DEVELOPING STUDENTS’ POSITIVE BEHAVIOUR THROUGH THE IMPLEMENTATION OF POSITIVE REINFORCEMENT IN EFL CLASS

Dw Ayu Putri Ari Ningsih
English Language Education, Languages and Arts Faculty, Universitas Pendidikan Ganesha, Bali
ningsih421@gmail.com

Abstract. This paper is aimed at explaining why the use of positive reinforcement in EFL class could promote and develop the students’ positive behavior. This paper is a library research in which the data were collected by analyzing articles, papers and journals. Positive reinforcement can be used in the teaching and learning processes to make the students behave appropriately in the class. The use of positive reinforcement in the classroom is important because a student who experiences positive reinforcement often shows a better willingness to demonstrate positive behavior. The discussion covers the reasons why using positive reinforcement is important, how it can manage the students’ behavior, the implementation, the anticipated impact, and the way to overcome it.

Keywords: Positive reinforcement, Positive behavior, EFL class

INTRODUCTION

The effectiveness of teaching and learning process in EFL class is highly influenced by the way teacher manages the students in the class (Wahyudi, 2013). Consequently, teacher has a big responsibility to set up or to create an innovative and effective classroom management. Padmadewi, Artini, & Agustini (2017:38) stated that innovative teaching strategy that teachers take will show their creativity in teaching the students. When teachers are able to show their creativity in the classroom, it will make the learning process more fun and the students will show their willingness to learn in the classroom. One of the good strategy that teacher can use in the classroom is giving reinforcement to the students. Reinforcement is a good strategy to build a good behavior for students and motivate them to learn (Wahyudi, 2013).

Reinforcement is adding or taking something away after a behavior occurs that will increase the possibility that the same behavior will happen again at a future time. (Cooper, Heron and Heward, 2007). Reinforcement can include anything that increases and strengthens a behavior, including stimuli, events, and situation. In EFL classroom, the type of reinforcement can be in form of praise, getting out of the class earlier than the other, token rewards, candy, extra playtime and fun activities. Cited from Wikipedia (2019), there are two types of reinforcement, known as positive reinforcement and negative reinforcement. Positive is the condition when a reward is offered on expression of the wanted behavior and negative is taking away a bad thing in the person’s environment whenever the desired behavior is achieved.

Similarly, positive reinforcement and negative reinforcement have same goal, which is to encourage a certain behavior, but they use different methods. Positive reinforcement adds a desirable stimulus to the situation, while negative reinforcement removes an undesirable stimulus, both in the service of reinforcing the behavior that was displayed (Ackerman, 2016). The example of positive reinforcement is teacher giving students who get a good grade a reward like candy or pencil. For negative reinforcement, the example is when teacher removing extra homework when students get good grade. However, it need to be stressed out that reinforcement is different with punishment. Reinforcement means you are increasing a behavior, and punishment means you are decreasing a behavior (Skinner, 1953).
Therefore, reinforcement is not always rightfully used by the teacher in the classroom to manage the students’ behavior. Sometimes, teachers will automatically punish a student for misbehaviors displayed in the classroom, forgetting to put emphasis on maintaining and praising positive behaviors in order to prevent unwanted behaviors in the first place (Gracia & Hoang, 2015). Whereas if teacher really wants to make the students behave well in the classroom, teachers should use behavior managements systems that can help them prevent undesired behaviors by maintaining and giving compliment the desired behaviors in a positive and effective way. Teaching students in a positive environment and positive habits early on will not only allow them to learn in a safer classroom atmosphere, but it will also build strong and lasting learning habits within the students.

Skinner (1961) stated that the most effective way to teach a person a new behavior is with positive reinforcement. As it is known, the positive reinforcement offered a desirable stimulus to increase a behavior. Skinner (1961) stated that teacher can create an effective teaching strategies if they can use positive reinforcement in correct way, in which, he argued, more effective at changing and establishing behavior than punishment. Skinner further explained that the only thing or the main focus people learn from being punished is how to avoid punishment. Being punished doesn’t make the students learn from their mistake, it only make them afraid to the teacher. They might change their behavior and try their best not to repeat the same mistake, but it is not because they are aware they made a mistake, more of their way to avoid the punishment. Positive reinforcement is highly recommended to build up the students’ good behavior rather than punishment.

Skinner (1961) studied rats, and he found that if the rats consistently pressed a bar which then administered food to the rat, the rat would press the bar more and more in order to get the food reward. Like those rats, if people find a particular behavior rewarding, it is more likely that they will repeat this behavior. When thinking about positive reinforcement in teaching and education, the overarching purpose is to provide an incentive for students to repeat desired behaviors (Craig, 2019). In other words, by providing students with a positive outcome when they accomplish achievements or display certain behaviors, students are encouraged to do so again. More specifically, the use of positive reinforcement is the act of identifying and encouraging a behavior, with the hopes that the desired behavior will increase (Burden, 2003). The theory is that any behavior followed by a pleasant stimulus is likely to be repeated (Westen 1999).

Further, this is not to say that negative reinforcement, punishment, or consequences are not effective means of discipline, but the use of positive reinforcement in the first place can prevent teachers using those methods if the negative behavior can be prevented in the first place. (Garcia & Hoang, 2015). Therefore, Gracia & Hoang (2015) proved that the use of positive reinforcement in the classroom indeed can encourage students to behave well in the classroom. They implemented positive reinforcement through the use of token economy system, in which students will be given bonus point if they behave well and their point will be eliminated if they show misbehave behavior. Moreover, they also found out when students were asked to raise hands if they prefer to get a reward or to be punished, the students mostly prefer the former and not the latter. Students more eager to gain the maximum amount of points in the class rather than getting punishment, therefore utilizing positive reinforcement first in the classroom is proven to be the most effective.

Another study by Wahyudi, Mukhaiyar & Refnaldi (2013) showed that the implementation of positive reinforcement can make the students maintain a good behavior in the classroom, as well as motivated them to learn in the class. It was conducted in SMAN 1 Kecamatan V Koto Kampung Dalam using three English teachers as the subject of the study. It was found out that teacher used reward more often than giving punishment. Further it was explained why teacher use reward often than punishment in the classroom. They explained that reward has several
benefit, such as: (1) can fulfil the students’ academic achievement, (2) help students maintain and increase positive behavior, (3) creating a conducive classroom, (4) helps students concentrating to their task, (5) creating good interaction between teacher and students in the class, and (6) managing the students’ behavior during the learning process in the classroom.

From all of the explanation above, in can be seen that positive reinforcement is a good strategy that can be used in the classroom to develop the students’ behavior in the classroom. It is also stated by Rumfola (2017) that it is important to use positive reinforcement in the classroom because a student who experiences positive reinforcement often shows a greater willingness to demonstrate positive behavior. Thus, in this paper it will be explained further about the implementation of positive reinforcement in EFL class as a strategy to develop students’ good behavior. Therefore, this paper has the aim to explain why positive reinforcement could develop students’ positive behavior in EFL class.

PROBLEM IDENTIFICATION

The strategy that is used by the teacher will highly influence the learning process in EFL class. Strategy that is used by the teacher will show the capability and the creativity of the teacher itself. Maintaining a good strategy will make the students eager to learn as well as maintain the students’ behavior in the classroom. Using reinforcement is one of good strategy that can be used in maintaining the students’ behavior. However, most of the teachers often automatically punish a student for misbehaviors displayed in the classroom, forgetting to put emphasis on maintaining and praising positive behaviors in order to prevent unwanted behaviors in the first place. That is why the use of positive reinforcement is highly recommended as the strategy for the teacher to promote students’ positive behavior in EFL class. In the implementation of the positive reinforcement, a desirable stimulus is added to increase a behavior. Just like what Skinner (1961) stated that the most effective way to teach a person a new behavior is with positive reinforcement. This might be the solution for the teacher to develop students’ positive behavior in the EFL class, instead of punish them, it is better to prevent the misbehave behavior by using positive reinforcement.

PURPOSE

Based on the identified problem, the paper purposed to explain the importance of positive reinforcement in an EFL class to develop and maintaining the students’ positive behavior during the learning process. Additionally, this paper will also cover the implementation of positive reinforcement in the classroom, the anticipated impact of positive reinforcement in an EFL classroom, and the solution of the impact that may occur during the implementation of positive reinforcement in the classroom.

Further, this paper also aimed to give teacher alternative teaching strategy that can be used in the classroom to manage the students, especially the students’ behavior. This paper aimed to make the teacher more aware that there is alternative of teaching strategy that can be used beside the common one that the teacher always use in the class. The paper aimed to persuade teachers, especially English teacher to be brave enough to try something new, something fresh that can help them manage the students in the classroom.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Teaching Strategy
Finzi, E. (2018) explained that teaching strategy is the methods of instruction used by the teacher to help students to learn and to apply their knowledge to achieve their academic goals. The teacher should consider the age of the students, their level, the setting of the class, the length of the class and the curriculum. There may be a possibility that teacher can use different teaching aids to reach all students with different learning styles and abilities. Another definition of teaching strategy is explained by Kumari (2019), in which he explained that teaching strategy is the pre planning of a teacher before teaching the students. Teachers make their strategy through their lesson design that how they want to deliver their lesson to students and grab their attention and interest towards the lesson.

Teaching strategies refer to methods used to help students learn the desired course contents and be able to develop achievable goals in the future (Armstrong, 2013). By using teaching strategies, teachers will be able to identify the different available learning methods to enable them to develop the right strategy to deal with the target group identified. The assessment of the learning competencies of students provides a key pillar in development of a successful teaching strategy. Padmadewi, Artini, & Agustini (2017:38) stated that innovative teaching strategy that teachers take will show their creativity in teaching the students. When teachers are able to show their creativity in the classroom, it will make the learning process more fun and the students will show their willingness to learn in the classroom.

Reinforcement

Reinforcement is a good strategy to build a good behavior for students and motivate them to learn (Wahyudi, 2013). According to Vicko (2001), reinforcement is a thing to increase the students’ motivation in the class to be more creative. It means that the result of students’ learning be more effectively. Besides, Sanjaya (2006) stated that the reinforcement process can give positive effect to the students’ attitude. It means that an event or stimulus is presented as a consequence of an attitude and the attitude increases. Further, Cooper, Heron and Heward (2007) explained that Reinforcement is adding or taking something away after a behavior occurs that will increase the possibility that the same behavior will happen again at a future time. In Wikipedia (2019) it is elaborated that Reinforcement can include anything that increases and strengthens a behavior, including stimuli, events, and situation. In EFL classroom, the type of reinforcement can be in form of praise, getting out of the class earlier than the other, token rewards, candy, extra playtime and fun activities.

According to Skinner (1938), reinforcement is divided into two types; positive reinforcement and negative reinforcement. At that time, according to Skinner, negative reinforcement is the same as punishment. However in 1953 he redefined and stressed out that negative reinforcement is different with punishment. In the revised version, he explained that positive reinforcement is the strengthening of behavior by the occurrence of some event, whereas negative reinforcement is the strengthening of behavior by the removal or avoidance of some aversive event. Positive reinforcement and negative reinforcement have same goal, which is to encourage a certain behavior, but they use different methods. Positive reinforcement adds a desirable stimulus to the situation, while negative reinforcement removes an undesirable stimulus, both in the service of reinforcing the behavior that was displayed (Ackerman, 2016).

Positive Reinforcement

Skinner (1961) stated that the most effective way to teach a person a new behavior is with positive reinforcement. Positive reinforcement refers to the introduction of a desirable or pleasant stimulus after a behavior. The desirable stimulus reinforces the behavior, making it more likely that the behavior will reoccur (Ackerman, 2016). Commonly, positive reinforcement is defined as a method of identifying to children which behaviors are acceptable and appropriate and which are not. More specifically, the use of positive reinforcement is the act
of identifying and encouraging a behavior, with the hopes that the desired behavior will increase (Burden, 2003). The theory is that any behavior followed by a pleasant stimulus is likely to be repeated (Westen 1999). This ‘desirable stimulus’ can be anything ‘good’ and can also include a multitude of other positive responses (Alberto & Troutman, 1990). Positive reinforcers are specific to each individual and can be determined through a preference assessment (Peoples, J., 2018). Some common reinforcers are toys, edibles, activities, and verbal praise.

Positive Reinforcement is giving a positive response when an individual shows positive and required behavior (Juneja, 2015). For example, teacher immediately praising a students for finishing the task earlier. This will increase the possibility of the desirable behavior occurring again. Reward is a positive reinforce, but not necessarily. If and only if the students’ behavior improves, reward can said to be a positive reinforcers. Positive reinforcement stimulates occurrence of a behavior. Teacher needs to pay more attention to the fact that more spontaneous is the giving of reward, the greater reinforcement value it has. It should be taken into a note that positive reinforcement is only one of the four types of conditioning according to famed behaviorist B. F. Skinner’s model. Skinner’s model of operant conditioning is based on the assumption that studying a behavior’s cause and its consequences is the best way to understand and regulate it. This theory grew from Thorndike’s “law of effect” which stated that a behavior that is followed by pleasant or desirable consequences is likely to be repeated, while behavior that is followed by undesirable consequences is less likely to be repeated (McLeod, 2018).

In addition to the four methods of training based on the theory of operant conditioning by Skinner (1961), positive reinforcement can be further subdivided into four types. These four types are differentiated by the type of positive stimulus also known as a reinforcer or the one that can trigger someone to be well-behave. The four types of reinforcers are: (1) natural reinforcers: reinforcers that occur directly as a result of the behavior (e.g., a student studies hard and does well on her exams, resulting in good grades), (2) token reinforcers: those that are awarded for performing certain behaviors and can be exchanged for something of value (e.g., parents devise a reward system in which the child earns stars, points, or some other token that they can save up and turn in for a reward), (3) social reinforcers: those that involve others expressing their approval of a behavior (e.g., a teacher, parent, or employer saying, “Good job!” or “Excellent work!”), (4) tangible reinforcers: reinforcers that are actual physical or tangible rewards (e.g., cash, toys, treats; Cherry, 2018).

IMPLEMENTATION AND ANTICIPATED IMPACTS

Reinforcement

Reinforcement is not always rightfully use by teacher in the classroom to manage the students’ behavior. Sometimes, teachers will automatically punish a student for misbehaviors displayed in the classroom, forgetting to put emphasis on maintaining and praising positive behaviors in order to prevent unwanted behaviors in the first place (Gracia & Hoang, 2015). Skinner (1961) stated that the most effective way to teach a person a new behavior is with positive reinforcement. In the implementation of positive reinforcement, a desirable stimulus is added to increase a behavior. Skinner (1961) further explained that effective teaching must be based on positive reinforcement in which, he argued, it is more effective at changing and establishing behavior than punishment. Further, he elaborated that the main thing people learn from being punished is how to avoid punishment.

The benefits of using positive reinforcement can be achieved in some areas such as academic, behavioral, social, and even emotional (Rumfola, 2017). Advantages of using positive
reinforcement are, as described in Rumfola (2017): (1) students can learn through the social
cues of their teachers as to what constitutes acceptable behavior. For example, if one student is
praised for a desired behavior, other students also learn that this behavior is acceptable and that
it will be praised, (2) students actively enjoy being present and learning in the classroom, (3) use
of positive reinforcement leads to heightened enthusiasm in students – and even the teacher, (4)
it can allow accomplishment to be celebrated as a class, (5) positive reinforcement leads to a
greater sense of community in the class, (6) use of positive reinforcement is related to increased
student attendance, and (7) when positive reinforcement is used, students are more motivated.

Positive reinforcement can be used to effectively change student behavior, this is why positive
reinforcement is very important (Smith, 2017). It is also important to use positive reinforcement
because it is a universal principle that actually occurs quite naturally in each and every
classroom (Maag, 2001). As well as offering the opportunity to increase the display of
appropriate behaviors, planning the occurrence of positive reinforcement also means that
educators can avoid inadvertently and haphazardly promoting inappropriate behaviors (Maag,
2001). It can be quite difficult to avoid reinforcing misbehavior simply by paying attention to it.
It is very useful to use positive reinforcement in the classroom because a student who
experiences positive reinforcement often shows a greater willingness to show positive behavior
(Rumfola, 2017).

Positive reinforcement is easier to process than other methods of training, since it doesn’t
involve taking anything away or introducing a negative consequence. It’s also much easier to
encourage behaviors than to discourage them, making reinforcement a more powerful tool than
punishment in most cases. Perhaps most important, positive reinforcement can simply be more
effective, especially in the long-term. When learning is accompanied by positive feelings and
associations is more likely to be remembered, even beyond the end of the reinforcement
schedule.

The Implementation

One of the examples given for positive reinforcement was a teacher handing out gold stars to
students who turn their work in on time; this is just one of the several ways positive
reinforcement can be implemented in the classroom. Some teachers may choose to hand out
stickers, others might be generous with their praise or high-fives, and others may hand out
candy or other small treats when students behave appropriately. Positive reinforcement can be
very effective in the classroom because of one important factor: social atmosphere, or peer
pressure. Children often want to do the right thing and may get embarrassed if caught doing
something wrong in front of their friends and peers. When there is a whole classroom of
students watching, children are more receptive than usual to a reward.

In teaching English, positive reinforcement can be implemented through five ways, namely;
direct reinforcement, social reinforcers, activity reinforcers, tangible reinforcers, and token
reinforcement. Direct reinforcement refers to a type of reinforcement that, as the name suggests,
directly results from the appropriate behavior. The example given by Smith (2017) is that if a
student interacts appropriately with their peers in a group activity, this will most likely lead to
further invitations to join in on such activities in future. In other words, if the student showing
good behavior while working with their friend in a group, this will most likely reoccurs in the
future. Simply, by behaving well with their friend in the activities, student will be given a direct
reward which is being liked by their friends.

The second one is social reinforcers. It refers to the way positive reinforcement is delivered by
others, for example teachers, parents, and even peer. They involve an expression of approval
and praise for appropriate behavior, for example: giving comments (e.g. “you did a good job”,
“your writing skill is so good”, “you pronounce English words well”), then giving written
approval (e.g. writing ‘super’ on a completed worksheet) and other expressions of approval (such as smiling, nodding head, clapping, a pat on the back) (Smith, 2017). Then, the third one is activity reinforcers. It involves allowing students to take part in their preferred activities if they behave appropriately. This is especially effective if they are allowed to choose a classmate with whom they can, for example, play a game or spend time on the computer with. This provides social reinforcement from their partner, too.

Next, for the fourth one is Tangible reinforcers. It is giving some kind of present for the students who are showing good behavior in the classroom. For example; food, toys, balloons, stickers, and awards. However, food and toys must be used mindfully. For example, if a student has a weight problem their parents may have reason to oppose the use of food as reinforcement. Furthermore, handing out toys may make other students envious. Instead, awards such as certificates, displaying work in the classroom, or a letter sent home to parents praising students’ progress can be used as reinforcement. The last one is token reinforcement. It is the common way of the implementation of positive reinforcement in the classroom. It occurs when points or tokens are awarded for appropriate behavior. The rewards themselves have little value but they can be collected, then exchanged for something valuable to the student. For example, every time a student shows a certain behavior, the teacher could give them a ticket. At the end of the week, tickets can be exchanged for a prize.

Using Positive Reinforcement to Change Behavior

In order to use positive reinforcement to change or to develop the students’ positive behavior, Teacher will need to come up with a plan of implementation. Teachers need to create a positive reinforcement schedule to structure their efforts. A positive reinforcement schedule is a plan that defines how the teacher will go about encouraging the behavior. Ackerman (2016), suggested that there are five different reinforcement schedules that can be used to implement positive reinforcement, namely: (1) continuous schedule: the behavior is reinforced after each and every occurrence (this schedule is hard to keep up on since we are rarely able to be present for each occurrence), (2) fixed ratio: the behavior is reinforced after a specific number of occurrences (e.g., after every three times), (3) fixed interval: the behavior is reinforced after a specific amount of time (e.g., after three weeks of good behavior), (4) variable ratio: the behavior is reinforced after a variable number of occurrences (e.g., after one occurrence, then after another three, then after another two), (5) variable interval: the behavior is reinforced after a variable amount of time (e.g., after one minute, then after 30 minutes, then after 10 minutes).

Further, if we talk about positive reinforcement schedule, it come hand in hand with positive behavior chart. A positive reinforcement behavior chart acts as a visual cue for those who are learning and a reminder of what they should be doing if they want to earn a reward. There are many options out there for a positive reinforcement behavior chart when working with children; a few examples can be seen below.
The Anticipated Impacts

Positive reinforcement surely is a good method that can be used to develop students’ positive behavior in the classroom. By using positive reinforcement teacher can make the students to behave accordingly in the class, either by giving reward or simply praising them for their good behavior. The use of positive reinforcement will help the teacher to build the students’ good manner in the class and motivate the students to do better in the class because they are given a reward on every good things that they do in the class. Giving such a positive input will surely make a positive output as well. Students rather receive a positive and desirable things rather than getting punished. When students are given a punishment, they will only focus on the way they will avoid the punishment later on, not reflecting about their behavior. Instead, if using the positive reinforcement the students are trained to behave positively in the class. If positive reinforcement is used in the class teacher doesn’t need to give such thing like punishment because the students are already taught to behave well, simply it is better to prevent the bad behavior to occur rather than witnessing it happen and give the students punishment in the end. However, positive reinforcement still has limitation and also still lacking in its implementation in the classroom. The use of praise may, in fact, have negative consequence. Kohn (2001) stated that the use of praise may result in children being tentative in their responses because they have come to rely on praise as reassurance or it can be said that the praise creates dependence for the students. They depend on the praise only, not because they want to behave the way they are told to. Kohn also describes a research study which found that children who were frequently praised for being generous actually ended up showing less generosity, in other words, the actions lost their value as something worthwhile in their own right. Rather, the actions are the means to elicit the positive reaction by an adult. It has been found that children who are praised may then struggle to achieve, in which it means the praise can create pressure to perform. The students may also be less likely to take risks if they're focused on getting more positive comments. Based on those finding, teacher needs to be more mindful and careful when implementing positive reinforcement in the class. Teacher should be able to look from both side; positive side and negative side. Become more sensitive to the surrounding might be one of the way teacher can do to minimize the bad effect of using positive reinforcement. Teachers also can make their own positive reinforcement behavior chart to control its implementation in the class. At the end, whatever limitation teacher might face in the classroom, those limitation must be overcome by the teachers in order to create a fun learning activity.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, positive reinforcement is a good strategy that can be used by the teacher to develop the students’ positive behavior in ELT class. Just like what Skinner (1961) stated that the most effective way to teach a person a new behavior is with positive reinforcement. In positive reinforcement, a desirable stimulus is added to increase a behavior. It is explained that effective teaching must be based on positive reinforcement which is, more effective at changing and establishing behavior than punishment. People often find positive reinforcement easier to swallow than other methods of training, since it doesn’t involve taking anything away or introducing a negative consequence. It’s also much easier to encourage behaviors than to discourage them, making reinforcement a more powerful tool than punishment in most cases. Perhaps most important, positive reinforcement can simply be more effective, especially in the long-term. Learning accompanied by positive feelings and associations is more likely to be remembered, even beyond the end of the reinforcement schedule. Even it has its own bad impact in its implementation, but with the good and appropriate management, positive reinforcement still can be used as a best method to manage the students’ behavior in ELT class.
References


