

Original Research Article

Using Reward Contingency as a Language Teaching Strategy to Novices

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Abstract

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There are several strategies to enhance language teaching. One of the strategies is pressure (Rau et al., 2006; Lane and Ferreira, 2008; Repak, 2012). In a previous study, four types of pressure were tested on language learners: ego relevance, monitoring pressure, punishment contingency and reward contingency (Abang, 2018). In that study, no type of pressure had a negative impact on performance in language learning. However, reward contingency was seen to have the highest positive impact on performance in language learning. This thus motivated the researcher to investigate the impact of reward contingency on performance in language learning, in the case of novices. Judge and Bono (2000) defined reward contingency as, “providing an adequate exchange of valued resources for followers support.” In other words, reward contingency denotes, offering praises, extra marks, awarding hard work with privileges. The present study seeks to demonstrate how reward contingency can enhance performance in language teaching and learning to novices. Novices here refers to language learners who do not use the target language often. In the case of this study French speaking students of ENSET (L'École Normale Supérieure de l'Enseignement Technique) Douala, learning English language, were subjects of the study. We had 95 participants who were divided into an experimental group and a control group. Research instruments were an observation chart, pre-test and post-test. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics. It was concluded that reward contingency improved class interaction and encouraged the students to ask questions in class.

Keywords: Reward Contingency, Language Teaching, Strategies, Novices

INTRODUCTION

This study comes as an aid to the teaching process. The study investigates the use of the pressure of reward contingency, as a strategy in the teaching/learning process. In instruction, the teaching method used determines the effectiveness of the outcome (Rodgers, 2001). There are several second language teaching methods, none of which is sufficient. Every language teaching method has advantages as well as disadvantages. It is therefore beneficial in the teaching/learning process, for teachers to use some methods in combination, where and when appropriate. After some key terms will be defined, the problem that pushed the researcher to investigate will be stated. This will closely

be followed by a review on motivation since motivation is an aspect of reward contingency. The objective of the study will be stated, the research questions and methodology used will be stated as well. This will be followed by data analysis, discussion and conclusion.

Definition of Terms

Reward contingency

Reward contingency denotes, offering praises, extra marks, awarding hard work with privileges.

Strategy

In this study, strategy pertains to the pedagogical techniques used to facilitate the teaching and learning processes of language.

Novices

Novices here refers to language learners who do not use the target language often. These are learners who have very little mastery of the target language. In the case of this study French speaking students of ENSET (L'École Normale Supérieure de l'Enseignement Technique) Douala, learning English language, were subjects of the study.

Statement of the problem

In a previous study, four types of pressure were tested on language learners: ego relevance, monitoring pressure, punishment contingency and reward contingency (Abang 2018). In that study, no type of pressure had a negative impact on performance in language learning. However, reward contingency was seen to have the highest positive impact on performance in language learning. This thus motivated the researcher to investigate the impact of reward contingency on performance in language learning, in the particular case of novices (learners learning a target language as a foreign language).

Gardner's Social Psychology Theory

One of the best scholars to explore motivation in language learning was Gardner and Lambert (1959). Their view of motivation argued that "an individual's motivation to learn an L2 is sustained by both attitudes towards the L2 community and the goals or orientation, right through the acquisition of the L2" (1972, in Noels, Pelletier, & Clement, 2003: 36). Gardner and Lambert's argued that motivation to an L2 requires a positive attitude towards the L2 community and a desire to become a member of that community (Clement, Dornzei & Noels, 1994: 419). Through this idea they distinguished two kinds of motivation: integrative and instrumental. Dornyei characterizes the former as having a positive attitude towards the L2 society and "the desire to interact with and even become similar to valued members of that community (1994: 274). Gardner and Lambert described instrumental motivation as the desire to gain practical benefits (1972, cited in Clement et al., 1994: 419).

Gardner and Lambert's study concluded that interactively motivated students are greatly successful in learning L2 than instrumentally motivated students. The

strength of Gardner and Lambert's theory is that it was empirically tested and supported by evidence. Although their research claims be disputed, linguists have found limitations with the findings. There have been some uncertainties concerning Gardner and Lambert's research findings ever since they were first published. The main hindrance with the theory is that the research was only tested on second language learners. There is an important difference to note between learning a second language and learning a foreign language (subsequently referred to as SL and FL). Learning an SL involves having some contact with the L2 community, whereas while learning an FL, students have less exposure to L2 speakers (Dornyei, 1994: 520). Gardner and Lambert's conclusion was based solely on a specific group of subjects who were learning an L2 in a SL setting. For this reason, their theory might not be applicable to FL learners.

It is a known fact that motivation enhances learning. This has been established through several studies in the area. Even though it has been established that motivation enhances learning, there exists several twists on handling this motivation. Teachers need to know certain facts on how motivation has to be handled. Motivating students well, brings out better results. Dornyei (2001) in Othman and Shuqair (2013) emphasized that, "teacher skills in motivating learners should be seen as central to teaching effectiveness" (Page,116). The article, "The Impact of Motivation on English Language Learning in the Gulf States" by Al Othman and Shuqair (2013) aimed at exploring the various types of motivation factors that affect the learning of the English language. These motivation factors outlined in the said article do not include the pressure of reward contingency. The present research does. Al Othman and Shuqair (2013) advised teachers to use activities and teaching ideologies that motivate students. These activities and ideologies were not specified. This is where the present research comes in. One of the ideologies the present researcher has considered to be a motivating factor to learning a language is through the pressure of reward contingency. In this light, reward contingency is envisioned as a teaching strategy to extrinsically motivate learners. This is coming at a time when most researchers believe intrinsic motivation is more effective than extrinsic motivation. This assertion is true but considering a school milieu, extrinsic motivation comes in handy. In other words, when students are admitted into the university, they become happy. This happiness comes from the fact that their educational level is now higher. They are intrinsically motivated to read whatever they had applied to read in the university (be it Journalism, Nursing, or any other). They are happy to embrace the challenges of the field of study. What they are not happy about but forced to embrace, are the other courses attached to their field of study. It could be a university requirement like Mathematics, Language, or Sports. In this case, they

need to be extrinsically motivated in order to learn. That is why the present research is helpful to teachers and learners of second and foreign language learning. There has to be an outside push, the pressure of reward contingency.

Intrinsic Motivation

Intrinsic motivation is an important factor when considering language learning. Intrinsic motivation is characterized by an individual being motivated to act on an activity for the pure fun that accompanies such an activity without any external factors to motivate (Noels et al., 2003:502). An example is a student who completes an activity for his or her pleasure without pressure from outside sources to participate in the task. Language learners who possess intrinsic motivation are motivated for the fun of gaining competence. Thus students who are intrinsically motivated have a higher chance of continuing their studies and furthering their L2 competence.

Extrinsic Motivation

Extrinsic motivation, contrary to intrinsic motivation, refers to the motivation one has, to participate in an activity, not for the joy of it but to accomplish some external goal (Ryan and Deci, 2000; Noels et al., 1999; Noels et al., 2003; Dornyei, 1998). An example of extrinsic motivation is an individual who participates in an activity in order to receive praise, money or any other kind of reward. Even if an individual participates in an activity in order to avoid punishment of any kind, he is still considered to possess extrinsic motivation. Extrinsic motivation does have short term motivational characteristics. However, students with it do not necessarily have positive attitudes towards the L2. Besides, research shows that such students could be more likely to discontinue language studies. Ramage's (1990) study argues that students who took the language to fulfill an academic requirement are more likely to cease any future language teaching classes (in Noels et al., 1999: 25).

To conclude on motivation, let us take a definition from Emily (2011), "motivation refers to reasons that underlie behaviour that is characterized by willingness and volition. Intrinsic motivation is animated by personal enjoyment, interest or pleasure; whereas extrinsic motivation is governed by reinforcement contingencies".

Research questions

1. How can reward contingency enhance performance in language teaching and learning to novices?

Objective

This study seeks to demonstrate how reward contingency can enhance performance in language teaching and learning to novices.

METHODOLOGY

The research design used was the quasi-experimental design. We had 95 participants who were divided into an experimental group and a control group. The pressure of reward contingency was used as a teaching strategy in the experimental group while the control group did not. Research instruments were an observation chart, pre test and post test. Standardized language tests were used in both the pre and post tests. The pre test was administered on the first day of the experiment when learning had not taken place. The post test was administered on the last day of the experiment after learning had taken place in both the experimental and control groups. Results of the pre test were compared to that of the post test in both groups, to check if there was an improvement or not. Behavioural changes in the presence of reward contingency (experimental group) and the absence of reward contingency (control group) were also analyzed. These behavioural changes were noted in the observation charts. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics.

Observation Chart for Reward Contingency

- Does the teacher praise good performance?
- How often does he praise good performance?
 - * Always, often, sometimes.
- Does the teacher ignore good performance?
- How often does the teacher ignore good performances?
 - * Always, often, sometimes.
- How does the teacher reward good performance?
 - * Applause
 - * Extra marks
 - * Verbal praises
 - * Giving ticks
 - * Others
- What type of good performances does the teacher reward?
 - * Giving accurate answers.
 - * Giving fairly correct answers.
 - * Making an effort to answer either right or wrong.
- What type of good performances does the teacher not reward?
 - * Giving accurate answers.
 - * Giving fairly correct answers.
 - * Making an effort to answer either right or wrong.
- How does the student who is rewarded react?
- How do the other students react in respect to the reward?
- How does the student who was not rewarded react?

- How do the other students react in respect to the unrewarded performance?

Data Analysis

ENSET is an Advanced Technical College of the University of Douala. Both the control and experimental groups were made up of Francophone students (students whose first official language is French). Just like most first classes, not all students were present. So the students who started the experiment were the students the researcher considered throughout the research. Therefore, we had 29 students for the experimental group and 65 students for the control group, making a total of 95 students.

Research Question 1: Can reward contingency enhance performance in language teaching and learning to novices?

To answer this question, we will consider the pre test and the post test results of both the control and experimental groups. If performance drops, then reward contingency did not have any positive effect on language learning. However if performance improves, then reward contingency had a positive effect on language learning.

Results of the pre test showed that the students of the experimental group performed better than the students of the control group. This means in the experimental group, more students passed and with higher grades than those of the control group. The total percentage passed of the control group was 17.24% while that of the experimental group was 24.14%. Measuring the performance in averages, the control group had 6.47 on 20 and 7.00 on 20 for the experimental group. It should be noted that the pre-test was administered on the first day of the experiment. Thus, there was no prior language instruction to guide the students' responses. The percentage passed of the pre-test in ENSET (both the control and experimental groups) was below average. This could only mean that the English background of the students of ENSET was low. We will find out in the post test whether reward contingency improved the students' English language proficiency.

Looking at the overall performance, there was an improvement in the performance of both groups in the post test. Here again, the experimental group (24.14%) had higher percentages than the control group (20.%) . Which means that, reward contingency had a positive effect on language learning. Therefore, since reward contingency was used as a teaching strategy in the experimental group, it caused the students of the experimental group to perform better. It is also worth noting that the percentage passed in the pre test and post test for the experimental group remained the same

(24.14%). This is just for the experimental group only. There was no drop in percentage, neither was there an increase. What this means is that, reward contingency did not have a negative impact on performance. Comparing the percentage passed of the pre test to that of the post test, in both the experimental and control groups, we can see that there was some improvement. Analyzing the results in averages, the experimental group had 7.83 on 20 and the control group had 6.95 on 20. Thus, the overall average passed in both groups was higher in the post test than in the pre test. This means that language instruction and reward contingency improved learning.

Research Question 2: How can reward contingency enhance performance in language teaching and learning to novices?

To answer this question, we will consider the analysis of the observation charts. From the daily notes in the observation charts some interesting points were noticed. There were some students in the experimental group who answered almost all questions and gave novel ideas. They were praised by the teacher and the teacher encouraged them after class. Every time they were praised, it was like a signal that said, do more. Because they kept going on and on, and other students applauded, some tried to follow his example, others made positive remarks. One important observation was that, whenever a student answered a question right in the experimental group, the other students would say, "Madame, his name is ..." in order to attract a reward. This made the class interaction become better and better every week. Some students asked questions, and gave great examples, just to show off. And it helped them understand the lessons better.

CONCLUSION

Generally speaking, it can be observed that the students' performance relatively improved in the post test. That is, moving from a total of 6.47 to 6.95 for the control group and 7.00 to 7.83 for the experimental group. This can be explained by the fact that language instruction and reward contingency improves performance. We should be reminded that the pre-test was written in the first class of the experiment. Therefore, the pre-test tested the students' English language knowledge, prior to language instruction and the exertion of reward contingency. The post test on the other hand was written after the students had received some language instruction and the exertion of reward contingency for the experimental group. Thus it was logical for the students to have improved in performance.

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