

# Reinforcement of Rewards as Motivation for Students in Art Learning: A Case Study at a Local University

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## ABSTRACT

This study aims to look into the necessity of rewarding students, and how effective the usage of rewards reinforcement in motivating students towards learning art subject in universities. Positive reinforcement is essential in education as it strengthens their behaviour by presenting a desired stimulus (rewards). Educators normally select materials, conduct activities, relay information, impart knowledge, provide guidance, evaluate students, motivate and encourage learners. The intended research is designed specifically to see whether the act of giving rewards as a mean of recognition of good work and progress will increase learners' level of motivation towards learning art. Arts in education is generally perceived as the less important subject in universities. This study is hoped to uplift the art education in universities and curriculum design such as Outcome Based Education (OBE) expert as to the importance of Art education, hence upgrades the quality, performance and motivation of students towards Art education. The researcher believes that universities in Malaysia need a change in their teaching methods. Giving rewards is considered as one of the best instruments in motivating Art learning amongst students. The research was conducted to 242 students from Humanities subject. The target population of this study is mostly from the Foundation year students from the Faculty of Creative Multimedia. The respondents were selected using a 'cluster sampling method'. The researcher employed the questionnaire method as a means to gather information directly from the 242 respondents. From this research, the researcher found that the act of giving rewards in recognition to students excellent performance and progress is effective in teaching arts. Rewards usually improve and motivate students at the university level. This study also found that both male and female students were attracted to rewards. In addition to that, the attraction to the rewards has shown no difference between students of low level and high-level performance in Arts. Giving praises is also another way to motivate students. Most respondents agreed that giving rewards is the best way to improve and motivate art learning. The finding of this research proves that giving rewards helps in motivating students to learn arts. Regardless of any type of reward given, either in the form of praises, additional marks, special merits or certificates of appreciation, these rewards act as an extra encouragement to motivate students in art learning. Implementation needs to be made in the method of teaching at university level. Thus, it is proven that the finding of this research may be deemed as a helpful guideline to university educators in their process of imparting new art skills to students.

**Keywords:** Rewards, Motivation, Learning, Art.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Learning and education is very useful for human capital development as well as for economic development. It can foster creativity as well as interaction in self-injecting innovation. It is a priority for the country to provide high-skilled youths in this challenging era. Armed with creativity and complimented with innovation, they can compete more positively in helping the expansion of the economy. With such status, Malaysia would be able to

establish links with other advanced nations all over the world. The more complex the innovation, the greater the adaptation required in the system. Therefore, Malaysians need to acquire excellent knowledge, skills and ability in creating or expressing beauty in its visual entity such as art and design and multimedia technology, an educator is to ensure that the education system will continue to move in-line with the country's mission and vision. Therefore, the country will be more advanced, more successful from the global perspective and increasingly competitive.

With this challenging phase of education system, we cannot neglect other issues of achievement in education. The lack of motivation and rewards will explore the reasons of disinterest that the students display towards learning. Therefore, it is important for lecturers to focus on reward recognition to help the continuity of effective learning.

Student who perform lesser or face learning disabilities will be demotivated to put extra effort due to their past and repetitive failures. Students will often be working better and be wiser in doing tests other than taking more risks in learning art. This was the general consensus and a common complaint heard pertaining to the students. Appreciation and motivation have always been the point of convergence between lecturers and students throughout the years because it is the backbone of the learning process without realising it was the best way. Rewards are seen as the epitome in uplifting positive emotion and dedication for students to strive. Hence, it will be the greatest motivational factor for students to keep trying.

Historically, the Malay Peninsula or Malaya was colonised by three western powers since 1511. The first western power to colonise the Malay Peninsula was the Portuguese, who occupied the country from 1511 to 1641. Then, came the Dutch who stayed from 1641 to 1815. The third European power to colonise the Malay Peninsula was the British. This was from 1815 to 1957. Not much was known about the education system in the Malay Peninsula during the Portuguese and the Dutch colonisation periods. However, the Malay Peninsula had undergone many changes in its education system, which they inherited from the British administration. The British Colonial Government introduced art as a formal subject in the education system in Malaya as early as 1816. The contents of the syllabus focused more on the usefulness of practical arts such as carpentry, metalwork, tailoring, bookbinding and drawing [1]. When the country obtained its independence from the British Colonial Government in 1957, the same contents for Art Education were retained and taught in Malaysian schools. Although there were some minor adjustments in the school art syllabus, Art Education remained as a practical subject. The syllabus stressed on picture-making and graphic design [2].

Art is a skill or an ability that can be learned or acquired through constant practice as compared to other learning subjects. Indeed, art is remarkably recognised as an intermediary in establishing and maintaining relationship between peoples around the world. Thus, art can be used as a medium of communication that links people in all aspects, be it in trade and commerce, technology, entertainment, health, administration and education. Arts

education is an important subject across schools and universities to form the personality of children and adults. To ensure that the objectives of teaching art, design and multimedia subjects are achieved and implemented, the citizens of this country need the collaboration from all levels of the Malaysian society, from the management right to the artists and designers who are creative, talented and progressive to play their part in developing an industrial country. Education policies typically focus on the importance of gaining skills that are useful in the workforce, and neglect the need to develop the ability to form meaningful relationships and peaceful, cohesive societies. Given the advantages of bringing the arts into educational systems, reform is required [3].

## 2. AIM AND METHODOLOGY

Interests and goals have been identified as two important motivational variables that impact individuals' academic performances, yet little is known about how best to utilize these variables to enhance children's learning [4]. This study aims to look into the necessity of rewarding students, and how effective the usage of rewards in motivating students towards learning the art subject in universities. This research uses questionnaires to gather information from selected samples. The questionnaires were designed as an instrument to collect data for this study. This is a survey research where questionnaires were used for the purpose. The questionnaires will increase the accuracy of statistic and at the same time will decrease sampling errors. Interviews and observations are not suitable for this type of research because they require more time and normally used for in-depth study of certain topics [5]. Most researchers do not require respondents to write their names and addresses but this research requires them as a relevant piece of information which are essential to enable the identification of respondents' performance in art class. With such information, it will then be possible for the researcher to obtain respondents' latest recorded results. However, their names will not be revealed to avoid any undesirable effect on the respondents' self-confidence.

The questionnaires are divided into two parts: Part 1 and Part 2. Part 1 consists of ten items, all of which are related to the respondents' personal data. Part 2 is divided into three sections, A, B and C whereby each part is related to each of the three hypotheses. Part 2(A) is related to hypothesis one; Part 2(B) is related to hypothesis two; and Part 2(C) is related to hypothesis three.

- Hypothesis one: reinforcement in the form of material rewards is not necessarily a useful tool for effective learning in art.

- Hypothesis two: other forms of reinforcement such as praising could be a useful tool towards effective learning in art.
- Hypothesis three: learning art is no different from learning other subjects in the sense that reinforcement is not necessary.

Each section of Part 2 contains twelve statements. At the end of each statement, there are three parentheses for the respondents to respond. The first parenthesis is under the word 'Agree', the second parenthesis is under the word 'Neutral', and the third parenthesis is under the word 'Disagree'. Respondents were required to indicate with an (X) in any one of the parenthesis 'Agree', 'Neutral' or 'Disagree' according to their perception towards the statements given. There is a various research methods used by researcher to obtain information for the research in question. It is very important that the researcher chooses the right research method that is suitable for the on-going type of research. This is because the capability of some research methods in data gathering may not be useful for the type of research being done. The researcher took almost 4 days to analyse the data given by the 242 respondents. The questionnaire given to respondents to obtain data is the only collective source of information and regarded as the primary data for the research.

### **3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

In its broadest sense, this research is an attempt to contribute to a fuller understanding of the importance of learning art and if the rewards can act as a form of reinforcement. Many students are not very well inclined to learn art for the simple reason that they do not see the importance of the subject as compared to other subject in university curriculum. Defiantly, art has been considered as secondary in the academic environment in comparison to other subjects such as law, medicine, business or accounting, which carry a better perception of a more secured future profession than taking art courses. In an attempt to find out students' attitude towards rewards as a motivational platform, the results from this study are as follows:

#### ***3.1. That Reinforcement in the form of material rewards is not necessarily a useful tool for effective learning in art.***

A large majority of respondents in the university believe that rewards should be given to them who have obtained high achievements in art subject. Most respondents agree that the grade given to students' work in art is a good reward and should be exercised by the subject's educators/lecturers at the university level to

improve the learning of the subject. A majority of the respondents also put their thumbs up to the fact that rewards given to students could motivate them to learn more. Furthermore, most respondents also agree that students who have excellent performance in art class should be rewarded. The nature and the form of possible rewards are the most important. These rewards could be cheap in monetary value or small in size, but the gesture is very significant to the receivers. A majority of the respondents also acknowledge that praise is also a form of reward in learning art. Sweet words of praises from the educators/lecturers acknowledging good artwork is more than enough to motivate students to improve their performance in class. In addition to that, many respondents agree that extra marks are also considered as a form of rewards that should be given to students.

Extra marks act as a bonus to students who do well in art. The bonus given varies between highly motivated and poorly motivated students as far as art education is concerned. Surprisingly, art students in Humanities class in general do not expect to be rewarded when they do not perform well in art. Most respondents do not agree with the notion that students always expect rewards after doing well in class. They never have such expectation. However, students will very much appreciate if they are rewarded after producing good and excellent work. Rewards need not always be in material form. Rewards could be in the form of certificates. Educators/lecturers sending short notes of appreciation to parents acknowledging the good work of their children could also be perceived as rewards. Respondent then disagree with the statement that they do not feel satisfied upon receiving rewards as recognition for their good work in art. As a matter of fact, students usually feel very happy and proud when they are given a reward as a recognition of their good work in art class. Factors like parents, school, peers, and social background and achievement scores could also be explored in the research to see how these factors impact on student motivation and engagement [6].

Thus, rewards in general is proven to be a necessity as perceived by the university students. They have a firm belief that rewards can motivate them to do well in art and should be incorporated on a frequent basis. Hence, supervision is needed to comprehend the importance of the application of rewards in universities and this could be done by a collaborative measure between relevant faculties in a university. Neglecting the importance of awarding rewards to students in universities would mean neglecting the importance of art in its faculty and universities in general.

### ***3.2. That other forms of reinforcement such as praising could be a useful tool towards effective learning in art.***

Behavior management is another important part of the classroom, and motivation plays a large part in how children act [7]. This actually can be one of the form of the tool that can be implements in learning domain. Most respondents said that they feel happy when their educator/lecturer praises their good work in art. Besides that, students also believe that they feel proud when their good work in art is shown to the rest of the class. Students feel proud because their classmates would look at their work with envy. A majority of the 242 respondents believe that they are determined to further improve their artwork after being praised by their lecturer. Additionally, students feel proud because not all students are always entitled to receive the words of praise from their lecturer. Therefore, most respondents believe that students expect to get positive comments from their lecturer after having produced good artwork. In addition to that, positive comments from fellow classmates are perceived as a form of motivation to further improve the respondents' artwork. Subsequently, most respondents also agree that praises from parents would increase their interest in art.

“Participating in art competitions takes courage and is an act of faith and belief in one’s own talent and strengths” [8]. Most respondents also feel that any invitation to participate in art competitions, exhibitions and workshops can increase their interest in art as well. Hence, this clearly proves that other forms of reinforcement such as word of praise can be an important motivational tool for effective learning in art education. The result of this survey shows that praises given to students can make them happy, proud and special, realize and improve their talent, determined and honored, all of which are vital to further improve the general perception towards learning art.

### ***3.3. That learning art is no different from learning other subjects in the sense that reinforcement is not necessary***

On the whole, respondents agree that learning art is no different from learning other subjects and that the reinforcement is inessential and unnecessary. Students believe that duress should not be enforced in art learning. Responses from these respondents also show that duress is not essential in art learning and that the students oppose duress to be incorporated in studying art. This case study has also shown that the majority of respondents agree with the statement that interest in learning art should be of natural consequence and without the presence of duress. Instead, the respondents agree that reinforcement

is necessary to nurture interest in art learning. It is also noted that the majority of the respondents believe they should be informed in advance that there would be rewards for excellent work in art.

Furthermore, these respondents also consider that positive reinforcements can motivate students in doing excellent work in class. In addition to that, students also agree on the notion that the promise of rewards makes them prepared for producing better artwork. Similarly, the promise of rewards is also perceived by students to have positive effect towards learning art and they believe that this world prepares them to come up with better artwork. Hence, students agree with the statement that giving rewards for their good art work is a part of the learning process. The perception from these respondents also indicates, most respondents found that material rewards can really help lecturers to encourage their students to do well in class. However, material reward is not necessarily effective in encouraging students to do well in learning art as perceived by students. Instead, students believe that lecturers giving extra bonus marks to them can really motivate them to perform better.

## **4. CONCLUSION**

This research is relevant to the question of whether rewards in general could become a form of reinforcement to motivate students in art learning. The prime intention is to investigate the necessity of using rewards as a motivational tool in determining students' behaviour. The analysed results obtained after the implementation of the research methods have significantly proven the powerful influence of rewards in shaping the needed motivation in art learning. Thus, the finding of this research could become a helpful guide to educators in their process of imparting new knowledge to students. The whole research arrives at the following conclusion.

Firstly, material reward is generally perceived as a form of reinforcement to motivate students in art learning. Students would make extra effort to take art, design, and multimedia courses and to excel in these fields if they visualise some forms of rewards being offered in relation to their achievement in that course or subject. However, rewards should not always be in a tangible form. Praise is intangible but the words of praise given to students who excel, will exhibit some elements of excellence in their work, which is also perceived as a reward.

Learning is fun and exciting, at least when the curriculum is well matched to students' interests and abilities and the teacher emphasizes hands-on activities [9]. Students are happy too when they improve their work, task and assignments given after getting some

words of praise from lecturers or prominent people such as Deans, Professors and higher official ranks in their university. These students would most likely double their efforts in producing excellent artwork throughout their years of candidatures.

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