Positive Teacher Feedback on Learning Motivation and Mental Health of Early Childhood

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Abstract

This study aims to describe the role of positive teacher feedback in improving learning motivation and mental health of early childhood children at Silampari Islamic School Kindergarten in Lubuk Linggau. Using a qualitative approach with observation, interviews, and documentation methods, this study explores how positive reinforcement is delivered and how children respond to these practices. The results indicate that positive feedback, such as verbal praise, affective expressions, and nonverbal reinforcement, can create a supportive, safe classroom atmosphere and boost children's self-confidence. Teachers, children, and the principal confirmed that an appreciative classroom climate contributes to increased learning motivation, a sense of comfort, and reduced anxiety during the learning process. This study confirms that a culture of appreciation is an important strategy in early childhood education to support both academic development and emotional well-being.

Keywords : *Positive Feedback, Learning Motivation, Mental Health, Early Childhood*

INTRODUCTION

Early childhood education is an important foundation for the development of all aspects of a child's self, including learning motivation and mental health (Squires, van Rhijn, Harwood, Haines, & Barton, 2025). At this time, children are at a developmental stage that is sensitive to environmental stimulation, so that all forms of interaction , especially from teachers, have a major influence on how children build self-concept, self-confidence, and interest in learning (Faizah, Hamzah, Farantika, Utama, & Anggia, 2024; Nurlina et al., 2024). Consistent emotional support, such as providing positive feedback, can help children feel valued, safe, and capable (Hikmawati, 2025). When teachers provide reinforcement in the form of praise, appreciation, or appropriate encouragement, children are not only motivated to try and learn better, but also develop healthy psychological conditions, such as a sense of comfort, stable emotional regulation, and the ability to adapt to social environments (Yusep Noviar, Syarif Maulidin, & Ari Arkanudin, 2024). At an early age, children have high emotional needs, so the teacher's response and treatment will greatly influence how they build their perceptions of themselves and the learning process (Harahap & Savitri, 2022).

In many early childhood education institutions, the quality of the emotional relationship between teachers and children is one of the main indicators of successful

learning because this relationship is the basis for the formation of a sense of security, trust, and positive attachment in children (Dabis, 2019). When children feel appreciated, listened to, and cared for by their teachers, they are more likely to express themselves, participate in learning activities, and demonstrate prosocial behavior. (Yusuf, Utama, & Rachmad, 2025; Hamzanwadi, 2020). Warm and responsive relationships also help children understand emotional regulation through direct examples from teachers, so they learn to manage stress, anxiety, and conflict more healthily (Howe, 2019). Conversely, relationships that are rigid, stressful, or lack emotional support can make children feel threatened, reluctant to engage in learning activities, and even reduce their internal motivation (Dammeyer, Hansen, Crowe, & Marschark, 2019). Therefore, teachers are not only tasked with teaching, but also as emotional companions who build positive interactions, provide a sense of comfort, and create a classroom climate conducive to the development of learning motivation and mental health in early childhood (Nesta & Razzaq, Abdur Fitri, Hartika Utami, Yoesoep Edhie Rachmad, 2024). Warmth, acceptance, and positive support from teachers have been proven to facilitate children to be more confident, active, and able to participate in the learning process in a safe and comfortable inner atmosphere (Ciolan, 2013).

In the context of educational psychology, theories such as Self-Determination Deci and Ryan's theory asserts that intrinsic motivation develops when a child 's basic needs for competence, autonomy, and relatedness are met through supportive social interactions. The theory explains that a person's motivation emerges optimally when three basic psychological needs are met: autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Ryan, RM, & Deci, 2017). In the context of early childhood education, this theory asserts that children will be more motivated to learn when they feel they have the freedom to choose or try (autonomy), feel capable and appreciated (Teng et al., 2024). Positive feedback from teachers, such as praise, gentle encouragement, or recognition of a child's efforts, helps fulfill these three needs (Kristianto, Susetyo, Utama, Fitriono, & Jannah, 2023). When children feel valued and confident, their intrinsic motivation increases, making them more enthusiastic, persistent, and comfortable in the learning process (Pan, López, Li, & Liu, 2021).

Positive feedback is a form of verbal and nonverbal support provided by teachers to reinforce a child's behavior, efforts, or achievements. When teachers provide appreciation, encouragement, or recognition for a child's efforts, it fosters a sense of competence which is the basis of learning motivation (Hidayah, 2023). Children feel that they are valuable and capable of performing tasks well, so they are encouraged to try, persist, and complete learning activities without fear of failure (Dabis, 2019). In addition, positive feedback can increase children's self-esteem because they feel valued not only for the results, but also for the process they undertake (Wibawati & Watini, 2022). This kind of reinforcement helps children build a positive self-image and see themselves as individuals with potential. Another impact that is no less important is reduced anxiety in learning. Early childhood is very sensitive to teacher responses. When the responses received are positive, supportive, and non-judgmental, they feel emotionally secure. This sense of security reduces tension, fear of making mistakes, and psychological stress that often arise during learning activities (Betancourt et al., 2020).

Meanwhile, the Social theory Learning developed by Albert Bandura emphasizes that the learning process in children takes place through observation or observational learning. Learning from surrounding models (Vaughan-Johnston &

Jacobson, 2020) Children not only learn behavior through direct instruction, but also through imitation of the actions, expressions, and emotional responses displayed by adults, especially teachers (Bandura, 1977). In the context of early childhood education, teachers serve as primary models who demonstrate how to react adaptively to learning situations. When teachers provide positive feedback—such as praise, smiles, or verbal encouragement—children observe and imitate these response patterns, thereby learning that effort, patience, and the courage to try again are valued behaviors (Ferdian Utama, 2017) . This theory explains how the interaction between teachers and children not only shapes learning behavior but also influences the development of emotional regulation and positive attitudes in children facing academic challenges.

In the context of early childhood education, teachers serve as the social models children observe most closely and frequently (Siti Maryam, 2025). When teachers provide positive responses, whether in the form of praise, verbal appreciation, smiles, or other nonverbal reinforcement, children not only receive information that their behavior is appropriate, but also imitate the teacher's way of expressing emotions and dealing with learning situations (Saputri & Widyasari, 2022). Through the mechanisms of attention , retention , reproduction , and motivation , children observe the teacher's behavior, store it in memory, and then imitate it in relevant social contexts. This positive response also provides vicarious reinforcement. Reinforcement that makes children feel safe, valued, and encouraged to repeat the same behavior. Positive feedback not only reinforces expected learning behaviors but also helps children develop emotional regulation, such as self-soothing, managing frustration, and responding more adaptively to learning challenges (Tang, Du, Zhong, Qin, & Liu, 2025). Therefore, from a Social Learning In theory , positive feedback serves a dual function: it reinforces learning behavior and stimulates a child's emotional well-being. Teachers are not only instructors but also emotional figures who shape a child's mindset, attitudes, and responses to the learning process through examples and everyday interactions (Degol & Bachman, 2023) .

Several previous studies have shown that positive feedback has a significant impact on increasing learning motivation in early childhood. Research by (Nugroho, 2021) found that verbal teacher appreciation can encourage children to be more confident and take initiative in classroom activities. Meanwhile, a study by (Marlina, 2020) showed that teacher emotional support can reduce children's anxiety levels and improve their mood during the learning process. Another study by (Widodo, 2022) confirmed that a respectful classroom environment has a direct impact on children's mental health development. However, the context of implementing positive feedback in Islamic-based educational institutions such as the Silampari Islamic School Kindergarten in Lubuk Linggau remains rarely studied, providing room for further exploration.

Based on these gaps, this study seeks to explore in depth how positive feedback practices are provided by teachers to early childhood at Silampari Islamic School Kindergarten , Lubuk Linggau. The research questions are: (1) what forms of positive feedback do teachers provide to early childhood; (2) how children respond to this feedback in the context of learning motivation; and (3) how does positive feedback from teachers influence children's mental health in daily learning activities. These three focus issues are expected to provide a complete picture of the dynamics of teacher-child interactions within the framework of religious and humanist education. The purpose of this study is to describe in depth the practice of providing positive feedback by teachers, understand its impact on children's learning motivation, and

analyze its contribution to the mental health of early childhood at Silampari Islamic School Kindergarten, Lubuk Linggau. As a qualitative study, this study seeks to interpret the meaning of children's and teachers' experiences in learning interactions, thereby providing contextual insights into effective strategies for strengthening motivation and mental health in early childhood education environments. The results of this study are expected to be a useful source of information for educational institutions, teachers, and other researchers in developing supportive and child-welfare-oriented learning approaches.

METHODOLOGY

Study employed a qualitative approach with a case study approach, seeking to deeply understand the practice of providing positive feedback by teachers at Silampari Islamic School Kindergarten in Lubuk Linggau and its impact on learning motivation and the mental health of early childhood children. This approach was chosen to comprehensively explore the phenomenon through direct observation, interviews, and analysis of interactions occurring in a natural context without special treatment. A qualitative approach allows researchers to gain a deep understanding of the subjective meanings experienced by children and teachers in the daily learning process (Melinda M. Leko, Bryan G. Cook, 2021). The research subjects consisted of grade A and B teachers, the principal, and several children aged 4–6 years old who were selected using a purposive sampling technique, which determines informants based on certain criteria relevant to the research objectives. Teachers were selected because of their direct experience in providing positive feedback, while children were selected based on initial observations that showed varying levels of learning motivation and emotional responses to teacher feedback. The principal's involvement provided a perspective on school policy and culture in implementing learning strategies that support children's mental health.

Data collection was conducted through three main techniques: observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation. Observations were used to observe the learning process, teacher-child interactions, and naturally occurring forms of positive feedback. In-depth interviews were conducted to understand teachers' perspectives on positive feedback practices, principals' perceptions of its implementation, and children's experiences regarding the emotional impact they experienced. Meanwhile, documentation in the form of activity photos, child development notes, and school policy documents was used to strengthen the research findings. Data analysis employed the Miles and Huberman model, which includes data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. In the data reduction stage, researchers selected and simplified data relevant to the research focus. The data were then presented in narrative form, matrices, and thematic categories to facilitate interpretation. The final stage was drawing conclusions, which was carried out continuously throughout the research process to ensure that the findings were truly supported by field data (Miles, MB, Huberman, AM, & Saldana, 2018).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION
Results

The results of this study were obtained through observations, in-depth interviews, and documentation conducted at Silampari Islamic School Kindergarten, Lubuk Linggau. The main findings of the study indicate that positive feedback provided by teachers has a significant influence on increasing learning motivation and

mental health in early childhood. The forms of positive feedback found in this study include verbal praise, gentle touch as nonverbal reinforcement, appreciative smiles and nods, award stickers, and affirmative expressions such as "you're great," "very good," or "thank you for your effort." Observations show that teachers consistently provide positive reinforcement when children demonstrate effort, good behavior, or achievement in learning activities.

This feedback is provided not only when the child is successful, but also in situations where the child is experiencing difficulty or anxiety. In these moments, the teacher provides calming verbal encouragement, encourages the child to breathe slowly, and helps the child calm down before returning to the activity. This practice aligns with the principle of positive reinforcement. Reinforcement from B.F. Skinner's Behaviorism theory explains that behavior that is given positive reinforcement tends to be repeated by individuals. Reinforcement in the form of praise or gentle touch becomes a stimulus that strengthens children's learning behavior, increases engagement, and forms adaptive responses in facing class assignments. In addition, the provision of verbal praise and warm expressions from teachers is in line with Vygotsky's scaffolding concept which emphasizes the importance of emotional and social support in helping children reach the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). When teachers provide affirmations and calming guidance, children feel helped to overcome difficulties with confidence (Lev Vygotsky, 2004).

This finding is also in line with Social Learning A theory developed by Albert Bandura , which asserts that the learning process in early childhood occurs through the mechanisms of observation, imitation, and modeling. In this theory, children learn social and emotional behavior by observing the actions of adults who are significant figures, especially teachers. When teachers provide positive responses—such as praise, warm facial expressions, or nonverbal reinforcement—children not only understand that their behavior is appropriate, but also imitate the teacher's way of expressing positive emotions. Thus, the teacher's positive response serves a dual function: as direct reinforcement for learning behavior and as a model of emotional behavior that children can imitate. Children then store this information in memory, imitate it in relevant situations, and develop adaptive response patterns in facing learning challenges. This process strengthens children's social-emotional development, as they learn how to express appreciation, manage emotions, and build positive relationships through the teacher's example. Learning This theory supports the finding that positive teacher responses have a significant impact on shaping children's learning motivation and emotional regulation abilities on an ongoing basis.

Furthermore, interviews with teachers revealed that providing positive feedback is part of the school's learning strategy to create a supportive classroom climate. Teachers stated that children are more easily motivated when they feel cared for, appreciated, and accepted without pressure. As shown in the following data:

> "...we do emphasize providing positive feedback as part of our learning strategy. Children are more easily motivated when they feel noticed and appreciated. This way, the classroom atmosphere becomes more supportive, and the children appear more confident in continuing to learn..."

Interviews with children also revealed that they felt happy, confident, and eager to return to learning when teachers offered praise or recognition. Some children even stated that they were "not afraid of making mistakes" when teachers responded with gentle, supportive feedback. This sentiment was captured in the following statement:

"...I love it when the teacher says 'good' or 'great' when I've memorized a verse. It makes me want to learn more quickly. If I make a mistake, the teacher just smiles and tells me to try again slowly. So I'm not afraid of making mistakes and keep trying until I get it. It feels like encouragement..."

The interview results indicate that positive feedback is an important part of the teacher's learning strategies, particularly in creating a supportive classroom environment and fostering children's intrinsic motivation. The teacher believes that children will be more enthusiastic about learning when they feel cared for and appreciated, so the approach used is not oriented towards pressure or harsh reprimands, but rather towards gentle and affirmative reinforcement. This aligns with the principles of humanistic learning , which emphasize the importance of a safe emotional environment as a prerequisite for developing learning motivation. The teacher also emphasized that a supportive classroom environment allows children to build self-confidence, which is evident in the way they continue trying even when making mistakes. Findings from interviews with children confirm the teacher's perspective. Children expressed that praise and appreciation make them feel happy, motivated, and eager to learn again. The teacher's gentle response when children make mistakes also reduces the fear of failure, making children more willing to try and repeat tasks until they succeed. This indicates that positive feedback affects not only cognitive aspects in the form of learning motivation, but also emotional aspects such as a sense of security, emotional regulation, and self-confidence. Thus, positive interactions built by teachers through praise, smiles, and verbal encouragement contribute significantly to the formation of a conducive classroom climate, while also supporting the mental health and development of learning motivation in early childhood.

Other findings indicate that children's mental health improves through these positive interactions. Children appear calmer, more able to regulate their emotions, more willing to try new things, and better able to collaborate with their peers. Observations of children's development show consistent improvements in independence, learning initiative, and emotional stability. Furthermore, the principal emphasized that implementing a culture of appreciation in the school environment supports the creation of a safe and warm learning environment, so that children feel comfortable and avoid excessive anxiety during class. As the principal explained:

"...At this school, we strongly emphasize a culture of appreciation as part of creating a safe and welcoming learning environment. Teachers are encouraged to offer praise, encouragement, or simple recognition whenever a child demonstrates effort or progress. This way, children feel valued and comfortable in the classroom. We find that when the atmosphere is positive, children are calmer, less anxious, and more prepared to participate in learning activities throughout the day..."

The principal's statement demonstrates that a culture of appreciation implemented in the school environment plays a crucial role in creating a safe, warm, and conducive learning climate for the psychological development of early childhood. The principal emphasized that teachers are encouraged to provide simple forms of appreciation—such as praise, applause, or recognition for a child's efforts—as part of a positive reinforcement strategy. This consistent application of appreciation has been shown to have a significant impact on children's sense of emotional security. When children feel appreciated and welcomed with positive responses, they demonstrate a higher level of comfort, are free from excessive anxiety, and are more prepared to participate in a series of learning activities. These findings confirm that a warm and

supportive classroom atmosphere not only supports learning motivation but also serves as psychological protection, helping children remain calm throughout the learning process. Therefore, a culture of appreciation instilled in schools directly contributes to the creation of a child-friendly environment, minimizes emotional stress, and strengthens the mental health and learning readiness of early childhood.

Discussion

The results of this study indicate that positive teacher feedback has a significant influence on increasing learning motivation and mental health of early childhood children at Silampari Islamic School Kindergarten, Lubuk Linggau. These findings reinforce the understanding that teacher emotional support through positive reinforcement is a core element in the early childhood learning process. Verbal praise, smiles, gentle touches, and symbolic rewards such as stickers can create a safe psychological atmosphere so that children feel valued and accepted. This positive emotional state encourages children to show greater effort, participate actively, and develop self-confidence in learning activities. This is in line with the principle of positive reinforcement. reinforcement of behaviorism theory Skinner emphasized that behavior that is reinforced through positive stimuli will tend to be repeated and develop consistently.

Furthermore, research findings also indicate that teachers provide positive feedback not only when children succeed, but also when they experience difficulties or anxiety. In this context, teachers use gentle verbal responses, emotional support, and calming techniques as a form of scaffolding to help children manage feelings of frustration. This practice aligns with Vygotsky 's scaffolding concept , which emphasizes the importance of social and emotional support in helping children reach their Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). With this kind of support, children are not only helped in completing academic tasks but also learn to regulate their emotions and restore their psychological state to a stable state, ready to resume learning.

This finding is further strengthened by the Social perspective. Learning Albert Bandura 's theory . Children observe and imitate positive teacher responses, so the feedback not only reinforces learning behavior but also serves as a model for children in managing emotions and expressing appreciation. Children learn through observing how teachers act gently, smile, give praise, and reassure peers. This modeling process helps children develop emotional regulation skills, prosocial behavior , and adaptive interaction patterns. In other words, teachers act not only as educators but also as emotional figures who shape children's attitudes and responses in learning situations.

Interviews with teachers revealed that providing positive feedback is a deliberate strategy implemented by the school to create a supportive classroom environment. Teachers emphasized that children are more easily motivated when they feel valued, seen, and accepted. This approach emphasizes the humanistic aspect of education, where a warm emotional climate serves as the foundation for the growth of intrinsic motivation. In line with Deci and Ryan's Self-Determination theory, children's basic needs—competence, autonomy, and relatedness—are met through supportive interactions, encouraging them to learn not because of pressure, but because they feel capable and accepted. Interviews with children support this view. Children feel happy, confident, and more eager to learn when teachers offer praise or recognition. Teachers' gentle responses when children make mistakes also reduce their fear of failure, making them more willing to try again until they succeed. This suggests that positive feedback plays a direct role in reducing learning anxiety and increasing

children's emotional resilience . resilience). The feeling of "not being afraid of being wrong" expressed by the child illustrates that positive feedback is able to build safe emotional Space is a psychological condition that allows children to learn without pressure or feeling threatened.

Furthermore, the principal's role is crucial in fostering a culture of appreciation that is consistently implemented by all teachers. The principal emphasized that a culture of appreciation is part of the effort to create a safe, warm, and emotionally stress-free learning environment. When all teachers are encouraged to provide positive reinforcement, the school climate shifts to one that supports children's mental health. Children appear calmer, less anxious, and more prepared to participate in learning activities throughout the day. These findings reinforce that children's motivation and mental health are shaped not only by individual interactions with teachers, but also by the overall school culture.

This study presents a novel approach by in-depth examining how positive teacher feedback influences learning motivation and mental health in early childhood within the context of an Islamic educational institution, namely the Silampari Islamic School Kindergarten in Lubuk Linggau. The focus on the practice of appreciation, a supportive school culture, and the integration of religious values in providing positive feedback provides a new perspective that has not been widely explored in previous research. Furthermore, this study enriches the literature by uncovering the subjective experiences of children and teachers through qualitative data that demonstrate the emotional connection, psychological safety, and self-confidence of children as a direct impact of the implementation of positive feedback in the classroom. Overall, this study confirms that positive feedback plays a crucial role in building learning motivation and mental health in early childhood. Teachers, as significant figures, are able to provide emotional reinforcement that fosters self-confidence, intrinsic motivation, emotional regulation, and prosocial behavior in children. The culture of appreciation established by schools contributes significantly to creating a safe and supportive learning climate, ultimately strengthening children's overall academic and psychological development. This study confirms that the practice of positive feedback is not only a pedagogical strategy but also an emotional intervention that has a broad impact on the well-being of early childhood.

CONCLUSION

The conclusion of this study confirms that positive feedback from teachers plays a strategic role in increasing learning motivation and maintaining the mental health of early childhood children, particularly in the Silampari Islamic School Kindergarten environment in Lubuk Linggau. Warm, supportive, and respectful teacher-child interactions create a classroom atmosphere conducive to the growth of self-confidence, the courage to try, and a willingness to continue learning. This approach aligns with the principles of early childhood education, which place emotional aspects as the foundation of development. Implementing a culture of appreciation in schools also fosters a safe and stress-free learning environment, enabling children to feel valued as individuals and avoid excessive anxiety. Positive feedback not only serves to reinforce learning behavior but also serves as a medium for developing children's psychological well-being and social character. Therefore, this study confirms that positive reinforcement practices need to be an integral part of learning strategies, particularly in elementary education, as they can have long-term impacts on the development of children's motivation, emotional regulation, and learning readiness. These findings

provide an important contribution to teachers, schools, and early childhood education practitioners in developing a more humanistic, responsive, and child-centered learning approach.

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