangible Reward in English Language Learning

¹ Ayu Ariska Alfat

riskaayu@gmail.com

² Stella Rose Que*

que.stella@yahoo.com

^{1,2} *Pendidikan Bahasa Inggris, FKIP, Universitas Pattimura*

Abstract

Intangible rewards are an award that is crucial to the students to perform outrages performance so that they can get appreciation. Intangible reward refers to a class of rewards which have no material or monetary value but can keep the students feeling recognized and motivated. Intangible reward is not specifically researched in the teaching profession. It has been linked since human beings have the same psychological experience in terms of pursuing better achievement both in academic and work fields. It is proven that intangible rewards provide continual treatment to help students stay motivated and energized. Using library research, this study tries to explore the positive impact of intangible rewards on the students. It focuses on discussing how intangible rewards as literary works in the EFL context affects students' language learning. Based on the literary review and the writer's experience at the English Education Study Program, the advantages that the students get by receiving intangible rewards, specifically in improving their language skills, is work. Intangible rewards do improve students' language skills.

Keywords: *English Language learning, Intangible rewards*

Introduction

Psychology of learners cannot be separated with students' performance in the classroom. We always need motivation either from our school or family. According to (Lai, 2011) motivation tends to attach to the behaviour that characterized by willingness and determination. Motivation includes a relation to beliefs, perspective, values, interest, and actions. Therefore, by accepting motivation, students will be encouraged in learning, so they will be motivated. As we know that, the correlation between motivation and students' performance are unquestionably important. Lecturer must be realized in the very first hand that the necessary of motivation in learner's language learning can help learners improve their performance (Alizadeh, 2016).

Nowadays, we as students are having less motivation from the teacher or even for the university students from the lecturer. The factors that influence the lack of motivation in university learners mostly happened due to the absence of rewarding from the teacher to the students as a part of

motivation. For the reason that in fact, motivation is important for students, especially in the process of learning. Winkel (1984) discovered that in the context of teaching and learning, motivation serves as the overarching driving force within the learner. It instills a desire to learn, ensures the ongoing nature of learning activities, and provides direction to achieve learners' desired goals. Consequently, it is imperative for teachers to conduct learning activities that evoke motivation in students to learn English. In that way, teacher enables to do their jobs as an educator or the authority who has responsibility in planning, executing, assessing the result learning, mentoring and training students to reach their objectives.

Seeing the condition above, it is the responsibility of the teacher to create favorable ways for learners. One way that was implemented in this paper is through rewards. Rewards could drive commitment and bonds. These types of rewards attract to students intrinsic motivation in which can positively impact their performance and creativity (Allan Schweyer, Anaïs Thibault Landry, Ashley Whillans, 2018). One type of rewards that used is intangible reward. The writer conducted a preliminary study in speaking class about how important the intangible rewards are. Based on the preliminary study, the writer spread questionnaire through google form. It has shown that most of the students are agree with the implementation of intangible rewards. It is crystal clear that 10 out of 11 students felt motivated when the teacher gave a compliment.

An intangible reward refers to a set of rewards without any material or monetary value, as outlined by Kharel (2012). Offering praise and expressions of appreciation enhances students' worth, motivating them to enhance their grades if they haven't met the target. Intangible rewards play a role in stimulating improved performance and encouraging greater effort in completing assignments, whether in the classroom or as homework. Employing rewards can enhance students' academic accomplishments and self-assurance, particularly in individual learning settings, by fostering a sense of care and trust. Based on the background above, the author decided to conduct a paper on "The Importance of Intangible Rewards in Speaking Class in English Language Learning".

Method

The research design involves a comprehensive library research methodology. The participants for this study consist of English language learners across diverse proficiency levels within a specified educational setting, chosen through targeted sampling criteria. The data collection process primarily entails an in-depth literature review, where a wide range of academic articles, books, and scholarly

sources related to intangible rewards in language learning are systematically examined. Simultaneously, document analysis is conducted to scrutinize reports and studies addressing the impact of intangible rewards in education, with a specific focus on English language learning contexts. This integrated approach allows for the synthesis and critical evaluation of existing knowledge, providing a robust foundation for understanding the significance of intangible rewards in enhancing language skills.

Result and Discussion

The Definition of Reward

Reward was used to describe the items that the instructor offers the students in recognition of their excellent work. When a student receives praise for completing a work, she is more likely to complete it and show greater interest in the next assignment. According to Guendouze (2012), reward is a crucial tactic teachers employ to boost students' motivation for learning and to improve the process' efficacy and efficiency. Additionally, a reinforcement or reward is an outcome that raises the probability that a behavior will take place. A teacher might tell a student, for example, "I'm really proud of the story that you wrote." Well done. I hope you'll follow through on the same action the following time. It is stated that the teacher's encouraging remarks reinforce or reward the student's writing behavior if she puts in more effort and produces an even better story the following time.

Rewards are commonly defined as incentives that may be provided in subsequent instances. However, in many classroom scenarios, these rewards tend to be allocated primarily to students with the highest accomplishments or rankings, those consistently victorious in games and class competitions, and those who excel academically. Concentrating rewards on these specific groups may have a detrimental impact on the learning experience of other students. When rewards are not employed effectively, it is likely that other students become demotivated. Therefore, the implementation of "effective reading" is recognized as a crucial tool for fostering motivation and playing a pivotal role in driving students' motivation and progress in language learning. This approach can ultimately cultivate positive and desirable behavior among students in the English language classroom.

This study delves into the use of rewards in English language learning and explores how students perceive these rewards in the classroom, with a specific focus on a research group of participants. Originating from behaviourism and notably developed by B.F. Skinner in the 1950s, the concept of rewarding behaviour asserts that reinforcing a behaviour after its performance strengthens that

behaviour (Cosgrove, 1982). In the context of language teaching, rewards are discussed within the framework of learner motivation theories.

The impact of rewards on students is significant, influencing their individual motivation, engagement, and responses within learning situations. Students often channel their focus towards achieving rewards during essential tasks, adhering to defined goals, and completing assignments promptly. This persistent effort reflects their commitment to important goals and contributes to the internalization of a desire for positive consequences. As external goals become internalized, behaviors become self-determined, fostering intrinsic motivation. This intrinsic motivation is particularly evident when individuals perceive themselves as competent and believe they have control over their learning and behavior.

Perception of Rewards

Some researchers have observed an increase in intrinsic motivation among subjects who received verbal praise compared to a control group (e.g., Deci, 1971), while others have reported no significant differences. The perception of rewards by both teachers and students appears to be a crucial factor in their effectiveness. Many teachers who incorporate rewards in their approach believe in the efficacy of using rewards in schools. According to Hoffman (2009), these teachers argue that rewards serve as a motivating factor for students to exhibit positive behavior, and some note that rewards encourage students to produce their best work. Hoffman also highlights that teachers using rewards for behavior management also tend to use them for academic achievement, with verbal or written praise and tangible prizes being the most frequently employed.

Mansfield's (2007) research indicates that students' perceptions of rewards and sanctions significantly impact their sense of belonging in school, influencing both academic performance and social behavior. Similarly, students' attachment to school is stronger when teachers show care, provide praise, and treat students fairly (Hallinan, 2008). Previous studies on motivation, behavior management, and academic achievement have yielded inconclusive findings. The focus on the use of rewards should shift from extrinsic motivators to a broader exploration of how learners manage their learning behaviors and development.

An intriguing aspect is the limited inclusion of students' perspectives in previous studies. This current study examines the process of rewarding English language learning in classroom settings, exploring secondary school students' experiences, and collecting information on their perceptions

before and after receiving rewards. The study investigates various aspects, including the types of rewards given, the basis for awarding rewards (reward contingency), and the reasons attributed to receiving rewards (reward attributions). Notably, this research sheds light on students' voices regarding the use of rewards in the classroom, emphasizing the importance of understanding how teachers employ rewards to enhance students' motivation and learning behaviours, ultimately contributing to self-development in the educational setting.

Types of Reward

Tangible Rewards

a. Definition

Tangible Rewards encompass items that individuals can physically hold, see, or touch, such as prizes, stickers, or food. When providing rewards, it is essential to ensure that they convey information about students' abilities, thereby enhancing their intrinsic motivation. For instance, teachers often employ reward systems, such as giving stickers to students who successfully complete their tasks. The quantity of stickers corresponds to the amount of work accomplished, creating a visible and tangible representation of achievement. Tangible rewards include items like candies, toys, and small gadgets, whereas internal or spiritual rewards involve intangible elements that contribute to a sense of self-fulfillment, such as verbal praise (Christopher, 2010). Additionally, some researchers categorize tangible rewards into anticipated rewards and unanticipated rewards based on the timing of their presentation (Ryan, 1983).

b. Types of Tangible reward

1. Anticipated reward

Anticipated rewards refer to the promised gift that is present before to engaging in an action.

2. Unanticipated reward

Unexpected rewards relate to the gifts they receive during or after the activity.

c. Disadvantages

1. Impact on Student Intrinsic Motivation

There are three main reasons why many academics have misgivings regarding the use of material rewards. The most common argument is that students' intrinsic motivation may suffer if they get material rewards, which could cause them to lose focus. Certain scholars

support teaching strategies that put students' intrinsic motivation first instead of depending on material incentives, stressing the significance of putting students' interests at the centre of their learning instead of external rewards.

2. Association with Bribes

Another concern raised by researchers is the perceived connection between tangible rewards and bribery. They argue that dispensing tangible rewards might be interpreted as a form of bribery, indirectly teaching students the behaviour of using rewards to manipulate others.

3. Potential for Misuse

A third critique relates to the current misuse of tangible rewards in educational settings. Many teachers may not be adequately informed about the correct use of tangible rewards, leading to adverse effects on students' mental and academic development. This misuse is particularly associated with the over-justification effect and unfair distribution.

4. Over-justification

Studies show that giving students external rewards for activities that they already find intrinsically fulfilling can reduce their internal drive for similar activities. Instead of enjoying the activity itself, students could start to place greater emphasis on getting rewards from other sources.

5. Unfair Distribution

The criteria teachers use for evaluating and distributing rewards can be subjective and unfair. Sometimes, the standards may only be suitable for a small subset of students, neglecting the feelings of others. Additionally, rewards are often broad and superficial, potentially leading to an excessive dependence on motivation among primary school students (J. Sun, 2020)

d. Advantages

1. Positive Impact on Intrinsic Motivation

Eisenberger, Pierce, and Cameron's research suggests that tangible rewards tied to performance can enhance individuals' self-determination and intrinsic motivation (Covington, 2001). According to social-cognitive theory, tangible rewards can pique interest in a particular activity, which boosts general intrinsic motivation,

2. Enhancement on Children's Self-esteem, Confidence, and Self-efficacy

Tangible rewards contribute to the pleasure derived from achievements, benefiting young students' self-development. Numerous studies indicate that tangible rewards are effective tools for boosting young students' confidence (H. Liu, 2018).

3. Benefits in Children's Socialization Development

Sociologists and symbolic interaction theorists argue that using tangible rewards fosters social interaction between teachers and students through symbolic signs. This process is considered a crucial way for young students to develop self-concept and achieve socialization goals (Y. Yu, 2019)

4. Necessity in Teaching Young Students

5. Teachers view tangible rewards as highly compatible tools for teaching children, aligning with socialization development theory. Accepting tangible rewards is seen as a fundamental psychological demand for children (L. Fang, 2005).

Intangible Rewards

a. Definition

Intangible rewards represent acknowledgements given to individuals for their achievements, including verbal praise, written commendations, grades, smiles, pats on the back, hugs, extra attention, and special privileges. In the teaching profession, intangible rewards, although not extensively researched, play a significant role in recognizing and motivating students. Kharel (2012) defines intangible rewards as a category without material or monetary value but capable of providing continuous recognition and motivation to keep students energized. This psychological experience aligns with the pursuit of better academic and professional achievements, and examples include written praise, symbols like smiles or stars, and positive comments on students' work.

b. The Aims of Intangible Rewards

Intangible rewards aim to encourage students in their learning endeavors. While not tangible, appreciations in the form of praise, smiles, gestures, and others act as stimuli to boost students' enthusiasm for learning. The crucial objective of utilizing intangible rewards is to foster a strong bond between lecturers and students, emphasizing respect through compliments rather than material feedback. Examples of intangible rewards include thank-you letters, appreciation notes, public recognition in meetings, special lunches, encouragement to pursue personal ideas, and opportunities to choose a preferred place (Moreno, 2010).

c. Types of Intangible Rewards

According to Cotton (1988), intangible rewards can be categorized into two types:

- Verbal Praise: Lecturers may verbally commend students for correct responses during class discussions, accurate homework, and improved test scores, using phrases like "good job," "I like it," or "perfect" to acknowledge positive behaviors or achievements.
- Written Praise: This type involves providing grades and comments on students' assignments, including symbols like smiles or stars, as positive feedback for their work.

d. The Benefits of Intangible Rewards

According to Santrock (2010), the benefits of intangible rewards include:

- Enhanced Student Enthusiasm for Learning: Offering intangible rewards motivates students to put forth more effort while completing assignments, encouraging enhanced confidence and a sense of being cared for and trusted. Students gain respect and enthusiasm when they grasp the significance of what they are learning for their future.
- Improved Student Concentration: Intangible rewards serve as a motivating factor for students to enhance their performance, leading to increased seriousness in studying. The awareness that their efforts are being observed by the lecturer contributes to thoroughness in completing assignments and creates a positive learning atmosphere in the classroom.
- Encouraging Academic Achievement Improvement: Students receiving frequent intangible rewards are more likely to be enthusiastic in learning, putting effort into tasks, and completing them meticulously and on time.
- Creating an Interesting Learning Atmosphere: Intangible rewards stimulate students' enthusiasm for learning, making the English language learning process more effective, enjoyable, and fostering positive interactions between teachers and students in the classroom.

Definition of Language Learning

Language is meant to be a systematic way to communicate the ideas or feelings by the implementation of incorporated signs, sounds, gestures, or marks, having under understood meanings (Webster's Third New International Dictionary of English Language (1961) in Brown (2000: 5). He explained briefly the definition of language. He defines it as follows:

1. Language is systematic.

2. Language is a set of arbitrary symbols.
3. Those symbols are primary vocal but may also be visual.
4. The symbols have conventionalized meanings to which they refer.
5. Language is used for communication.
6. Language operates in a speech community or culture.
7. Language is essentially human, although possible not limited to human.
8. Language is acquired by all people in much the same way language and language learning both have universal characteristic.

Then, Brown (2000: 6) states that learning is the process of incorporating or getting knowledge of a subject or a skill by studying experience or instruction. Based on previous statement, brown divided learning into some components as follow:

1. Learning is acquisition or “Getting”.
2. Learning is retention of information or skill.
3. Retention implies storage system, memory, and cognitive organization.
4. Learning involves active, conscious focus on and acting upon events outside the organism.
5. Learning is relatively permanent but subject to forgetting.
6. Learning involves some form of practice, perhaps reinforced practice.
7. Learning is change in behavior

Language learning is a long and complex way. Language learning is the process where the learners explore all their competence to think, feel, and act. In addition, he also explained that language learning is not a set of easy process that can be programmed in instant way. It required regular training due to succeed in learning process.

English Education in Indonesia

Indonesia has a 50-year history of English language instruction, while its research in this sector is relatively new. There is currently a growing interest in English language teaching and learning throughout all educational levels in the country (Zein, 2020).

On the other side, English was regarded as a language of international significance, as represented by powerhouse countries such as the United States and the United Kingdom. Many

people think English will be the language of the future. This established a strong argument for incorporating English into the national education curriculum, paving the way for its status as 'the first foreign language', according to Nababan (1991).

English was established as a foreign language and was the first to be taught in schools, before Arabic, French, and German. Many years later, the new order regime (1967-1998) strengthened the official function of English with Presidential Decree No. 28/1990. This edict established English as the official language in secondary schools administered by the Ministry of Education and Culture. As a result, English became a required subject in junior high school, senior high school, and technical high school. The obligation also applied to secondary schools administered by the Ministry of Religious Affairs, such as Madrasah Tsanawiyah and Madrasah Aliyah. As a result, English became the second language for individuals who only spoke Indonesian, and the third language for the vast majority of Indonesians who knew both Indonesian and an indigenous language.

Conclusion and Suggestion

Conclusion

Intangible rewards are an award that is crucial to the students to perform outrageous performance so that they can get an appreciation. Intangible reward refers to a class of rewards which have no material or monetary value but can keep the employee feeling recognized and motivated. Intangible reward is not specifically researched in the teaching profession. It has been linked since human beings have the same psychological experience in terms of pursuing better achievement both in academic and work fields. It is proven that intangible rewards provide continual treatment to help students stay motivated and energized. For example, written praise; by drawing symbols like smile, stars, or comment on the students sheet as positive feedback of their work.

Based on the literary review and the writer's experience while spreading the questionnaire in academic speaking class at the English Department of Pattimura University, the benefits get by giving intangible rewards to the students are inevitable. It can increase students' enthusiasm for learning. Giving intangible rewards to them encourages them to work harder in completing the assignment. The stimulus that is given by the teacher can improve students' confidence in learning individually or in groups due to the feeling of being respected and bounded emotionally. It also enhances students' concentration. They tend to be serious in studying because they realize that every gesture is monitored by the teacher. It does make sense that the students become more thorough when finishing the tasks

and be satisfied if the results of their work get a good appreciation from the lecturer. In addition, it is encouraging the students to improve their academic achievement by pushing their motivation in the psychological side.

Suggestion

After reviewing all the related literature, the writer proposes several suggestions as follow:

1. English teacher

Considered the important roles by giving intangible rewards to the students. Teachers should take on the opportunities to master how to give no material reward to them. Teachers should do it more often to reach learning objectives.

2. Students

With this paper, students are expected to be aware that intangible rewards that has been given to them are scientifically approved to enhance their motivation to be better in academic achievement.

3. Other researchers

To the future researcher, this paper is far from perfect. Therefore, other researchers can also expand a different discussion by providing other variables that may have something to do with intangible rewards.

Acknowledgments

Primarily, the author expresses enduring gratitude to the Almighty Allah SWT for the continuous grace, blessings, and strength that enabled the completion of this research titled "The Importance of Intangible Rewards in English Language Learning." However, the author acknowledges that the realization of this research was possible through the prayers, support, suggestions, assistance, advice, and help received from others.

References

- Alizadeh, M. (2016). *The Impact of Motivation of English Language Learning*. Islamic Azad University: Iran.
- Allan Schweyer, Anaïs Thibault Landry, Ashley Whillans. (2018). Establishing the intangible, non-financial value of awards program . *Incentive Research Foundation*, 5.

- Brown, H-Douglas. 2000. *Principles of Language Learning and Teaching*. London: Longman.
- Christopher Knapper, John R. Kirby Patrick Lamon & William J. Egnatoff (2010) Development of a scale to sure lifelong learning, *International Journal of Lifelong Education*, 29:3, 291-302, DOI: 10.1080/02601371003700584
- Cotton, K. (1988). Instructional reinforcement. Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory.
- Couching, H. C. (n.d.). 5 Low-cost, Intangible Rewards That Can Have a Big Impact on the Bottom Line. *Lasting Solutions*, 2.
- Covington, M. V., & Müeller, K. J. (2001). Intrinsic Versus Extrinsic Motivation: An Approach/Avoidance Reformulation. *Educational Psychology Review*, 13(2), 157–176. <https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1009009219144>
- Daniel O' leary K., & RONAL D. (1971). Token Reinforcement Programs in the Classroom. *Psychological Bulletin*, 75, 379-398.
- Deci, E. L., Koestner, R., & Ryan, R. M. (2001). Extrinsic Rewards and Intrinsic Motivation in Education: Reconsidered Once Again. *Review of Educational Research*, 71(1), 1–27. <https://doi.org/10.3102/00346543071001001>
- Dwija, I. W. (2008). The relationship between self-concept, achievement motivation and parental attention with learning outcomes of Sociology in class II students of superior high school in Amlapura City. *Journal of Education and Teaching*, 41(1).
- Guendouze, M., & Abderrahim, F. (2012). The Effects of Anticipation Rewards on Students' Motivation in Learning Grammar (Doctoral dissertation, Ministry of Higher Education).
- Harmer, J. (2007). How to the Practice of English Language Teaching. *Fourth Edition*. *Edinburgh Gate: Pearson Longman*.
- Hidi, S., & Harackiewicz, J. M. (2000). Motivating the academically unmotivated: A critical issue for the 21st century. *Review of Educational Research*, 70, 151–179.
- Hidi, S. (2016). Revisiting the Role of Rewards in Motivation and Learning: Implications of Neuroscientific Research. *Educational Psychology Review*, 28(1), 61–93. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10648-015-9307-5>
- H. Liu, Analysis of Strategies and Effects of Implementing Reward for Preschool Teachers, *Journal of Chengdu Normal University*, 2018
- J. Sun, Negative effects and coping strategies of primary education reward, 2020

- Kharel, Y. K. (2012). Practice of Reward in ELT Classroom. Thesis. Tribhuvan University: Kirtipur, Kathmandu, Nepal.
- Kristin, F. H., Jessica. H., Ashley S. P., & John L. N. (2009). Elementary teachers' use and perception of rewards in the classroom. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 25, 843-849.
- Lai. (2011). Motivation: A literature Review. *Pearson*.
- L. Fang, Analysis on the Mechanism of Rewarding Educational Function in Preschool Moral Education, *SOCIAL SCIENCES REVIEW*, 2005
- Lindsay, Peter and Donald A, Norman. 1997. Human Information Processing. An Introduction to Psychology.
- Moreno. (2010). Positive reinforcements at increasing the students motivation in English Language Learning. *Teaching Education*, 80-85
- Nababan, P. W. (1991). Language in education: The case of Indonesia. *International Review of Education*, 37(1), 115–131
- Rachel E. C. (1987). Rewards and Punishment in Schools: A study of their Effectiveness as Perceived by Secondary School Pupils and Their Teachers. *School of Psychology International*, 8, 85-94.
- Ryan, R. M., Mims, V., & Koestner, R. (1983). Relation of reward contingency and interpersonal context to intrinsic motivation: A review and test using cognitive evaluation theory. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 45(4), 736– 750. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.45.4.736>
- Santrock, J. W. (2010). Educational psychology (5th ed). New York: McGraw- Hill.
- Sidin, S. A. (2020). The Application of Reward and Punishment in Teaching Adolescents. *Atlantis Press*, 539.
- Winkel. 1984. Educational Psychology and Learning Evaluation.
- Y. Yu, The Missing Representation and Reconstruction Path of Reward in Education from the Perspective of Social Interaction Theory, *Contemporary Educational Science*, 2019
- Zein, S. (2020). Language policy in superdiverse Indonesia. New York, NY: Routledge.