

English Teachers' Perception of Using Rewards in the Classroom at a Public Elementary School in Jambi

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
<p>Keywords: Elementary School, English Teachers' Perception, Rewards</p> <p>DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.22437/langue.v3i2.32412</p> <p>Received: April 5, 2025</p> <p>Reviewed: July 4, 2025</p> <p>Accepted: November 11, 2025</p>	<p><i>This study portrayed the English teachers' perceptions of using rewards in teaching English at the elementary school level. It aimed to investigate why English teachers use rewards in their teaching. The study employed a qualitative research approach, with data collected through interviews. It was conducted at a public elementary school in Jambi, where three English teachers from the school were selected as participants, and the data was gathered through interviews. The findings illustrated a gap between teachers' theoretical understanding and their practice in implementing rewards as a way to motivate students to learn. The results showed that teachers do partially understand the concept of 'reward' in theory. In line with these findings, the study revealed that rewards can help improve several aspects of student learning, such as self-confidence, motivation, and enthusiasm for learning. The study also includes several recommendations for stakeholders and other teachers.</i></p>

1. Introduction

English is an essential language that is officially taught in Indonesian elementary schools. In today's era, people are encouraged to communicate in English, but practicing the language is not easy. For many Indonesian students, learning English as a foreign language can be frustrating. Children often view English as just another subject they must pass to get good grades; as a result, their interest in learning the language is minimal, and they often consider it unimportant. Using rewards as a tool to increase students' interest in learning may help teachers in the classroom learning process. Therefore, it is part of a teacher's responsibility to consider various factors that can support and enhance their students' performance and success in learning English. Rewards align well with the characteristics of primary school students in a typical school setting.

Rewards are indeed essential to recognize students' behavior and character. They represent the teacher's creativity, including giving presents, stars, stickers, or any form of appreciation to students for demonstrating positive behavior or outstanding performance at school (Aypay, 2018). The purpose of using rewards is to make learning enjoyable and engaging, thereby

encouraging students' motivation and interest. It is hoped that the use of rewards will support the teacher in teaching and helping students learn English.

There has been a plethora of studies exploring the use of rewards in learning English (Bouguerne, 2011; Damayanti et al., 2021; Hoffmann, et al., 2015; Kasyulita & Armelida, 2019; Putri et al., 2021; Prawiro, 2019; Syahrir et al., 2023). However, most of this research focuses on the students' perspective and often links it to student motivation. There is a scarcity of research that examines this phenomenon from the teachers' perspective. Additionally, based on the researchers' observations in a public primary school in Jambi, teachers tend to rely on reward strategies in their teaching. This observation sparked the researchers' curiosity to further explore and understand this phenomenon. Therefore, the researchers are interested in conducting a study on English teachers' perceptions of using rewards in the classroom at a public primary school in Jambi, guided by two research questions:

1. What do English teachers understand about the reward strategy?
2. What are the benefits of using rewards in teaching English?

2. Literature Review

2.1 Reward

Rewards are one of the factors that influence student learning outcomes, making it essential to describe the rewards given by teachers, as well as both the teacher's and student's perceptions of these rewards. Rewards serve to recognize students' behavior and character. They reflect the teacher's creativity, such as giving presents, stars, stickers, or other forms of appreciation for positive behavior or excellent performance in school (Aypay, 2018). The purpose of rewards is to provide students with a fun and engaging learning experience, while also encouraging their motivation and interest. The use of rewards is expected to assist teachers in teaching and helping students learn English. Rewards align well with the characteristics of primary school students in a typical school setting.

By giving rewards, the teacher demonstrates attention and care for the students. According to Mikander (2010:16), "A reward is the benefit that arises from performing a task, rendering a service, or discharging a responsibility." Rewards can motivate individuals to put in effort to achieve a task. Furthermore, offering rewards can enhance someone's performance and boost their self-confidence to improve even further.

On the other hand, Kelishadroky et al. (2016:783) argue, "Reward is merely the impact seen by the reinforcing agent, and to determine whether an event is capable of reinforcing, its impact should be considered." This statement highlights that a reward is essentially an external motivator. External rewards, such as candy, money, or free time, often serve as effective motivators for children. Additionally, rewards influence the decisions individuals make, as behaviors that lead to desirable outcomes are more likely to be repeated in the future. When rewards are offered correctly and fairly, they encourage students to become more aware and engaged in the educational process.

2.1.1 Types of Reward

In general, there are two types of rewards: positive and negative rewards. Kelishadroky et al. (2016:783) posit, "Positive rewards occur when the consequences of a behavior are immediately observed, and the chance of repeating the behavior increases." Positive rewards are often sought after because they enhance an individual's image in front of others. Examples

of positive rewards include stars, praise, scores, and applause—things students may receive for performing well in the learning process.

On the other hand, Kelishadroky et al. (2016:783) conclude, “Negative reward is a process whereby a behavior eliminates a negative punishment, thus increasing the likelihood of the behavior being repeated.” An example of negative reward is the removal of punishment. People typically receive punishment when they engage in actions that are deemed wrong or inappropriate according to expectations. Several types of negative rewards include: Physical Punishment, Verbal Punishment (Words and Sentences), Stimulus Physical Punishment, and Inconvenient Punishment.

a) Physical Punishment

This includes slapping, pinching between the forefinger and thumb, and striking. Such punishment has been applied for centuries, mostly outside the education field. In education, however, physical punishment is now rarely applied, except in gym classes. This form of punishment, though, may serve to prevent students from misbehaving. However, it can also frighten students, potentially causing them to fail to achieve their objectives.

b) Words and Sentences

Teachers can use words or sentences, such as warnings or threats, as punishment for students. This is often applied when students engage in misbehavior, such as disrupting the class. The aim of this punishment is to maintain a conducive classroom environment, encouraging students to stay focused on their studies. Teachers may also use threatening language, such as applying pressure before an exam, to motivate students to perform their best and avoid the consequences mentioned by the teacher.

c) Stimulus Physical Punishment

This type of punishment is typically administered directly by the teacher. For instance, some students may misbehave in class, and the teacher may respond with non-verbal stimuli like using a stern look, widening their eyes, or making a disapproving gesture to correct the behavior.

d) Inconvenient Punishment

Lecturers may use this form of punishment, which includes actions like making students stand in front of the class, leave the room, stand beside the teacher, sit next to the teacher, or write a sentence repeatedly (10 times or more). The purpose of this punishment is to deter students from misbehaving by making them aware of the consequences.

2.1.2 Benefits of Rewards in Teaching English

As mentioned in the introduction, teachers are inclined to use rewards as part of their teaching strategies. The use of reward-based strategies offers several benefits for both students and teachers. Based on various studies and references, there are at least seven key benefits of using rewards in teaching. These benefits include enhancing student motivation, improving academic performance, promoting positive classroom behavior, encouraging consistent learning, building students' self-confidence, and fostering a competitive and collaborative learning environment. Each of these benefits plays a significant role in shaping a productive and supportive learning experience for students.

a) Enhances Motivation and Engagement

Rewards are powerful tools to boost students' motivation to learn English. Positive

reinforcement encourages students to engage more actively in their learning process by providing incentives for good behavior and performance. According to Skinner (1953), the use of rewards, especially positive reinforcement, can lead to an increase in the frequency of desired behaviors, such as active participation and consistent effort in learning. This is particularly effective in language learning, where motivation plays a critical role in mastering new vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation.

b) Improves Academic Performance

Rewards have been shown to improve students' academic performance. A study by et al., (1991) found that external rewards, such as praise or tangible incentives, can enhance intrinsic motivation in students, which in turn positively affects their learning outcomes. When students are rewarded for their achievements, it reinforces the behavior that leads to success, motivating them to strive for better results in future tasks, such as English language exams and assignments.

c) Promotes Positive Classroom Behavior

Rewards help create a positive and productive classroom environment by reinforcing desirable behaviors, such as attentiveness, participation, and cooperation. According to Lumsden (1994), rewards can foster a classroom culture where students are more likely to engage in appropriate behaviors, knowing that they will be recognized for their efforts. In an English language classroom, this can lead to a greater willingness to practice speaking, writing, reading, and listening skills without fear of making mistakes.

d) Encourages Consistent Learning

When rewards are given consistently for specific learning behaviors, students are more likely to develop good study habits. The consistency of reward-based reinforcement supports the development of self-regulation and discipline, essential for language learning. As noted by Schunk (1990), when students see that their effort and progress in learning English are recognized and rewarded, they are more likely to persist in their studies, which is critical for mastering a second language.

e) Builds Self-Confidence

Rewards, especially in the form of praise, help build students' self-esteem and confidence in their language skills. When students receive positive reinforcement for their language learning achievements, they are more likely to develop a positive self-image and a growth mindset. As Dweck (2006) asserts, praise and rewards can encourage students to view challenges as opportunities for growth, leading to increased resilience in overcoming language barriers.

f) Fosters a Competitive and Collaborative Learning Environment

Rewards can be used to create a balanced competitive environment that encourages students to perform their best while also promoting collaboration. For example, group-based rewards in English language learning can motivate students to work together, sharing knowledge and helping one another improve their skills. As Amabile (1996) suggests, creating a competitive yet collaborative environment can enhance both individual and group learning outcomes, especially in language acquisition.

2.2 Perception

Perception is defined as the process of recognizing (being aware of), organizing (gathering and storing), and interpreting (binding to knowledge) sensory information (Ward, Grinstein, & Keim, 2015). It involves the human senses, which generate signals from the environment through sight, hearing, touch, smell, and taste. According to Galotti (2018), perception is the process of taking sensory information from objects or environments and then interpreting this information meaningfully. In other words, perception occurs when an individual receives sensory data about an object from their surroundings and then interprets the meaning based on the information gathered through their sensory systems. Similarly, Hedge (2013) stated that perception is an active process in which the brain strives to make sense of sensory information and fit it into a known pattern.

Lewis (2001) further explained that perception refers to the process of collecting information about the world through the senses. Individuals or groups experience stimuli from the external world and then assign meaning to them. Although these stimuli are often experienced similarly, they can be interpreted differently. The fundamental elements of perception contribute to this variation. There are three essential components of perception: first, the perceiver (the person experiencing the perception); second, the object, person, situation, or relationship being perceived; and third, the context in which the perception takes place, influencing how objects, events, or individuals are understood.

3. Research Methodology

3.1 Research Design

The present study is qualitative with a phenomenological approach. This design was chosen because it allows for an in-depth exploration of the phenomenon (Abrar, 2024; Creswell, 2012; Flick, 2009). According to Fraenkel and Wallen (2009), this approach investigates various reactions or perceptions related to the phenomenon being studied. In this context, the study examines English teachers' understanding of and rationales for implementing reward strategies in their teaching practices.

3.2 Participants

Three English teachers participated in this study. The first participant, Teacher 1, is a female who has taught English for four years. The second participant, Teacher 2, is a female who has taught English for almost three years. The third participant, Teacher 3, is a male who has taught English for 11 years. Data was collected through direct, face-to-face interviews with the participants.

3.3 Instruments

The researcher spent approximately two months collecting data for this study. The data was gathered through interviews, which included 12 open-ended questions designed to uncover detailed information. All interview questions were presented in Bahasa Indonesia to ensure clarity and ease of understanding. During the interviews, the researcher focused on identifying the teachers' perceptions of rewards and their reasons for using reward strategies in teaching English to students at a public elementary school in Jambi. A smartphone was used to record the interview results, and each interview lasted approximately 25 minutes.

3.4 Data Analysis Procedure

The gathered data were then analyzed qualitatively using the framework provided by Miles and Huberman (1994). This framework involves three key steps: data reduction, data display, and conclusion or verification. These steps were applied systematically to analyze the data collected during the study.

4. Findings and Discussions

4.1 Teachers' Perceptions Toward Rewards in the EFL Classroom

4.1.1 Teachers' Understanding Toward Reward in Teaching English

In an educational context, providing rewards is a strategy often used to motivate students and improve their performance in the classroom. However, understanding how teachers perceive rewards, particularly in the context of English language learning, is important to explore. The present study aims to investigate teachers' perceptions of the effectiveness, relevance, and impact of rewards in English language learning within the classroom. By gaining insight into teachers' views, it becomes possible to identify the factors that influence the success of reward strategies in achieving English language learning objectives.

The first finding highlighted by the researcher was related to the participants' understanding of the concept of "reward." The study revealed that some participants did not have a clear understanding of the term "reward." One teacher described rewards as simply a form of motivation, given during activities such as quizzes or question-and-answer sessions. While the teachers demonstrated some awareness of the concept, they seemed to lack a deeper understanding of how rewards function in the context of English teaching. To help students achieve good results, it is not enough to only provide engaging materials; teachers also need to offer rewards throughout the learning process. Through rewards, teachers demonstrate their attention and support for students' progress.

This study also revealed that many teachers did not fully grasp the concept of "reward" in the learning context. There was a lack of clarity in both the definition and implementation of rewards in the classrooms observed by the researchers. This gap was evident in the participants' explanations during the interviews. The following excerpts illustrate their understanding:

“I don't really understand the meaning of the reward itself, but what I conceptualize is that it is a kind of appreciation for the progress of the student's learning process” (Teacher 1).

“Er... yes, I know the term reward. In my opinion, reward is one of the motivations for students when we give a quiz or ask a question like that” (Teacher 2).

From these responses, it can be concluded that the participants have a partial understanding of the concept of rewards, rather than a complete grasp of it. This highlights a gap between theoretical knowledge and its practical application in everyday teaching. As Milkander (2010) explained, rewards can encourage individuals to exert effort and improve their performance. Offering rewards can also enhance self-belief and motivate students to perform better. Therefore, understanding the concept of rewards is essential before moving on to their implementation. However, the teachers' understanding should better align with Milkander's (2010) concept, emphasizing the need for a clearer comprehension of the role rewards play in the learning process.

One of the main findings of this study was that participants tended to associate rewards with material gifts or external incentives, such as candy, toys, or extra points. The teachers believed that these tangible rewards could motivate students to behave better and engage more in the learning process. The following excerpts illustrate this perspective:

“I often reward students by giving food, toys, or extra points” (Teacher 3).

“I often give extra points to motivate students to be more active in the learning process” (Teacher 1).

However, the concept of rewards extends beyond material gifts. According to Gorozidis & Papaioannou (2014), rewards also include various forms of recognition and positive reinforcement from educators, such as verbal praise, non-material rewards, and emotional support. This broader view of rewards aligns with Teacher 2's perception.

“I think not only in the form of gifts, I also often provide reinforcement such as verbal praise and emotional support to students” (Teacher 2).

The limited understanding of rewards in the context of learning can negatively impact teaching and learning effectiveness. For example, an over-reliance on material rewards can reduce students' intrinsic motivation and shift their focus away from the actual learning process. Furthermore, a vague understanding of rewards can lead to inconsistent application among teachers, causing confusion and uncertainty among students. Therefore, it is crucial for teachers to have a thorough understanding of both the definition and implementation of rewards to maximize their effectiveness in the classroom.

4.1.2 The Reason of Using Rewards in Teaching English

Another issue related to teachers' perceptions of the use of rewards in English language teaching is understanding why teachers use rewards. Regarding the use of rewards in their teaching, all participants indicated that they had used rewards, although not consistently. However, each teacher had different reasons for incorporating rewards into their teaching practices. Based on the statements provided by the three participants, the following are some of the reasons why they chose to use rewards in their English language teaching.

1. Motivating students to learn English

One reason for using rewards is to motivating students to learn English. This was highlighted by all participants in their interviews. Teacher 1, for example, mentioned that without rewards, her students would be less interested in learning. However, when rewards are used, her students show more interest in learning, even if the material is the same as what is presented in the textbook. She said:

“Rewards boost my students' motivation to learn English, and I can see this clearly. When I use reward strategies in teaching, many of them become actively engaged. On the other hand, when rewards are not used, only a few students try to actively participate in class activities” (Teacher 1).

Similarly, teacher 2 and 3 also acknowledged that reward strategy helps them easier to manage the class and motivate their students. They uttered:

"So far, as long as I teach, it's good because it can motivate students, and it can motivate other students too, for example, when they see their friends receiving rewards” (Teacher 2).

“My students’ motivation seems to be improved. They become more active when I used reward strategy in teaching (Teacher 3).

In conclusion, the use of rewards in teaching English plays a significant role in motivating students and enhancing their engagement in the learning process. All participants in this study emphasized the positive impact of rewards on students' motivation. This finding aligns with the theory and results of previous studies (Bouguerne, 2011; Kasyulita & Armelida, 2019; Putri et al., 2021; Skinner, 1953; Syahrir et al., 2023), which highlighted that rewards increase learners' motivation and desire to learn. Overall, these findings suggest that reward strategies are an effective tool for boosting student participation, improving motivation, and fostering a more dynamic learning environment.

2. Building Students' Self-confidence

Another finding related to the reasons for using reward strategies in teaching English is the enhancement of students' self-confidence. Two out of the three teachers explained in their interviews that their students' self-confidence improved after the implementation of reward strategies. They said:

“I noticed the significant change after using the reward strategy. Some introvert students seem to be more active...yes, they showed more confidence in engaging in classroom activities” (Teacher 3).

“Some of my students became more confident after I used the strategy. They were usually quiet and lacked the courage to respond to any questions, but now they are more willing to participate” (Teacher 2).

Based on the participants' excerpts, it can be concluded that the teachers recognize the advantages of using rewards, which serve as the primary reason for their implementation. This finding aligns with previous studies (Latifah & Ichsan, 2023; Prawiro, 2019), which demonstrated that rewards positively influence students' self-confidence.

5. Conclusions and Suggestions

The participants had positive views on using rewards in their classrooms. They understood rewards as a form of motivation and saw them as helpful in teaching English, even though they were not fully familiar with the definition of "reward." The study found that teachers tend to use rewards, and when they do, it demonstrates their attention to the students. Rewards can boost students' motivation and help them believe in their ability to improve.

Although this research successfully elicited teachers' perceptions of the use of rewards in teaching English, it has some limitations. One limitation is the small sample size, as it only involved three English teachers from one public elementary school in Jambi. This limited sample may not fully represent the broader range of teachers' perceptions and practices regarding rewards in different educational contexts. Additionally, the study relied solely on interviews for data collection, which could introduce bias based on the participants' self-reports. The findings may have been influenced by the teachers' willingness to share their true views or experiences. Moreover, the study did not include the perspectives of students, which would provide a more comprehensive understanding of how rewards impact their motivation and learning. Future research could address these limitations by including a larger sample size and considering both teachers' and students' perspectives across various schools or regions.

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