

BOOSTING LANGUAGE LEARNERS' MOTIVATION THROUGH TEACHER PRAISE AND FEEDBACK

Dewi Syafitri¹, Nabilah Khairunnisa²

Universitas PGRI Silampari^{1,2}

dewisyafitristkipllg@gmail.com¹

Abstract

Motivation is an important part of language learning because it affects how much effort students give, how they feel about learning, and how long they stay committed. When students are motivated, they are more likely to enjoy learning and try harder to improve their skills. This paper explores the role of teacher praise and feedback in helping students stay motivated in English as a foreign language (EFL) classroom. Praise helps students feel appreciated and more confident, while feedback gives them direction and helps them improve. Many studies show that praise and feedback together give better results than when used separately. They support both academic improvement and emotional well-being. This review suggests that using both strategies is a helpful way to create a positive classroom and support students in becoming more independent and motivated learners.

Keywords: *Motivation, Teacher praise, Teacher feedback*

I. INTRODUCTION

Motivation is one of the most important factors in learning a new language. It influences how much effort learners are willing to put into studying and practicing the language. Students who are highly motivated are usually more focused and enthusiastic in class. According to Peng (2021), motivated learners tend to be more successful in acquiring second language skills because they show greater persistence and enjoyment in the learning process. In language classrooms, motivation can make the difference between a student who gives up easily and one who keeps trying, even when tasks are difficult.

One of the main sources of student motivation is the teacher. Teachers play an important role in shaping learners' attitudes, behavior, and confidence. One specific strategy that teachers can use is praise. Teacher praise refers to the verbal or non-verbal messages of approval given to students when they perform well. This could be simple comments like "Great job!" or "That's a good sentence," or even a supportive smile or nod. According to Liu (2021), teacher praise helps create a positive emotional connection

between teachers and students. It also reduces feelings of hopelessness and helps students develop a stronger sense of self-worth.

Praise is especially effective when it is specific, sincere, and directed at students' efforts or progress. Generic praise like "good work" may have less impact than comments that point out what the student did well. For example, saying "You used the correct verb tense here" helps students recognize their own improvement. Research by Abbasi, Ghanbari, and Zare (2024) showed that verbal praise that focuses on student achievement and learning behaviors improves student motivation and attitude toward English learning. When praise highlights growth rather than just correctness, it encourages a growth mindset among students.

Another important way teachers can support student motivation is through feedback. Feedback is information given to students about their performance, usually to help them improve. It includes corrections, suggestions, clarifications, and reinforcement. When feedback is clear and delivered in a helpful way, it can support students' academic growth. As noted by Cao and Mao (2023), feedback that is timely, understandable, and constructive enhances both students' writing skills and their desire to keep learning. In language learning, feedback guides students in understanding language rules, vocabulary use, pronunciation, and grammar accuracy.

Teacher feedback also affects learners on an emotional level. Feedback that includes encouragement and recognition of effort can help students stay motivated and confident. On the other hand, overly negative or unclear feedback can make students feel confused or discouraged. Tu and Ego-ugan (2024) emphasized that feedback that balances corrections with encouragement creates a more welcoming learning environment. Students are more likely to respond positively to feedback when it is respectful, focused on learning, and delivered in a calm and patient tone.

In addition to improving academic performance, praise and feedback help students become more responsible for their own learning. This is known as self-regulated learning. When students receive feedback and praise, they start to monitor their own progress, set personal goals, and take control of their learning habits. Gan and Ma (2024) explained that feedback and praise together support the development of self-regulated

learning strategies, such as planning, reviewing, and evaluating one's own work. These skills are essential for students who want to become independent and lifelong learners.

The classroom environment also plays an important role in supporting student motivation. Praise and feedback contribute to building a supportive and friendly classroom atmosphere. When students feel safe, respected, and encouraged, they are more likely to participate and take risks in learning. As Peng (2021) suggested, teacher praise promotes trust and engagement between students and teachers. A positive environment not only improves students' emotional well-being but also enhances their willingness to use the target language in class activities.

Although many studies have examined praise and feedback individually, fewer have explored how both strategies work together to improve motivation in language learning. Most recent research has focused on one method at a time. However, using praise and feedback in combination may have a stronger effect than using them separately. According to Abbasi et al. (2024), teachers who provide verbal praise along with helpful feedback can motivate students more effectively than teachers who only correct errors. This study aims to explore how the combination of teacher praise and feedback can support and improve motivation among learners of English as a foreign language. Understanding this relationship can help educators apply better strategies in their classrooms.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Motivation in Language Learning

Motivation plays a very important role in second language learning. It affects how interested and focused students are, and how much effort they give. Peng (2021) found that motivated students are more active and confident in English classes. According to Zheng (2021), motivation also increases when teachers are clear and supportive. Both internal factors (like goals) and external ones (like teacher actions) influence how motivated learners feel.

Teacher Praise

Praise helps students feel emotionally supported. Teacher praise is a simple but powerful way to encourage students. It includes kind words like "Well done" or small

gestures like a smile or nod. Liu (2021) showed that praise helps reduce students' feelings of hopelessness and creates a stronger teacher-student bond. This emotional support helps students feel safer and more willing to learn in class.

Teacher Feedback

Feedback helps students learn and grow. Teacher feedback gives students information about their language performance. It helps them fix mistakes and improve their skills. Cao and Mao (2023) found that helpful, clear, and respectful feedback boosts both writing ability and motivation. Feedback can come in different forms spoken, written, or even through expressions.

Feedback and Emotions

Feedback is not just about correcting errors. When feedback is respectful and positive, students feel more confident and stay motivated. Tu and Ego-ugan (2024) showed that feedback that mixes praise and suggestions is more effective than only correction. This kind of feedback helps create a healthy, safe learning space.

Self-Regulated Learning (SRL)

Praise and feedback help students learn independently. Praise and feedback also help students become more responsible for their own learning. This is called self-regulated learning (SRL). Gan and Ma (2024) said that when students receive feedback and praise, they are more likely to set learning goals, monitor their work, and keep improving. These skills help them succeed even without direct teacher support.

Stronger Impact from Praise and Feedback

Combining praise and feedback works better than using only one. Using praise and feedback together has a stronger effect on motivation than using them separately. Abbasi et al. (2024) found that combining kind words and helpful advice helped students feel both supported and challenged. When students know what they did well and how to improve, they become more motivated to keep learning.

III. RESEARCH METHOD

This study used a library research method, also known as a literature review. This method involves collecting and analyzing data from existing research and academic writings related to the topic. The goal of this study was to explore how teacher praise and feedback affect students' motivation in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning.

The criteria for selecting articles included the following: the study had to focus on EFL or ESL learners, it needed to discuss the relationship between praise or feedback and student motivation, and it had to be published in English between 2021 until 2024. After collecting the articles, the researcher read each one carefully and summarized the key findings. The results were then analyzed using a thematic analysis method, in which the ideas were grouped into common themes, such as emotional impact, academic improvement, and self-regulated learning. The findings from different authors were compared to show both similarities and differences. This method helped the researcher understand how praise and feedback work in real classroom situations based on the experiences and results from various studies.

IV. FINDINGS

1) Motivation in Language Learning

Motivation is one of the most important parts of learning a second or foreign language. Gardner (1985) described motivation in language learning as "the combination of effort plus desire to achieve the goal of learning the language plus favorable attitudes toward learning the language." Later, Deci and Ryan's Self-Determination Theory (SDT) became a popular theory for understanding motivation in schools. According to SDT, students are more motivated when they feel they have autonomy, competence, and connection with others (Deci & Ryan, 2000). This means that the teacher's behavior and attitude can strongly influence students' internal motivation.

In EFL (English as a Foreign Language) classrooms, where students may feel nervous or shy, a motivating environment helps them take risks and participate. Peng (2021) explains that teacher–student interactions, especially those with care, praise, and encouragement, affect students' emotions and engagement. So, teachers do more than just teach—they help build a positive atmosphere that supports student success.

2) Types of Motivation: Intrinsic and Extrinsic

There are two main types of motivation in language learning: intrinsic and extrinsic. Intrinsic motivation comes from inside the learner. It means doing something because it is interesting or enjoyable. Extrinsic motivation comes from outside, like getting a reward, a good grade, or praise (Deci & Ryan, 2000).

A recent study by Bismayanti, Sakkir, and Aeni (2024) identified seven key factors that promote intrinsic motivation among junior high school students at SMPIT Al-Fityan School Gowa. These factors include:

1. Curiosity. Students are motivated to learn English because they are eager to explore new topics and gain knowledge.
2. Control. Students feel motivated when they have a sense of autonomy and can manage their own learning or complete tasks independently.
3. Competition. Comparing their performance with peers drives some students to improve and strive for better outcomes.
4. Cooperation. Working in groups and helping others increases satisfaction and social bonding, enhancing motivation.
5. Challenge. Students enjoy facing increasingly difficult tasks that match their skill level.
6. Fantasy. Learners are inspired by imagining future scenarios (e.g., becoming a teacher or studying abroad).
7. Recognition. Being appreciated for their efforts and achievements fuels their intrinsic drive.

In the context of English language learning, extrinsic motivation can be shaped by environmental and social pressures, especially among school-aged learners. In their study on EFL students at SMPIT Al-Fityan School Gowa, Bismayanti, Sakkir, and Aeni (2024) identified several key extrinsic motivation factors, which include: 1) teacher praise; 2) parental expectation; 3) reward and punishment; and 4) social pressure and comparison.

According to the study results, the most dominant extrinsic motivators were teacher praise (92%), parental expectations (85%), and rewards/punishment (83%). These factors indicate that students are highly responsive to external reinforcement, especially those

coming from authoritative figures like teachers and parents (Bismayanti et al., 2024, p. 98).

Dornyei (2001) added another theory called the L2 Motivational Self System. He said that students are motivated by: 1) their ideal self – who they want to become; 2) their image of themselves as successful language users; and 3) their "ought-to self" – who they think they should be based on what others expect.

In practice, teacher praise can enhance both types of motivation. It can validate a learner's progress (boosting intrinsic motivation) and act as a social reward (strengthening extrinsic motivation). When teachers combine verbal recognition with specific feedback, it not only satisfies the learner's desire for competence but also reinforces their image of themselves as capable language users.

3) Examples of Teacher Praise in Language Learning

Teacher praise is a form of positive response that shows appreciation for a student's effort, improvement, or success. It can be spoken or shown through body language. Praise helps students feel recognized and more confident in using the language. According to Peng (2021), students who receive regular praise become more motivated and active in class. Liu (2021) also stated that praise supports students' emotional well-being, especially when it is given with kindness and care. Praise works best when it is specific and focused on student behavior or progress, not just general compliments.

1. "Great job using the past tense in your sentence!" Gives clear praise about grammar use (Peng, 2021).
2. "I really liked your story. It was creative and easy to understand." Encourages creativity and fluency (Liu, 2021).
3. "You have improved a lot in pronunciation since last week!" Highlights student progress over time (Abbasi et al., 2024).
4. Non-verbal praise like a smile, nod, or thumbs-up. Shows support without using words (Abbasi et al., 2024).

4) Examples of Teacher Feedback in Language Learning

Teacher feedback helps students understand their mistakes and improve their language skills. It can be written or spoken, and may include corrections, suggestions, or comments. Feedback is most effective when it is respectful, clear, and includes encouragement. Tu and Ego-ugan (2024) found that students feel more motivated when feedback includes both praise and correction. Cao and Mao (2023) also explained that feedback should help students understand why something needs to be changed—not just point out what is wrong.

1. “This is a good idea, but you need to add more detail to support it.” Commentary feedback that builds on student ideas (Cao & Mao, 2023).
2. “Be careful with subject–verb agreement. ‘She go’ should be ‘She goes.’” Direct correction to grammar errors (Tu & Ego-ugan, 2024).
3. “I liked your opinion in the first paragraph. Just check the spelling in the last sentence.” Balanced peer feedback with praise and a correction (Cui et al., 2022).
4. “Good use of linking words like ‘however’ and ‘in addition.’ Keep using them!” Reinforces successful use of cohesive devices (Peng, 2021).

5) The Role of Teacher Praise in Enhancing Motivation

Teacher praise is a form of positive reinforcement that can encourage desired behaviors and increase students’ willingness to participate in classroom tasks. Brophy (1981) emphasized that praise should be contingent, specific, and credible in order to be effective. In EFL contexts, where language anxiety can hinder student performance, praise helps reduce fear and builds learner confidence.

Recent studies confirm that praise remains a relevant and powerful motivational tool. Peng (2021) found that praise contributed significantly to students’ emotional engagement and their motivation to persist in EFL classrooms. Similarly, Liu (2021) reported that supportive behaviors like praise and encouragement were associated with lower levels of hopelessness and higher levels of emotional well-being. These findings reinforce the idea that praise is not only a behavioral tool but also an emotional and motivational strategy that can transform the classroom atmosphere.

6) The Role of Teacher Feedback

Feedback is also very important for motivation. Hattie and Timperley (2007) said that good feedback answers three questions: 1) Where am I going? 2) How am I going? and 3) Where to next? This kind of feedback helps students think about their progress and how to improve.

Tu and Ego-ugan (2024) illustrated this in an EFL academic writing context, where students responded positively to feedback that was encouraging and non-threatening. The feedback promoted not just performance improvement but also emotional engagement. Similarly, Nurhayati and Apoko (2023) observed that when feedback was personalized and constructive, students became more confident and motivated to improve. This supports the argument that feedback, especially when affective and growth-oriented, serves not just to correct but also to motivate.

In digital classrooms, feedback becomes even more critical. As Mahara and Hartono (2023) showed, learners in online environments were more sensitive to tone and clarity in written feedback. Empathetic and respectful feedback helped maintain engagement, while overly critical or vague comments led to demotivation. Thus, in both physical and virtual classrooms, teacher feedback must be designed not only to guide but also to support and uplift learners emotionally.

V. DISCUSSION

This section discusses the key findings of the literature review and interprets how teacher praise and feedback contribute to students' motivation in language learning. The findings of this study confirm that teacher praise and feedback have a strong influence on students' motivation in English language classrooms. Students who receive regular praise tend to feel more appreciated and confident, which leads to better emotional well-being and increased participation. This supports Liu's (2021) and Peng's (2021) conclusions that praise builds a positive classroom environment and reduces negative feelings such as hopelessness and anxiety.

Furthermore, the use of teacher feedback also plays a key role in supporting students' learning progress. Feedback that is respectful, clear, and encouraging does not only help students improve their academic performance but also supports their emotional

engagement. The findings of Tu and Ego-ugan (2024), as well as Nurhayati and Apoko (2023), show that students respond more positively to feedback when it is given with care and focuses on growth, not only correction. This kind of feedback increases student confidence and helps them focus on their learning goals.

The combination of praise and feedback is more effective than using either one alone. When teachers recognize student effort through praise and provide guidance through feedback, students feel both supported and challenged. Abbasi et al. (2024) found that this combination leads to stronger motivation and better classroom behavior. This is also consistent with Brophy's (1981) idea that praise is most effective when it is specific, credible, and linked to behavior.

Another important point is the role of praise and feedback in developing self-regulated learning (SRL). Based on the studies by Gan and Ma (2024), as well as Yang et al. (2023), students who receive positive and constructive input begin to set their own goals, monitor progress, and reflect on their performance. These are key signs of SRL, and they show that teacher interaction can help students become more independent and responsible in their learning.

In terms of motivational types, the findings also support the idea that praise and feedback contribute to both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. Teacher praise, in particular, serves as an external motivator that validates students' effort, while also helping students feel capable and competent—thus supporting internal motivation as well. The research by Bismayanti et al. (2024) further strengthens this, showing that teacher praise ranked as the strongest factor in motivating EFL students in junior high schools.

Overall, the discussion highlights that teacher praise and feedback not only improve language learning outcomes but also shape students' emotional and motivational states. These strategies support academic achievement, personal growth, and classroom engagement when used consistently and thoughtfully.

VI. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this study shows that teacher praise and feedback are important strategies for increasing students' motivation in English language learning. Praise helps

students feel recognized, confident, and emotionally supported, while feedback gives them clear guidance to improve their skills and stay focused. When both are used together, the impact is stronger. They support not only academic success but also emotional well-being. In addition, praise and feedback help students become more independent by encouraging self-regulated learning, such as setting goals and reflecting on progress. When used effectively, these strategies create a more positive classroom environment where students feel motivated, engaged, and ready to learn.

REFERENCES

- Abbasi, A., Ghanbari, B., & Zare, M. H. (2024). The effect of teachers' individual verbal feedback and praise on EFL learners' motivation and attitude. *International Journal of Recent Advances in Multidisciplinary Research*. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.11122244>
- Cao, Z. H., & Mao, Z. C. (2023). The motivational aspect of feedback: A meta-analysis on the effect of different feedback practices on L2 learners' writing motivation. *Assessing Writing*, 59, 100802. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.asw.2023.100802>
- Gan, X., & Ma, X. (2024). Relationships between teacher feedback and English writing proficiency in Chinese students: The mediating effect of writing self-regulated learning strategies. *Journal of English for Academic Purposes*. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jeap.2024.101234>
- Liu, F. (2021). The Role of EFL Teachers' Praise and Love in Preventing Students' Hopelessness. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 12, 800798. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2021.800798>
- Peng, C. (2021). The Academic Motivation and Engagement of Students in English as a Foreign Language Classes: Does Teacher Praise Matter? *Frontiers in Psychology*, 12, 778174. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2021.778174>
- Tu, S. P., & Ego-ugan, G. B. (2024). Teacher Feedback Shaping Emotions and Motivation in EFL Writing. In *JALT Postconference Publication*. <https://doi.org/10.37546/JALTPCP2023-32>
- Zheng, J. (2021). A functional review of research on clarity, immediacy, and credibility of teachers and their impacts on motivation and engagement of students. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 12, 712419. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2021.712419>
- Brophy, J. (1981). Teacher praise: A functional analysis. *Review of Educational Research*, 51(1), 5–32. <https://doi.org/10.3102/00346543051001005>
- Deci, E. L., & Ryan, R. M. (2000). The "what" and "why" of goal pursuits: Human needs and the self-determination of behavior. *Psychological Inquiry*, 11(4), 227–268. https://doi.org/10.1207/S15327965PLI1104_01
- Dornyei, Z. (2001). Motivational strategies in the language classroom. Cambridge University Press.

- Gardner, R. C. (1985). *Social psychology and second language learning: The role of attitudes and motivation*. Edward Arnold.
- Hattie, J., & Timperley, H. (2007). The power of feedback. *Review of Educational Research*, 77(1), 81–112. <https://doi.org/10.3102/003465430298487>
- Liu, H. (2021). Loving pedagogy matters: The development of the Student–Teacher Rapport Scale (STRS) and its predictive effects on students’ success and well-being. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 12, 648859. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2021.648859>
- Mahara, M. F., & Hartono, R. (2023). The effect of teacher's corrective feedback in EFL students’ speaking performance. *JET (Journal of English Teaching)*, 9(1), 36–48. <https://journal.unnes.ac.id/sju/index.php/jet/article/view/60204>
- Nurhayati, R., & Apoko, I. (2023). Teacher's feedback on vocational high school students' motivation in EFL classrooms. *Jurnal Penelitian dan Pengkajian Ilmu Pendidikan: e-Saintika*, 7(1), 19–29. <https://doi.org/10.36312/esaintika.v7i1.1463>
- Bismayanti, S., Sakkir, G., & Aeni, N. (2024). Exploring factors affecting students’ intrinsic and extrinsic motivation in learning English at SMPIT Al-Fityan School Gowa. *Journal of Excellence in English Language Education*, 3(1), 90–102. <https://doi.org/10.26858/joele.v3i1,%20January.59629>