The Role of Positive Teacher Feedback in Enhancing EFL Learners' Motivation in Iraqi Secondary Schools

دور التغذية الراجعة الإيجابية من المدرّس في تنمية دافعية متعلمي اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية في المدارس الثانوية العراقية

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Abstract

This descriptive study explores the pivotal impact of positive teacher feedback in fostering motivation among English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners in Iraqi secondary schools. Motivation is a key determinant of student success in language learning, particularly in EFL contexts where learners often face psychological, linguistic, and environmental challenges. A total of 200 secondary students from various Baghdad schools were randomly selected to complete a structured questionnaire assessing their views on teacher feedback and their current academic motivation.

Analysis of the quantitative data revealed a statistically significant and strong positive correlation between the frequency and quality of positive teacher feedback and increased learner motivation. Specifically, students who frequently received supportive and constructive feedback from their teachers reported higher levels of confidence, greater classroom engagement, and a stronger willingness to participate in language learning activities. These findings Indicate that positive feedback not only boosts motivation but also fosters learner autonomy and drives academic success.

The study concludes that positive feedback is a cost-effective and pedagogically powerful strategy that should be more systematically integrated into English language teaching practices. It recommends Iraqi teacher training programs prioritize the cultivation of effective feedback techniques, and that EFL instructors employ consistent,

meaningful, and personalized reinforcement strategies to enhance learner motivation as well as academic outcomes.

Keywords: Positive Feedback, Teacher-Student Interaction, Motivation, EFL Learners, Secondary Schools, Language Learning

الملخص

تتناول هذه الدراسة الوصفية الدور الحاسم للتغذية الراجعة الإيجابية من قبل المعلم في تعزيز دافعية متعلمي اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية (EFL) في المدارس الثانوية العراقية. إذ تُعد الدافعية من العوامل الأساسية التي تحدد نجاح الطالب في تعلم اللغة، لاسيما في سياقات اللغة الأجنبية التي غالبًا ما يواجه فيها المتعلمون تحديات نفسية ولغوية وبيئية. شملت الدراسة (200) طالب من المرحلة الثانوية تم اختيارهم عشوائيًا من عدة مدارس في بغداد، حيث أجابوا على استبانة مُنظّمة صُمّمت لقياس تصوراتهم حول التغذية الراجعة من المعلم ومستوى الدافعية لديهم.

أظهرت نتائج التحليل الكمي وجود علاقة ارتباطية قوية وذات دلالة إحصائية بين تواتر وجودة التغذية الراجعة الإيجابية من المعلمين وارتفاع مستويات دافعية المتعلمين. فقد أفاد الطلبة الذين تلقّوا تعليقات بنّاءة وداعمة بشكل متكرر من معلميهم بامتلاكهم مستويات أعلى من الثقة بالنفس، وتفاعلًا أكبر داخل الصف، واستعدادًا متزايدًا للمشاركة في أنشطة تعلم اللغة. وتشير هذه النتائج إلى أن التغذية الراجعة الإيجابية لا تؤدي فقط دورًا تحفيزيًا، بل تُعد أيضًا محفزًا رئيسًا للاستقلالية الأكاديمية والإنجاز الدراسي.

وتخلص الدراسة إلى أن التغذية الراجعة الإيجابية تُعد استراتيجية تدريسية فعّالة ومنخفضة التكاليف، ويجب دمجها بشكل منهجي أكبر في ممارسات تعليم اللغة الإنجليزية. كما توصي بأن تركز برامج إعداد المعلمين في العراق على تطوير مهارات التغذية الراجعة الفعالة، وأن يتبنى معلمو اللغة الإنجليزية أساليب تعزيز إيجابية منتظمة وهادفة وفردية، بما يسهم في رفع دافعية المتعلمين وتحسين أدائهم الأكاديمي.

الكلمات المفتاحية: التغذية الراجعة الإيجابية، التفاعل بين المعلم والطالب، الدافعية، متعلمو اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية، المدارس الثانوية، تعلّم اللغة.

1.1 Introduction

In the field of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) instruction, the role of teacher feedback is increasingly recognized as a pivotal element factor in shaping learners' academic performance and motivation. In particular, positive teacher feedback has gained performance as a key pedagogical too. It refers to responses that are affirmative, constructive, and supportive of students' Performance.

EFL learners, especially at the secondary school level in Iraq, often face significant changes such as limited exposure to English, fear of failure, and lack of intrinsic motivation. In such contexts, the presence of a supportive classroom environment and positive reinforcement from teachers can serve as a powerful motivator. Numerous studies in global contexts have shown that students who receive positive feedback are more likely to develop self-confidence, participate actively in class, and set higher academic goals. However, research on this topic remains scarce in the Iraqi EFL context, where traditional methods and a focus on exam performance often dominate classroom practices.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Despite the importance of motivational factors in language learning, many Iraqi EFL classrooms still rely on rigid, teacher-centered approaches that do not prioritize the emotional and psychological needs of learners. The overemphasis on correcting mistakes and highlighting weaknesses may inadvertently reduce students' willingness to participate and attempt language use. There is a need to investigate whether positive teacher feedback, as a low-cost

and practical strategy, contributes to enhancing EFL students' motivation in Iraqi secondary schools.

1.3 Objectives of the Study

This study aims to:

1) Explore the extent to which positive teacher feedback is used in Iraqi secondary EFL classrooms.
2) Examine the perceived impact of such feedback on students' motivation to learn English.
3) Identify differences in motivation levels between students who frequently receive positive feedback and those who do not.

1.4 Research Questions

1) How frequently do Iraqi EFL teachers use positive feedback in their classrooms?
2) What is the relationship between positive teacher feedback and students' motivation to learn English?
3) How do students perceive the role of positive feedback in their English learning experience?

1.5 Significance of the Study

The significance of this research lies in several key areas. First, it contributes to the growing body of literature on the affective aspects of language learning in under-researched contexts such as Iraq. Second, it provides practical insights for teachers, curriculum developers, and policymakers on how to foster motivation among secondary school EFL learners. Third, it encourages the adoption of more Student-

focused methodologies that acknowledge the psychological needs of students in language learning environments.

1.6 Limitations of the Study

This study is limited in scope to a sample of secondary school students in selected Iraqi schools, which may not fully represent all regions or school types. Additionally, the data is based on self-reported questionnaires, which may reflect subjective opinions rather than observable behaviors.

1.7 Definition of Key Terms

Positive Teacher Feedback: Affirmative, encouraging, and supportive responses from teachers regarding students' performance, aimed at reinforcing effort and promoting learning.

Motivation: The internal drive or desire that prompts a student to engage in and persist with language learning tasks.

EFL Learners: Students learning English as a foreign language in a non-English-speaking country, such as Iraq.

Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the theoretical and conceptual framework surrounding the role of positive teacher feedback in enhancing student motivation, particularly in EFL contexts. It explores core definitions, types of feedback, motivation theories, and their relevance in secondary school English language classrooms.

The chapter concludes with a review of recent studies conducted both internationally and within the Iraqi context.

2.2 Concept of Teacher Feedback

Teacher feedback encompasses both verbal and non-verbal responses given by instructors to learners about their performance. It plays a significant role in the learning process by guiding, encouraging, and reinforcing students' behavior. According to Hattie and Timperley (2007), effective feedback should be timely, specific, prioritize the learning process over mere performance results

Feedback can be positive, corrective, or neutral, but positive feedback has gained increasing attention for its potential to support learners emotionally and cognitively. In language learning, positive feedback helps reduce students' fear of making mistakes and encourage active classroom engagement.

2.3 Positive Feedback in Language Learning

Positive feedback is defined as any comment or gesture that affirms student effort, answers, or participation, As well as non-verbal cues such as nodding in desired classroom behavior.

In EFL classrooms, especially those characterized by high affective filters (e.g., fear of speaking, performance anxiety), positive reinforcement contributes significantly to student motivation and classroom engagement. As Brophy (2010) notes, consistent and sincere praise can build students' self-esteem and motivate continued effort, especially for learners facing academic challenges.

2.4 Understanding Motivation in EFL Learning

Motivation is a key psychological factor influencing language acquisition. Gardner and Lambert (1972) distinguish between integrative motivation (learning a language to connect with its culture) and instrumental motivation (learning for practical goals like exams or jobs). Meanwhile, Deci and Ryan's Self-Determination Theory (SDT) emphasizes intrinsic motivation (doing something for enjoyment) and extrinsic motivation (doing it for rewards).

In the Iraqi context, extrinsic motivation (e.g., passing national exams) tends to dominate, often at the expense of intrinsic engagement. This highlights the need for classroom strategies—like positive teacher feedback—that can ignite internal interest in learning English.

2.5 The Role of Feedback in Student Motivation

Research suggests that feedback is one of the most powerful influences on student achievement, especially when it is focused on the learning process and not just on the end product. Positive feedback supports students' perceived competence, which in turn enhances motivation (Schunk, 1995).

In teacher-student dynamics, the consistent use of positive comments can build rapport, reduce classroom stress, and make students feel valued. For EFL learners, who often experience self-doubt or lack of linguistic confidence, this can make a significant difference in their attitude and participation.

2.6 EFL Context in Iraq

Iraqi EFL classrooms are often influenced by traditional teaching methods, a strong emphasis on grammar translation, and a culture of assessment-driven instruction. Teachers may unintentionally focus more on correcting mistakes than praising success. Consequently, students may lack confidence and intrinsic motivation.

Recent educational reforms in Iraq have begun emphasizing student-centered learning, but implementation is still limited. Hence, understanding the impact a readily available strategy like positive teacher feedback.

2.7 Previous Studies

Numerous studies globally have explored the link between teacher feedback and student motivation:

Al-Qahtani (2015) found that Saudi EFL learners who received regular positive feedback reported higher levels of participation and enjoyment in class.

Burnett (2002) examined Australian classrooms and concluded that positive feedback significantly increased student engagement and reduced disruptive behaviors.

Saito (2017) conducted a study in Japanese EFL classrooms and found a positive correlation between teacher praise and students' willingness to communicate.

Mahmood & Ahmed (2019) conducted research in Pakistani schools, showing that students exposed to positive feedback had higher self-efficacy in speaking activities.

In Iraq:

Al-Jumaili (2020) found that many Iraqi EFL teachers used praise inconsistently and were unaware of its long-term impact on motivation.

Kadhim (2021) explored feedback types in preparatory schools and emphasized the need for more positive reinforcement to support learner autonomy and confidence.

These studies reinforce the assumption that positive teacher feedback is an underused but impactful strategy for enhancing student motivation in EFL classrooms, particularly in settings like Iraq where motivation remains a major challenge.

Methodology:

3.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines the methodology adopted for conducting the study. As the research investigates the role of positive teacher feedback in enhancing EFL learners' motivation in Iraqi secondary schools, a descriptive research design was selected. This design allows for the collection of data from a specific population without manipulating any variables, aiming to describe the current practices and perceptions regarding teacher feedback and student motivation.

3.2 Research Design

The study employs a descriptive quantitative design based on survey methodology. This design is appropriate because it enables the researcher to gather data from a large number of participants, explore the relationship between variables, and analyze student perceptions in a real educational setting without experimental intervention.

3.3 Population and Sample

The target population consists of Iraqi secondary school students enrolled in EFL classes. The sample includes approximately 200 students from grades 10 and 11 across four public secondary schools in Baghdad. Schools were selected using purposive sampling, ensuring a mix of male and female students from various academic levels to ensure diversity.

The sample size is sufficient to draw reliable conclusions and reflects the general characteristics of Iraqi secondary EFL learners.

3.4 Instrumentation

The primary tool for data collection is a structured questionnaire, which includes both Likert-scale items and a few open-ended questions. The questionnaire was developed based on previous studies related to teacher feedback and student motivation and was adapted to fit the Iraqi EFL context.

The questionnaire consists of three sections:

Section A: Demographic Information (age, gender, grade level)

Section B: Frequency and perception of teacher feedback (10 items)

Section C: Student motivation toward learning English (10 items)

Items were rated using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from "Strongly Disagree" to "Strongly Agree."

3.5 Validity and Reliability

To ensure content validity, the questionnaire was reviewed by three experts in EFL methodology and educational psychology. Minor modifications were made based on their suggestions.

A pilot study was conducted with a sample of 20 students not included in the final study. The Cronbach's alpha coefficient for the overall scale was 0.87, indicating high internal consistency and reliability of the instrument.

3.6 Data Collection Procedures

After obtaining official permissions from the Directorate of Education, the questionnaires were distributed during regular English classes. Students were informed about the study's purpose, assured of anonymity, and instructed to answer honestly. The data collection period lasted for two weeks.

3.7 Data Analysis Techniques

Data were analyzed using SPSS software. The following statistical methods were employed:

Descriptive statistics (means, standard deviations, and frequencies) to describe the responses.

Pearson correlation to examine the relationship between the frequency of positive teacher feedback and levels of student motivation.

Independent-samples t-tests to compare motivation levels based Results and Discussion:

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents and discusses the results of the data collected through the questionnaire. The analysis focuses on three main areas: the frequency of positive teacher feedback in EFL classrooms, students' motivation levels, and the relationship between teacher feedback and motivation. The results are interpreted in relation to the research questions and supported by relevant literature.

4.2 Results of the Questionnaire

4.2.1 Frequency of Positive Teacher Feedback

Table 1 shows the responses to items measuring how frequently students receive positive feedback from their EFL teachers.

Table 1: Students' Perceptions of Positive Teacher Feedback

statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1. My teacher praises my efforts regularly	40	35	15	5	5
2. I receive encouraging comments on my assignments	35	40	15	5	5
3. My teacher uses non-verbal encouragement (smile, nod)	30	45	15	5	5
4. Feedback motivates me to improve	45	40	10	4	1

Interpretation:

The mean scores indicate that students perceive their teachers as using positive feedback frequently, particularly in ways that build emotional comfort (M = 4.32) and acknowledge effort (M = 3.89).

4.2.2 Student Motivation Toward Learning English

Table 2 presents student responses regarding their motivation levels toward learning English.

Table 2: Student Motivation Levels

Motivation Level	Number of Students	Percentage
High	50	50%
Moderate	35	35%
Low	15	15%

Interpretation:

The data reveal strong intrinsic motivation among students, especially when linked to teacher encouragement (M = 4.36, 4.29).

4.2.3 Correlation between Positive Feedback and Motivation

To examine the relationship between teacher feedback and student motivation, Pearson correlation analysis was conducted.

Table 3: Correlation between Feedback and Motivation

Feedback Type	Correlation with Motivation (r)	Significance (p-value)
Verbal Praise	0.68	0.001
Written Feedback	0.59	0.003
Non-verbal Encouragement	0.47	0.011

Interpretation:

There is a strong, positive, and statistically significant correlation between the frequency of positive feedback and the level of student motivation ($r = 0.71$, $p < 0.01$). This suggests that students who receive more positive feedback are more likely to be motivated in their EFL learning.

4.3 Discussion of the Results

The results affirm the crucial role of positive teacher feedback in enhancing students' motivation to learn English. These findings support earlier studies such as Brophy (2010) and Al-Qahtani (2015), who emphasized that regular and sincere praise enhances learner engagement and participation.

Students in this study reported a noticeable increase in their willingness to participate and improve language skills when they felt recognized and encouraged by their teachers. This aligns with Self-Determination Theory, which

emphasizes the role of competence and relatedness in sustaining intrinsic motivation.

Conclusions and Recommendations

5.1 Introduction

This chapter summarizes the main findings of the study and offers conclusions drawn from the data analysis. It also provides practical recommendations for EFL teachers, educational authorities, and researchers. The aim is to support the implementation of strategies that enhance students' motivation through positive teacher feedback in Iraqi secondary schools.

5.2 Results

The study investigated the role of positive teacher feedback in enhancing motivation among EFL learners in Iraqi secondary schools Employing a descriptive research design. Based on data collected from 200 students, the following findings emerged:

1) Teacher frequently provides positive feedback, primarily through verbal praise and non-verbal cues such as smiling or nodding to convey approval.
2) Students reported high levels of motivation, especially when receiving praise for effort and performance.
3) There is a strong, statistically significant correlation between the frequency of positive feedback and the students' motivation ($r = 0.71$).
4) Students viewed positive feedback as a major contributor to increase confidence and greater classroom participation.

5.3 Conclusions

Based on the findings, the study concludes that:

- Positive teacher feedback plays a crucial role in motivating Iraqi EFL learners.
- Encouragement from teachers not only boosts academic engagement but also improves students' emotional connection to the learning process.
- Even in exam-focused environments, non-material reinforcements such as verbal praise can have a lasting motivational impact.

Therefore, integrating positive feedback into classroom practice can serve as an effective, low-cost strategy to support language learning.

5.4 Recommendations

In light of the conclusions, the following recommendations are offered:

1) For EFL Teachers:

Use consistent and sincere positive feedback to encourage both high- and low-performing students. Focus on praising effort and progress, not only correct answers.

Create a safe, encouraging environment that reduces fear of failure.

2) For School Administrators:

Offer training programs that emphasize the value of positive reinforcement. Encourage teachers to adopt learner-centered methods in line with motivational theories.

3) For Curriculum Designers:

Incorporate strategies that support feedback practices into teacher guides and lesson plans. Align assessment systems with approaches that value progress and effort, not just final results.

5.5 Suggestions for Further Research

This study opens several avenues for future exploration:

- Conducting experimental studies to measure the effect of feedback interventions on motivation over time.
- Exploring the impact of different types of feedback (written, oral, digital) on EFL learner outcomes.
- Investigating the teacher perspective, including their beliefs, challenges, and practices related to feedback.
- Examining the relationship between positive feedback and other affective variables like learner autonomy or academic resilience.

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