

THE PEDAGOGICAL IMPORTANCE OF PRAISE AND FEEDBACK TYPES IN MOTIVATING YOUNG EFL LEARNERS

Toshpo‘latova Lobar Aziz qizi

4th-year student of the Faculty of Ecology and Law,
Tashkent Institute of Irrigation and Agricultural Mechanization Engineers.

towpolatovalobar@gmail.com

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Abstract. *This article examines the pedagogical importance of praise and feedback types in motivating young learners of English as a foreign language. The study is based on a theoretical analysis of scientific literature on motivation, teacher praise, formative feedback, and corrective feedback in language teaching. The article highlights that young EFL learners' motivation is strongly influenced by classroom atmosphere, teacher response, emotional safety, and learners' sense of competence. The analysis shows that praise and feedback are not merely evaluative classroom reactions, but important pedagogical tools that can support learners' confidence, participation, willingness to communicate, and positive attitude towards English learning. The article argues that praise is most effective when it is sincere, specific, effort-oriented, and connected with learners' progress, while feedback is most useful when it is clear, constructive, age-appropriate, and focused on improvement. The findings of the theoretical analysis suggest that appropriate praise and constructive feedback may reduce learners' fear of mistakes and create a more supportive EFL classroom environment.*

Keywords: *young EFL learners, motivation, praise, feedback, corrective feedback, formative assessment, classroom participation, English language teaching.*

INTRODUCTION

Motivation is one of the central factors in successful foreign language learning. In young EFL classrooms, learners' achievement depends not only on textbooks, grammar explanations, vocabulary practice, or teaching methods, but also on their emotional involvement, self-confidence, classroom participation, and willingness to communicate. Young learners are usually sensitive to the teacher's words, tone, facial expressions, praise, correction, and feedback.

Therefore, the way the teacher responds to learners' performance can either strengthen or weaken their motivation.

In Uzbekistan, the improvement of foreign language teaching has become an important priority of the education system. The development of learners' communicative competence, the introduction of modern teaching approaches, and the creation of a motivating learning environment are considered significant aspects of English language education [1]. In this context, teaching English to young learners requires not only linguistic instruction, but also psychological and pedagogical support.

Young EFL learners often study English as a school subject rather than as a language of daily communication. As a result, their motivation is strongly shaped by the classroom environment. If pupils feel supported, respected, and encouraged, they are more likely to participate in English lessons.

If they are corrected harshly or ignored, they may become passive and afraid of making mistakes. For this reason, teacher praise and feedback should be considered important motivational tools in young learner classrooms.

The relevance of this article is connected with the fact that praise and feedback are often used in English lessons, but not always effectively. Praise may be too general, for example, “Good” or “Excellent”, without explaining what exactly the learner has done well. Feedback may be limited to error correction and may not always show the learner how to improve. However, research in education and language teaching shows that praise and feedback are effective only when they are meaningful, specific, constructive, and appropriate to learners’ age and level [2; 3; 4].

The purpose of this article is to analyze the pedagogical importance of praise and feedback types in motivating young EFL learners on the basis of scientific literature. The article focuses on the following research questions:

1. What role does praise play in motivating young EFL learners?
2. How do different types of feedback support learners’ motivation and classroom participation?
3. What principles should teachers follow when using praise and feedback in young EFL classrooms?

METHODOLOGY

This article is based on a theoretical and analytical research method. The study does not present experimental data; instead, it analyzes scientific and methodological literature related to motivation, praise, feedback, and young EFL learners.

This approach is appropriate because the main aim of the article is to explain the pedagogical significance of praise and feedback from a theoretical point of view.

The following methods were used:

Literature analysis. Scientific works on motivation, praise, feedback, formative assessment, and corrective feedback were analyzed. Special attention was paid to the works of Ryan and Deci, Dörnyei, Brophy, Hattie and Timperley, Ellis, Cameron, Pinter, and Shute.

Conceptual analysis. The key concepts of the article — motivation, praise, positive feedback, corrective feedback, oral feedback, written feedback, specific praise, and effort-based praise — were examined and compared.

Pedagogical interpretation. The theoretical ideas were interpreted in relation to young EFL learners and English language classroom practice.

The article focuses on young learners because this group of pupils needs both linguistic support and emotional encouragement. Young learners may quickly lose confidence if they are corrected negatively, but they may become more active when they receive supportive and specific teacher responses.

Therefore, praise and feedback are analyzed as pedagogical tools that influence not only learning outcomes, but also learners’ emotional state and classroom behavior.

RESULTS

The theoretical analysis of scientific literature shows that praise and feedback have significant pedagogical value in motivating young EFL learners. Several important findings can be identified.

First, motivation in language learning is a dynamic process. Dörnyei emphasizes that language learning motivation is influenced by the learning environment, teacher behavior, classroom activities, and learners' previous experiences [2]. This means that young learners' motivation may change during the lesson depending on how the teacher organizes interaction and responds to learners' answers. A supportive teacher response can encourage pupils to continue learning, while a negative response can reduce their willingness to participate.

Second, praise can support learners' confidence when it is used appropriately. Brophy argues that teacher praise is effective when it is meaningful, sincere, and connected with real classroom behavior [3]. This is especially important for young EFL learners, because they often need confirmation that their effort is noticed. However, praise should not be mechanical. If the teacher says "Excellent" after every answer, the word may lose its pedagogical value. Specific praise, such as "You used the new word correctly" or "Your pronunciation is clearer today", is more effective because it gives learners clear information about their successful performance.

Third, effort-based praise is more useful than ability-based praise. Henderlong and Lepper point out that praise can influence children's intrinsic motivation positively or negatively depending on its focus [4]. Praise directed only at personal ability, such as "You are very smart", may create pressure and fear of failure. In contrast, praise directed at effort, progress, and strategy helps learners understand that success depends on practice and persistence. For young EFL learners, this is very important because it encourages them to try even when their answers are not perfect.

Fourth, feedback is one of the strongest influences on learning when it is clear and constructive. Hattie and Timperley define feedback as information that helps learners understand their current performance and the next steps in learning [5]. In English language teaching, feedback helps pupils notice errors, correct mistakes, and improve their language use. However, feedback should not be reduced to criticism. Effective feedback should answer three basic questions: What is the goal? How is the learner performing? What should the learner do next?

Fifth, corrective feedback can support language development if it is given appropriately.

Ellis explains that corrective feedback plays an important role in second language learning because it helps learners notice the gap between their current language use and the correct form [6]. However, in young learner classrooms, correction should be supportive and age-appropriate.

For example, instead of saying "Wrong", the teacher can say, "Good try. We say she likes, not she like." This form of feedback corrects the mistake without damaging the learner's confidence.

Sixth, oral and written feedback have different pedagogical functions. Oral feedback is useful during speaking activities because it is immediate and interactive. It can help learners correct pronunciation, grammar, or vocabulary mistakes quickly. Written feedback is useful in writing tasks because pupils can read the teacher's comments again and revise their work.

However, both oral and written feedback should be short, clear, and understandable for young learners.

Seventh, praise and feedback are most effective when they are used together. Praise gives emotional support, while feedback gives learning guidance. If the teacher uses only praise, pupils may feel encouraged but may not know how to improve. If the teacher uses only correction, pupils may feel discouraged. Therefore, a balanced teacher response is more effective. For example: “Your answer is clear. Be careful with the verb form. Try again.” This response recognizes the learner’s effort, gives guidance, and encourages further improvement.

DISCUSSION

The analysis confirms that praise and feedback should be regarded as essential elements of young EFL teaching methodology. They are not simple classroom expressions or additional teacher comments. They are pedagogical tools that influence learners’ motivation, confidence, classroom participation, and attitude towards English.

The first important point is that young learners need emotional safety in order to participate actively. Speaking a foreign language requires risk-taking. Pupils may make mistakes in pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, or sentence structure. If mistakes are corrected harshly, learners may become afraid of speaking. However, if mistakes are treated as a natural part of learning, pupils are more likely to try again. This shows that feedback has not only linguistic, but also psychological importance.

The second important point is that praise should be specific. General praise may create a positive classroom atmosphere, but it does not always support learning. Specific praise helps pupils understand what they did well. For example, “Good job” is less informative than “You used three new words correctly.” The second comment is more pedagogically useful because it shows the learner which behavior should be repeated.

The third point is that praise should focus on effort and progress. Young learners differ in language ability, confidence, and previous learning experience. If the teacher praises only perfect answers, weaker learners may feel excluded. If the teacher praises effort, improvement, participation, and persistence, more pupils become involved in the lesson. This approach supports a growth-oriented view of learning.

The fourth point is that feedback should be constructive. Constructive feedback does not only identify an error; it also shows the way to improvement. For example, “Your sentence is wrong” may discourage a learner, while “Your idea is good, but use the past tense here” gives both support and direction. This kind of feedback helps pupils understand that mistakes can be corrected and that improvement is possible.

The fifth point is that feedback should be age-appropriate. Young learners may not understand long grammatical explanations or abstract terminology. They need simple teacher language, examples, repetition, visual support, and clear models. For example, instead of explaining the third person singular rule in a long theoretical way, the teacher may model the correct sentence: “He likes football. Repeat: he likes.” This makes feedback more understandable and practical.

The sixth point is that teachers should avoid negative comparison. Comments such as “Why can’t you answer like your classmate?” may damage learners’ confidence and classroom relationships. It is better to compare pupils with their own previous performance: “Today you answered more confidently than last lesson.” This type of feedback supports individual progress and creates a positive learning atmosphere.

The seventh point is that praise and feedback should be connected with lesson objectives.

If the aim of the lesson is speaking fluency, the teacher should not interrupt every small grammar mistake. In this case, delayed feedback may be more appropriate. If the aim is grammar accuracy, immediate correction may be useful. Thus, the type and timing of feedback should depend on the purpose of the activity.

The theoretical analysis also shows that praise and feedback are closely connected with formative assessment. Formative assessment is aimed at supporting learning during the process, not only evaluating final results. Feedback is one of the main tools of formative assessment because it helps learners understand their progress and future learning steps [7]. In young EFL classrooms, formative feedback can motivate learners by showing them that learning English is a gradual and achievable process.

From a practical point of view, teachers can use the following model when giving praise and feedback:

Recognition → Guidance → Encouragement

For example:

“Your idea is interesting. Check the word order. Try again — you can make it better.”

This model is useful because it combines emotional support and learning direction. First, the teacher recognizes the learner’s effort. Second, the teacher gives guidance. Third, the teacher encourages the learner to continue. Such responses are especially suitable for young EFL learners because they protect confidence and support improvement at the same time.

Conclusion

In conclusion, praise and feedback types play an important role in motivating young EFL learners. The theoretical analysis shows that young learners’ motivation is strongly influenced by teacher response, classroom atmosphere, emotional safety, and the way mistakes are treated during English lessons.

Praise is effective when it is sincere, specific, effort-oriented, and connected with learners’ progress. It helps pupils feel noticed, valued, and capable of improvement. Feedback is effective when it is clear, constructive, supportive, and age-appropriate. It helps learners understand their mistakes, improve their performance, and continue learning without fear.

The article concludes that praise and feedback should not be used mechanically. They should be purposeful, balanced, and connected with lesson objectives. Teachers should avoid harsh correction, vague comments, exaggerated praise, and negative comparison. Instead, they should use supportive teacher language that encourages pupils to participate, take risks, and learn from mistakes.

Thus, praise and feedback are not only classroom management techniques, but also important pedagogical tools in teaching English to young learners.

When used effectively, they can increase learners' confidence, reduce fear of mistakes, improve classroom participation, and develop a positive attitude towards English learning.

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