PRACTITIONER RESEARCH

https://e-journal.uum.edu.my/index.php/pr

THE USAGE OF POSITIVE REINFORCEMENT TO STUDY ITS EFFECT ON LEARNERS' MOTIVATION DURING ONLINE CLASS

[1]**Mohd Zulhusni Raof & Muhammad Noor Abdul Aziz**
School of Education
Universiti Utara Malaysia, Malaysia

[1]*Corresponding author: zulhusni@uum.edu.my*

ABSTRACT

This study investigates the effects of positive reinforcement on working adult learners' motivation in online English learning. Grounded in Skinner's operant conditioning theory, it explores how rewards and praise influence learners' emotional responses and engagement during virtual lessons. Using a qualitative case study design, six adult learners enrolled in a part time English Proficiency II course at a university in northern Malaysia were interviewed through semi structured online sessions. Data were analysed thematically to identify the relationship between reinforcement and motivation. Findings reveal that positive reinforcement significantly enhances learners' emotional states, particularly feelings of pride, happiness, and encouragement, thereby improving participation and persistence in online learning tasks. Furthermore, the study shows that intrinsic motivation, driven by self-improvement, confidence, and the importance of mastering English, plays a more dominant role than extrinsic factors such as workplace requirements. The study concludes that incorporating verbal praise and supportive feedback into online instruction can foster greater engagement and satisfaction. Recommendations include integrating structured reinforcement strategies in adult education and expanding future research to broader demographic contexts.

Keywords: Positive reinforcement, motivation, online learning, adult learners, English language education.

INTRODUCTION

Learning happens either by observable task or non-observable progress (Ormrod, 2016). The former process can be seen from a teacher's point of view when a student is able to perform after the lesson.

While the latter may be experienced by the students themselves when they are able to understand foreign languages. She added that learning may also happen by observing other people and adapting what they do; which is a part of social cognitive theory of learning. Ormrod (2016, p. 4) gives the definition of learning as follows; "a long-term change in mental representations or associations as a result of experience". Her definition of learning is further explained that firstly, it takes a long time for the learning process to occur. Secondly, it is based on brain activity. Thirdly, learning is caused by experience, and not by physiological aspects.

Learning process and its outcomes are influenced by numerous factors. Chamorro-Premuzic (2011) in his book of personality and individual differences, listed "motivation" as one of the areas to be concerned among individuals which can affect learning. Motivation is a force that can drive a person to strive for success. In his book, he describes in detail on how theories and perspectives can be a part of motivation. One of the theories in his description is Skinner's reinforcement.

B. F. Skinner popularised the study of operant conditioning in1930s' after he built his work following the predecessor studies of Edward Thorndike. In Skinner's work, he used his Skinner box to watch the animal behaviour change. The most iconic event was when he put a rat in the box, which the rat later learnt to push a button to get food. After a few sequences, the rat continued to push the button after he had learnt that this button would provide him food. Skinner then formulated that a response that occurs from a reinforcer is strengthened and will likely to happen again. Since a reinforcer is a stimulus to generate a response, then the act of following a response by a reinforcer is called reinforcement (Ormrod, 2016).

For motivation, National Institute of Open Schooling (NIOS) (2012) elaborates four characteristics of motivation. Firstly, motivation pushes us to reach our goals. To reach our goal, we need to be pushed to take some action. If we get too little push or arousal, we will feel bored, and there may be no action. Secondly, motivation can be produced in ourselves if we are expecting a pleasant external stimulation. Imagine a situation in which the lecturer asks his students to attend an event as spectators in order to get bonus marks, even though some of the students are not interested to attend. Thirdly, motivation can be a result of our own thought and expectation; which is based on intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. Finally, motivation can also be characterised as needs; which is based on Maslow's hierarchy of needs. Once we have accomplished level 1 tasks, we may move on to higher level tasks. As for reinforcement in learning, Hayes (2017) describes it as a pleasant effect which follows us when we learn something. If positive reinforcement can make people feel pleasant, then it can be a trigger for motivation. Furthermore, in any learning situation, motivation is needed to push learners forward in aiding them in their task. Rewarding learners with something pleasant should help them in learning through online settings.

Since the COVID-19 outbreak in 2020, the world has been introduced to online learning. Many underprivileged people were also forced to adapt to the new norm in life, which includes new methods in teaching and learning (T&L). Since the outbreak, the traditional face-to-face method has been replaced with online learning. This change does not only happen in Malaysia, but also worldwide (Khairul Faiz et al. 2021). Even though online learning is considered as a new method of learning in Malaysia, in fact it has already existed for so long in some other countries. According to Blanson et al. (2020), and Hue Dung (2020), the first online learning-alike was recorded in 1960. However, the online learning during that era was different from today's standard.

During a T&L session, a teacher may experience a variety of challenges. Among the challenges a teacher may be facing is the need to have the students pay attention to instruction (Mohd Ghani, 2014). In another situation, non-anticipating students is also a challenge for teachers. Davis (2009), believed students may choose to be silent because they are afraid to be wrong. She added that student's poor performance also can be caused by their own perception which they believe they are underperforming. To overcome the challenges, she stated that it is the teacher's task to change the student's behaviour into a more suitable one for their learning. She asserted that the teacher is responsible for making sure students maintain their attention in class.

Due to the sudden changes of T&L method, learners are facing problems too. The transition from physical class to online class was sudden, and it was not an option for everyone. Based on Hue Dung's (2020) study, he found out tiredness, loss of concentration, boredom, and IT literacy issues are some of the problems everyone is facing on online learning. Other than that, less interactions and technical difficulties are also recorded. "Less interactions" includes interactions with colleagues and teachers, and "technical difficulties" includes internet connections and equipment (Khairul Faiz et al., 2021).

Motivation-related problems during online learning are also mentioned in some literature. Alchamdani et al. (2020) discovered that their study subjects experienced decreasing in concentration during online learning. They are also alert that the students in their study had issues in participating in online learning due to some constraints. This resulted in the students' readiness to follow the online lesson was not encouraging. Another study reported that online learning caused low motivation in learning (Aguilera-Hermida, 2020). She also recorded that online learning also caused her students to develop negative motions. These two studies obviously showed that motivation was an issue in learning through online methods.

In this study, the researchers would like to see how positive reinforcement can affect students' motivation during online learning. Based on a study by Maria Ana (2020) she supported this belief by stating that reinforcement may show how valuable people's effort is even though they make mistakes which can make them strive more. The target learner in this study is working adult-learners. In Malaysia, study on reinforcement in learning is not popular. The latest publication on positive reinforcement in Malaysia education was made in 2016. During the time of making this study, the researcher believed and confirmed that it was the only study on positive reinforcement in Malaysia. The context of the study was different as well, where it was conducted to see how reinforcement can aid classroom management among children. However, many articles on this topic can be found in international publications, many of them are from Indonesia.

The general objective of this study is to explore the effects of positive reinforcement on motivation in learning English language on working-adult learners. The T&L session is through an online method. The more specific objectives of this study are as follows:

1) To identify the effects of positive reinforcement among working-adult learners in learning English through online methods.
2) To identify the types of motivation which play more role in English online learning by working-adult learners.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Positive Reinforcement

Positive reinforcement is associated with reward. Reinforcement can be described as a force that could trigger a behaviour to happen, and to make it appear again (Narges et. al., 2014; Phungphai & Boonmoh, 2021). Hayes (2017) explains that a pleasant effect may become a part of the process. That pleasant effect which occurs during the learning process is considered as reward. This reward's function is to encourage a certain behaviour to appear in order to enhance the learning process. Thus behaviour modification may occur in operant conditioning. In implementing reward in learning, it can be done in a number of ways. Brown (2001) believes that it can be used in the classroom in three different styles; by giving praise to students, by giving extra grades, or simply by making them become recognised, or becoming an attention.

Reward plays an important role in T&L. This is because in order to make learners follow instructions, they always expect something in return. This behaviour was confirmed by the father of operant conditioning himself; B. F. Skinner. He believed that in order to direct people's behaviour, there is always anticipation of reward, as it was considered as a powerful factor (Brown, 2001). This led to an idea that reward can be used as a tool to plant motivation in students. Once they are motivated, learning can be assisted from the positive vibes which are presented to them.

Previous literature shows positive reinforcement has benefits on learning. Kelly and Pohl (2018) use positive reinforcement to alter students' behaviour to achieve academic success. Sumiati et. al., (2019) apply positive reinforcement to encourage learning motivation in kindergarten students. Nurul Hidayati et al., (2019) finds correlation between reinforcement and students' achievement in the English learning process. They concluded that reinforcement is important towards learning motivation, which later affects students' achievements. Maria Ana (2020) confirms from her study that positive reinforcement makes students more enthusiastic and active in learning.

Motivation in Learning

According to Khasturi and Yeo (2022), motivation is an activated force. Hayes (2017) describes motivation as an act of not only involving physical, but also mental. Valarmathie et al. (2017) define motivation as a concept to clarify human behaviour, which provides motives to react and fulfil the needs. While Brown (2001), defines motivation from the behaviourist perspective as "the anticipation of reinforcement". He believes that a behaviourist approach is heavily linked to motivation, as to whatever we do, we always expect the reward.

There are two common types of motivation, namely intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. Intrinsic motivation is a motivation that arises to engage in an activity for its own sake. People become intrinsically motivated when they love doing that task or they enjoy it (Schunk et al., 2014). Extrinsic motivation is a type of motivation where it is fuelled by anticipation of reward (Brown, 2001). If the reward is nowhere to be seen, the motivation may not occur. In language learning, similar theories like intrinsic and extrinsic motivation existed by Gardner and Lambert in 1972 known as instrumental and integrative motivation. Similarly, Self-Determination Theory by Ryan in 2000 also integrates intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. Khasturi and Yeo (2022) conclude that every learner should get both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation from time to time. The reason is to make sure learners have the motivation and also to maintain the motivation. Prior studies on motivation are done on the correlation in motivation and academic performance (Nadia, 2010), and the relationship among motivation and interest with writing performance Sabarun et al. (2021).

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study applies a qualitative method; which is also known as descriptive research design (Burkholder, 2020). This research design can be conducted in various ways, but there are five descriptive designs which are likely to be performed by researchers. Among the five approaches, the one that is selected for this study is case study. This is due to the nature of the study to understand the effects of what is being studied (Bukholder, 2020; Cresswell, 2018), in this case, the effect of positive reinforcement on working-adult learners . The samples for this study are individuals who receive the treatment in the same environment, and experience the same phenomenon.

Population and Sampling

The target population for this study is working-adult learners who are studying part-time bachelors' degree in Universiti Utara Malaysia (UUM). UUM is one of the public universities in the northern-peninsular region in Malaysia. It offers part-time bachelor's degrees for working adults from the public and private sectors. However, the specific population for this study is not the whole students of PJJ. Instead, only 35 students who are taking course SBLE2113 English Proficiency II (EPII) for semester October 2021/2022 (JA221) from group A and E are selected as the population because they are reachable.

The sampling method used is simple random sampling. It is part of qualitative purposeful sampling; however, it is not a typical random sampling which is popularly applied in quantitative research. This version of random samples allows researchers to pick the samples among the population group which shares some similarities (Tracy, 2013). Similar view is shared by Burkholder et al. (2020) that simple random sampling allows the members of a population to have an equal chance to be chosen. In this study, 6 working-adult students are randomly selected. They belong to the same group of class, course, and session in the semester.

Data Collection Methods

Researcher chooses the interview as the instrument for this study. An interview is a method of data collection which an interviewer enquire question towards the respondents; and it also considered as a conversation with specific reasons to achieve something, which are commenced by a researcher to acquire information on the research and objective (Johnson and Christense, 2004; Robson, 2000; Cohen and Manion, 1989; in Ruzlan et al., 2018). Semistructured interview questions are used in order to ensure consistency in the questions asked, and at the same time to make it flexible for additional questions when required (Bukrholder et al., 2020; Tracy, 2013; Ruzlan et al., 2018).

Due to a limited time availability, face-to-face interviews do not seem as a way to conduct this research. Hence, the interview is going to be conducted through a video conference method. This method is believed to be as effective as face-to-face interviews because it allows researchers and respondents to participate synchronously. Not only that, the video conference method also allows researchers to take note on non-verbal responses just like during face-to-face interviews. What is interesting about using video conferencing for an interview is, both interviewer and interviewee can be at any place that they feel comfortable (Tracy, 2013).

Interview Protocol

For this research, the interview protocol is used as guidance. The protocol document is designed properly as it contains as much as crucial information to be served as an interview guide. On top of the document, it has the topic of the interview. Below it, it has the criteria to be filled during the interview; which are date, location of interview, name of the interviewee, name of the interviewer, and the position of the interviewee during the interview.

The next section is the notes for the interviewer as a reminder of what to be uttered to the respondents before the interview process begins. The reminder notes are reminding the researcher to inform respondents about the agenda of the interview, and also telling them of their personal details are recorded. Their personal details are kept secret and safe. After that, the interview questions appear.

The interview begins around their demographic background. They answer a few questions related to their personal background. This is to set up the mood and to make them comfortable. Once it is done, more specific questions may arise. They answer questions based on motivation, reward, and give their perception based on both. Other questions which may arise based on their responses also will be asked. All responses by respondents are noted down on the form. Researchers also take note of any non-verbal and gesture which seems unique while answering the questions. The interview is recorded using the video-conference software itself. Webex meetings enable the host to record the session and save the recorded session either on cloud storage or in device; both enable researchers to retrieve.

The interview questions consist of six questions. They are divided into 2 sections, namely Section 1 and Section 2. In Section 1, there are three questions which are about students' perception about positive reinforcement. Within these three questions in Section 1, one false question is made to encourage their expression. Meanwhile in Section 2, which is also made of three questions, are about students' perception on their motivation which is related to positive reinforcement. In this section, question one and question two are the false questions. They are prepared to generate ideas for students for question three. The questions used for the interview can be viewed in Table 1.

Table 1

Prepared Interview Questions

Question	Interview questions
Section 1	Effects of positive reinforcement
1	Has your teacher rewarded you when you got the correct answers to questions? Did you like it? What makes you like it?
2	Does your teacher reward you when you fail to give the correct answers? Did you like it? What makes you like it? Do you feel like attempting questions asked again or ceasing to make another response?
3	Does earning a reward give you a positive impact? Does it make you want to be more active to learn?
Section 2	Intrinsic/extrinsic motivation influenced by positive reinforcement
1	Do you learn English for internal reasons or external reasons? Tell me more about it.
2	Does getting the reward boost your motivation in learning English online internally or externally?
3	After receiving the rewards, which makes you want to learn English online more; internally or externally?

Data Analysis

Creswell (2012) elaborates three steps in analysing data. He suggests starting with organising the data as the first step. This step is a crucial stepping stone because information gathered from qualitative research is huge. The second step in analysing is transcribing the data. Every data collected during the study must be converted to text data. The final step is to analyse the data by hand analysis or computerisation.

After the interview is done, transcription will be developed through non-verbatim transcription. This is to make sure the analysis later will be easier with only allowing proper wording to be used. By omitting the speech error from the interviewer and respondents, the transcribed data will be more relevant for analysis. During analysing, the process of identifying key-words with labelling, which is significant to the study will take place. All key-words are sorted according to themes.

FINDINGS

Background of the Learners

Table 2 below shows three male and three female adult learners who are attending online English class during the study. All of them are working in the public sector as full government servants in different agencies.

Table 2

Background Information of the Learners

Pseudonym	Age	Gender	Working sector
Participant 1	41	Female	Public
Participant 2	23	Male	Public
Participant 3	41	Female	Public
Participant 4	27	Female	Public
Participant 5	36	Male	Public
Participant 6	43	Male	Public

Their highest education level ranges from Malaysian Certificate of Education (SPM) to diploma. Their level of education can be referred to Figure 1 below. These academic levels indirectly confirm that the learners all had been learning English prior to the current distance education program.

Students' Perception about Reward on Correct Answer

From the analysis done from the learners' responses, the most common influential factors which impacted a students' learning are categorised as the themes for this first sub-section. They are emotion, learning process, and self-build.

Emotion

The use of positive reinforcement affects the learners in emotion. From the responses, pride is mentioned the highest in terms of emotion. The learners mention that the feeling of pride appears after

they receive positive reinforcement due to being able to answer questions correctly. Each respondent gives a different explanation on the reasoning of them to feel proud, which are based on achievement, challenge, and appreciation.

> *"I feel proud of myself because I could give correct answers, credit goes to the lecturer. It is a moment of pride and achievement for myself." (Participant 1)*

> *"Feels proud because learning English isn't easy." (Participant 4)*

> *"I feel proud when I get appreciated like that." (Participant 6)*

Aside from pride, another reason given by the respondents related to emotion is feeling happy. This is the second highest reason given by the respondents after pride. However, only one respondent explained her reasoning of feeling happy as shown below. The reason is she feels happy because she knows she actually can do the task.

> *"It feels good. We know we can." (Participant 4)*

Another two emotion-related given are encouraging and shy. Firstly, about encouragement. The respondent explained that praise as a positive reinforcement could encourage her to learn in the online English class. Secondly, about being shy. The student explained that the shy feeling appeared because the other students did not participate in the class.

> *"With a word of praise. He encourages people to do it again, want to try again, want to answer again. I like English even though I'm not fluent. But I love learning English." (Participant 3)*

> *"I feel happy and sometimes shy because the classmates are not so active. They were there, but didn't respond. I feel sorry for the teacher, so I gave a response." (Participant 5)*

Learning Process

The use of positive reinforcement affects the learners in the learning process. From the responses, only three reasons were given which are to increase interest, increase participation, and increase determination.

> *"The teacher gave a good gesture which can increase my interest to keep participating in the class." (Participant 2)*

> *"When we get support we will boost our interest, participation in the next question, next class and many more." (Participant 2)*

> *"When someone gives us praise, actually he gives us spirit/determination to do and try again." (Participant 3)*

Self-build

The use of positive reinforcement when the students do well in an online class has also affected the learners in self. A respondent mentions in the interview that receiving positive reinforcement after he does well in the online class is able to increase his self-esteem along with other values.

> *"When we get support we will boost our interest, participation in the next question, next class and many more. And it increases our self-esteem." (Participant 2)*

Students' Perception about Reward on Incorrect Answer

From the analysis done from the learners' responses, the most common influential factors about receiving positive reinforcement from their poor performance are emotion and learning process. These two factors are considered as the themes for this second sub-section.

Emotion

When the students perform poorly, they do not get punished as a consequence. Instead, according to all of the interviewees, the teacher still reward them with praise.

From the interview, the students state that they feel encouraged even if they answered the question wrong. The further explanation given is that the encouragement from the teacher meant the teacher still supports them to learn better. Furthermore, English is considered difficult for a student.

> *"I feel encouraged to learn. The lecturer didn't down the spirit. He encourages us to know more. Furthermore, online classes are very challenging." (Participant 1)*

Another view shared by the learners is he felt okay after receiving praise from the teacher. This student explains that the teacher always welcomes ideas from students. Even though the answer was wrong, the teacher still gave support.

> *"I'm OK. I have no problem with that. Because he said "Nobody is true. Everyone has his opinion. But from the content, it didn't fit the question". (Participant 5)*

Learning Process

Many respondents respond with a statement that they wish to try again after their poor attempt during the class. Among the reasons from the students is positive reinforcement makes them want to re-try on their earlier attempts if compared with punishment.

> *"Yes, I feel like trying more. If a teacher in a class down his students, we don't want to try." (Participant 1)*

Another response given by the students is the desire to perform better during the online class. Positive reinforcement made them want to perform better on the next one. However, there was no indicator whether it refers to the same question but to try answering it again, or it meant the next different question.
> *"Feels like we want to do better than the previous one." (Participant 4)*

Another reason given by the learners is curiosity. From the interview, the researcher notices that positive reinforcement could generate students' curiosity when they perform poorly.

> *"So far, yes, sort of. But when he told me the answer was incorrect, I was curious about the correct one. I want to know. When the lecturer gave the real answer, OK, so learn something in the end." (Participant 3)*

Lastly, according to one of the respondents, positive reinforcement from the teacher could motivate them in their learning. This is probably due to their low performance which generates motivation after getting praise and gestures from the teacher.

> *"He doesn't give praise, but he gives motivation to re-attempt the question." (Participant 6)*

Learners' Motivation after Positive Reinforcement

The second part of the study is to identify how positive reinforcement affects motivation on adult learners during online English lessons. The rationale is to see how the reinforcement could influence the learners' motivation based on their perceptions. The participants are asked whether intrinsic or extrinsic motivation is more preferred by the learners due to being reinforced positively. Based on the analysis, two themes are made which are; intrinsic motivation and extrinsic motivation.

Intrinsic Motivation

Two learners value intrinsic motivation due to the importance of the language. They agree that English is widely used and it is crucial to improve it. So with the help of positive reinforcement, they feel it is able to drive their motivation intrinsically to improve their mastery of the language.

> *"From the inside, we improve ourselves. We must have knowledge in English because English is global. So indirectly, when we learn English we can gain more knowledge and with English we can interact with outside people with more confidence and won't feel embarrassed when talking with people." (Participant 6)*
>
> *"Internal. To improve my English proficiency." (Participant 1)*

Another way positive reinforcement could help with intrinsic motivation is by boosting enthusiasm of a learner.

> *"Gives enthusiasm for me to learn this subject". (Participant 3)*

Another learner strongly states that positive reinforcement really helps with confidence. She explains that reinforcement could help in gaining confidence, thus making her apply the language learnt in the real world.

> *"Firstly it is internal. Because once we have confidence in ourselves, once we can speak then we will be brave to voice out." (Participant 4)*

Lastly, one of the respondents elaborates about support. According to him, positive reinforcement could be a tool to show support in providing motivation.

> *"To me it is internal motivation. If it is external it should be very few. Because internal support is more important and strong than external support." (Participant 5)*

Extrinsic Motivation

Besides intrinsic motivation, positive reinforcement is also able to influence working students' motivation in English online learning extrinsically. One the learners mentions work. She elaborates during her interview that her extrinsic motivation which was caused by positive reinforcement are mostly due to her work. She also describes her career in a government agency as a customer relation officer, requiring her to make interaction with people by using the language. So it seems, her vocation was her motivation to learn English.

> *"I am in customer service. Every day I have to learn and use English at the counter. That's what I need to improve when I learn English. I can adapt in the workplace…….. Because of work. When I learn, I have an advantage if I can converse in English." (Participant 3)*

Another interviewee shares a different reason towards his extrinsic motivation. This student's response was due to personal reasons. He mentions the embarrassment if he is unable to converse in the language with people. He also states that he works in the government sector, but he does not explain about his extrinsic motivation which is related to work.

> *"We must have knowledge in English because English is global. So indirectly, when we learn English we can gain more knowledge and with English we can interact with outside people with more confidence and won't feel embarrassed when talking with people." (Participant 6)*

DISCUSSION

The first question is about rewarding the students when they performed well. All students report that they receive compliments from the teacher for their correct answers. The highest frequency from their responses is that the teacher's reward affects their emotions. Within this theme, the most frequent description given by the learners is reward makes them feel proud. They explain that the reward makes them feel proud because learning English is not easy. Thus by getting the reward, they feel really appreciated and it is considered as an achievement.

Another description based on emotion is that reward makes the learners happy. The learners explain that happy feelings exist because they have the acknowledgement of their ability. Another description is encouraging. A learner describes it as the reward or praise from the teacher made her to be more encouraged to perform well on the next event. One student describes feeling shy after receiving a reward because he is the only active student when the rest of the students do not become active. This one is the only response which can be considered as a negative effect. The findings above are similar to the study of Sumiati et al. (2019) in which their respondents felt happy when they were given rewards consistently. Maria Ana (2020) also had the same results when her study showed the learners felt good inside when they were praised.

The second question is about rewarding students for their low performances. From this part of the question, most responses from the students are on the learning process. The highest frequency of responses is about the urges to try again. This shows exactly that reward for poor performances of learners may improve their participation in the learning process. The respondents explain that receiving positive reinforcement in the form of praise and positive feedback really help them in wanting to try again. This is because the said reward is preferable if compared to punishment. They also mention that if the teacher uses punishment for their poor attempt, they probably do not have the tendency to try again. This is exactly similar with Kelly and Phol (2018) article where they concluded that positive behaviour modifications are more effective than punishment. Though they do acknowledge that most teachers are more inclined to apply punishment.

Another frequent response from the adult learners which belong to the same theme of learning process is the urge to improve. Learners express that by receiving the positive reinforcement for their poor attempt makes them want to improve themselves so they could do better.

Apart from that, a student described that she is filled with curiosity after getting positive reinforcement from her teacher. When the initial answer is given, the student does not get punished but instead, gets positive feedback to do better. This action makes the learner want to know the correct answer which she failed earlier. Another student describes how he feels motivated during the lesson due to being reinforced by the teacher. Similar to the previous explanation, this student wants to try again due to being motivated. This result bears similar results from Sumiati et al. (2019) and Maria Ana (2020) where they managed to improve the learners' motivation in learning by applying rewards.

The second research question of the study is about what kind of motivation plays a major role in learning English online among adult learners. The researcher hopes to be able to identify if it is intrinsic motivation or is it extrinsic motivation that helps the students in their learning English online.

Most students express that intrinsic motivation plays a bigger role in their online English class due to the importance of improving their mastery of the language. They share their view by saying the importance of improving the proficiency of their English. Since English is spoken globally, they agree that they can gain more knowledge and learn more by knowing how to use the language. Furthermore, it will make it easy for communication by improving their English.

Other views shared by the students are positive reinforcement able to affect their motivation intrinsically by making them enthusiastic in learning the language online, making them confident in using the language, and making them feel supported.

The findings indicate that the study of positive reinforcement improves learners' motivation in the English online class among the adult learners. It is necessary for all instructors teaching English and other courses online to the adult learners in part-time undergraduate programs to encourage and support the students with positive verbal reinforcement techniques (general praise, ability praise and effort praise) which positively affects learners' emotion during T&L, which also can improve the learning process. These may lead to learners' maintenance or repetition of the desired learners' behaviours hence improve their learning.

Future research may be conducted with full-time undergraduates which consist of young adult learners, and also other levels such as postgraduate students in UUM as well as other levels such as primary and secondary schools, and pre-university institutions in the state of Kedah. Other than that, the replication

could also be done with a larger target population, including students from the whole country. The study that involves samples from the whole country will make it possible for the findings to be generalized to all Malaysian students.

Future research may include goals orientation, attention span, and also learners' engagement in English online learning. This is because positive reinforcement and the general theory of behaviourism and motivation can be studied alongside goals, attention, and engagement. This study only involved six participants from 35 populations. With more participants and more topics to study, the result may be more outstanding.

Further study may include the different factors between demographic differences such as gender, age class, marital status and level of education in the effects of positive reinforcement on learners' motivation. Thereby, all these can be further researched for the future development of education.

For instructors who are teaching part-time undergraduate programs with adult-learners, it is recommended to include motivation booster in their lesson. This is because adult-learners are working people with family. While they are studying, they are also thinking about other things like work and family. Since the young learners are also in need of a motivation booster, the adult learners may need more. One way to make sure this idea could be achieved is by designing appropriate learning activities for their students. Try to design more activities to match the differences with students' type. Students in the classroom may bring different beliefs regarding the nature of the knowledge and skills they are expected to acquire in class and regarding the learning processes that they will need to undertake to acquire this knowledge.

REFLECTION

This study is very useful for all educators and even to the authors. It reminds everyone about the importance of caring and understanding students' motivation during T&L. The implementation of the positive reinforcement can also be applied to adult learners. Instead of giving a token, other forms of positive reinforcement works well on all levels of learners. By giving positive feedback and praises, this study shows those forms of positive reinforcement help the adult learners to be more motivated in the classroom. Attending classes from morning until evening is tiring. It is clearly necessary for teachers to change their students' mood from time to time. Since teachers may apply ideas from this study, the students may be aid in their quest to follow the lesson.

The data collection period was fascinating because almost all of the students were willing to be interviewed. Due to some constraints, only six respondents were selected. The interview was carried out via online interview because of the situation at the time. Furthermore, all of them are married and employed full time, thus more planning was required. Authors have to learn to use computer software for future data analysis for qualitative study, to replace manual methods of qualitative data analysis.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that positive reinforcement plays a crucial role in enhancing adult learners' motivation and engagement in online English learning environments. By fostering feelings of pride, happiness, and encouragement, reinforcement creates a supportive atmosphere that promotes sustained

participation and self directed improvement. The findings underscore that intrinsic motivation, driven by personal growth, confidence, and the meaningful application of English, has a greater influence than external incentives. Educators are encouraged to integrate consistent verbal praise, recognition, and constructive feedback into their online teaching practices to enhance learners' emotional well being and academic persistence. Beyond improving performance, positive reinforcement strengthens learners' sense of achievement and belonging, empowering them to remain committed to their learning journey. Integrating such reinforcement strategies within online pedagogy can transform virtual classrooms into dynamic, motivating spaces where learners' enthusiasm and confidence continue to thrive beyond the boundaries of traditional instruction.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

REFERENCES

Aguilera-Hermida, A. P. (2020). College students' use and acceptance of emergency online learning due to Covid-19. *International Journal of Educational Research Open, 1*(1)*, 1-8*. https://doi.org/10.15405/ejsbs.288

Alchamdani Alchamdani, Fatmasari, Eka Rahmadani Anugrah, Nahda Putri Sari, Freddrika Putri, & Astina Astina. (2020). The impact of COVID19 pandemic on online learning process in the college at Southeast Sulawesi. *Jurnal Kesehatan Lingkungan, 12*(No. 1 Special Issue), *129-136*. https://doi.org/10.20473/jkl.v12i1si.2020.129-136

Blanson, K. L., Ntuli, E., & Blankson, J. (2020). *Handbook of research on creating meaningful experiences in online courses*. IGI Global.

Brown, H. D. (2001). *Teaching by Principles* (2nd ed.). Longman.

Burkholder, G. J., Cox, K. A., Crawford, L. M., & Hitchcock, J. H. (2020). *Research design and methods: An applied guide for the scholar-practitioner*. Sage.

Cohen, L., & Manion, L. (1989). *Research methods in education* (3rd ed.). Routledge.

Chamorro-Premuzic, T. (2011). *Personality and individaul differences* (2nd ed.). BPS Blacwell.

Creswell, J. W. (2012). *Educational Research* (4th ed.). Pearson.

Creswell, J. W., & Poth, C. N. (2018). *Qualitative inquiry & research design: Choosing among five approaches* (4th ed.). Sage.

Davis, B. G. (2009). *Tools for teaching* (2nd ed.). Jossey-Bass.

Hayes, N. (2017). *Understand Psychology*. John Murray Learning.

Hue Dung, D. (2020). The advantages and disadvantages of virtual learning. *IOSR Journal of Research & Method in Education (IOSR-JRME), 10*(3), 45-48. https://doi.org/10.9790/7388-1003054548

Johnson, R. B., & Christensen, L. B. (2004). *Educational research: Quantitative, qualitative, and mixed approaches*. Allyn and Bacon.

Khasturi Ramalingam, & Yeo, K. J. (2022). Influence of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation in learning among primary school students. *Central Asia and the Caucasus, 23*(1).

Khairul Faiz Alimi, Abdul Halim Ayob, Abdurraouf Ramesh Abdullah, Fazal Mohamed Mohamed Sultan, & Gunasegaran Karuppannan. (December, 2021). Effectiveness of English language e-learning among tertiary education students during the COVID-19 pandemic. 3L: Language, Linguistics, Literature: *The Southeast Asian Journal of English Language Studies, 27*(4). http://doi.org/10.17576/3L-2021-2704-05

Kelly, J., & Pohl, B. (2018). Using structured positive and negative reinforcement to change student behavior in educational settings in order to achieve student academic success. *Multidisciplinary Journal for Education, Social and Technological Sciences*.

Maria Ana Mei Lestari. (2020). Teachers' reinforcement and students' perception to the teachers in English classroom. *Journal of English Language Teaching*.

Mohd Ghani Awang. (2014). *Pedagogy for lecturers*. Universiti Malaysia Pahang.

Nadia Ayub. (2010). Effect of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation on academic performance. *Pakistan Business Review, 3*, 363-372.

Narges Adibsereshki, Somaye Jalil Abkenar, Mohammad Ashoor, & Mahmood Mirzamani. (2014). The effectiveness of using reinforcements in the classroom on the academic achievement of students with intellectual disabilities. *Journal of Intellectual Disabilities*, *19*(1), 83-93. https://doi.org/10.1177/1744629514559313

National Institute of Open Schooling. (2012). In *Secondary course: Psychology* (222). India.

Nurul Hidayati, Martin Kustati, & Luli Sari Yustina. (2019). The correlation of teachers' Reinforcement and students' achievement in English learning process. *Turast: Jurnal Penelitian dan Pengabdian, 7*(1).

Ormrod, J. E. (2016). *Human learning* (7th ed.). Pearson.

Phungphai, K., & Boonmoh, A. (June, 2021). Students' perception towards the use of rewards to enhance their learning behaviours and self-development. *JEE (Journal of English Education), 7*(1).

Robson, C. (2000). *Real world research*. Blackwell.

Ruzlan Md Ali, Fahainis Mohd Yusof, & Fuziah Shaffie. (2018). *Pengumpulan data kualitatif dalam penyelidikan*. Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka.

Sabarun, Laela Himah Nurbatra, Zaitun Qamariah, Hesty Widiastuty, & Aisyah Hafshah Saffura el-Muslimah. (2021). The relationship among intrinsic/extrinsic motivation and interest toward L2 writing performance at higher education. *Ilkogretim Online - Elementary Education Online, 19*(2), 60-68.

Schunk, D., Meece, J., & Pintrich, P. (2014). *Motivation in Education* (4th ed.). Pearson.

Sumiati, T., Septiani, N., Widodo, S., & Caturiasari, J. (2019). Building children's learning motivation through positive reinforcement in science and math classroom. *Journal of Physics: Conf. Series 1318,* 012023.

Tracy, S. J. (2013). *Qualitative research method: Collecting evidence, crafting analysis, communicating impact.* Wiley-Blackwell.

Valarmathie Gopalan, Juliana Aida Abu Bakar, Abdul Nasir Zulkifli, Asmidah Alwi, & Ruzinoor Che Mat. (2017). *A review of the motivation theories in learning*. The 2nd International Conference on Applied Science and Technology 2017 (ICAST'17).