

Positive and Negative Reinforcement as Predictors of the Behavior of Students in Learning English

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Abstract: Poor student behavior in learning English remains a persistent problem. The significance of positive and negative reinforcement in the behavior in learning English was determined. Using predictive research design and applying simple random sampling in selecting 134 Junior High School students as respondents, results showed that the model to predict the criterion is moderately significant (46.8%). This claim partially supports Reinforcement Theory which states that reinforcement shapes and strengthens student behavior. Future research may examine other reinforcement variables explaining the remaining variance. Qualitative research may be explored to attain this. The use of reinforcement strategies to foster positive behavior in learning English may be initiated.

Keywords: Positive Reinforcement, Negative Reinforcement, Predictors of Behavior, Learning English.

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I. INTRODUCTION

➤ *The Problem and its Scope*

Poor student behavior during English instruction remains a persistent problem. Across the globe, poor behavior in learning English has become a growing concern in many educational settings. In numerous English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms, learners demonstrate poor behavior. Such behavior is often reflected through inattentiveness, reluctance to communicate, and passive involvement in classroom tasks. Studies emphasize that students' behavior is a critical component of language learning in English class (Ye, 2024; Hu & Wang, 2023).

Moreover, poor English learning behavior has been observed in several countries where English is taught as a foreign language. In China, researchers reported that many learners exhibit poor behavior during English instruction (Wang et al., 2024). In Indonesia, students displayed limited attention and involvement during English lessons, indicating challenges in maintaining consistent behavioral engagement in EFL classrooms (Barus et al., 2022). In addition, research in Saudi Arabia found that poor behavior in English class is the most common problem teachers encounter (Alshammari, 2024).

In the Philippine context, poor behavior in learning English has also become a concern in many classrooms. It is noted that students demonstrate low engagement and limited active participation in English class, exhibiting passive behavior, minimal interaction, or a lack of focus (Cambay & Paglinawan, 2024; De Guzman, 2025).

When students exhibit poor behavior, their opportunities to practice communication skills, engage with learning materials, and participate in language activities are limited. As a result, the development of language competence and academic achievement may be affected (Alshammari, 2024; Ye, 2024). This negative effect of poor behavior prompted this study.

➤ *Significance of the Study*

This study is significant as it aligns with United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 4 (Quality Education), which promotes inclusive and effective learning by highlighting the role of reinforcement strategies in shaping students' behavior in English learning. In the Philippine context, the findings may guide school leaders and teachers in designing programs and initiatives that encourage positive behavior, cooperation, and a supportive learning environment. Lastly, this study supports the vision, mission, and goals of Holy Cross of Davao College by

promoting discipline and strengthening collaboration among teachers and parents.

➤ *Statement of the Problem*

This study aimed to determine the significance of positive and negative reinforcement as predictors of students' behavior in English learning. Specifically, it pursued the following objectives:

- To describe the levels of positive reinforcement in terms of tangible rewards, praise, and caring behavior; negative reinforcement in terms of verbal warning, scolding/threatening, and penalty/punishment; and the behavior of students in learning English in terms of behavioral attitude, cognitive attitude, emotional attitude, and inside the class.
- To determine the significance of the correlation between positive reinforcement and negative reinforcement, and the behavior of students in learning English
- To determine the significance of the predictive model for the behavior of students in learning English by examining the strength of positive and negative reinforcement as predictive variables

➤ *Hypotheses*

The study tested the null hypothesis at a 0.05 significance level:

- Ho1: Positive and negative reinforcement, and the behavior in learning English, are not correlated.
- Ho2: The positive and negative reinforcement do not significantly predict behavior in learning English.

➤ *Theoretical and Conceptual Framework*

This study was grounded in Skinner's (1953) Reinforcement theory of Motivation. This theory, a subset of operant conditioning, focuses on how the environment influences behavior. The four primary concepts in reinforcement theory are positive reinforcement, negative reinforcement, extinction, punishment, shaping, and maintaining behavior.

This study was delimited to the concepts of negative and positive reinforcement highlighted in the theory. The other concepts covered in the theory are excluded from this study. Positive reinforcement is indicated by tangible rewards, praise, and caring behavior, while negative reinforcement is indicated by verbal warnings, scolding/threatening, and punishment.

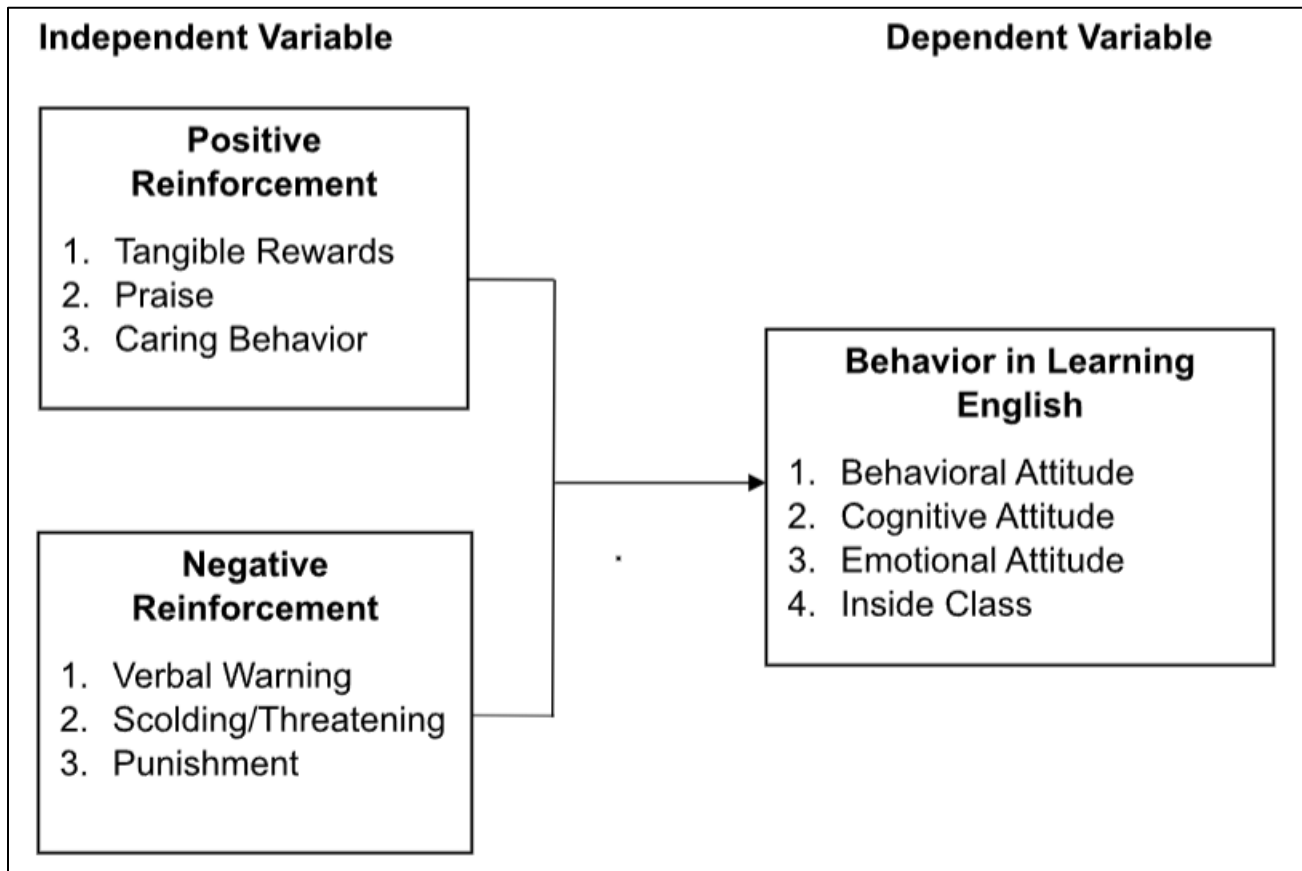


Fig 1. The Conceptual Framework of the Study

II. METHODOLOGY

In this section, the research design, study locale, sample, and sampling techniques, data-gathering techniques, data analysis techniques, and ethical considerations are presented.

➤ Research Design

This study employed a predictive research design to determine whether certain variables predict the criterion variable, using statistical techniques, including multiple linear regression. This research approach was utilized when variables cannot be experimentally altered and when researchers sought to predict results utilizing pre-existing data. It helps identify key predictors and facilitates informed decision-making (Relich, 2023).

➤ Locale of the Study

This research was conducted in a private school in Davao City. In the educational field, Davao City is recognized for its progressive approach to learning and skills development. Many schools incorporate modern teaching strategies, technology integration, and community-based learning programs that significantly impact student behavior, particularly in English learning. The city also benefits from collaborations between educational institutions, government agencies, and private organizations, fostering research, scholarship, and professional development opportunities for teachers and students alike. As a result, Davao City continues to serve as a hub of educational excellence in the southern Philippines, contributing significantly to enhancing student learning and school engagement.

➤ Sample and Sampling Technique

The respondents in this study were Junior High School students enrolled in a private institution. The sample size of this study was 134, composed of grade 7 to grade 10 students from the total population of 200. Simple random sampling is often used in quantitative studies because it provides all target respondents with an equal opportunity. Using the Raosoft sample size online calculator with a margin of error of 0.05, the sample size was determined. According to Noor et al. (2022) and Thomas (2023), the simple random sampling technique randomly selected respondents from a subset of the population, providing them with an equal opportunity to participate in the study.

➤ Data Gathering Technique

In this study, a survey data-gathering technique was used. Such a technique systematically collected data from a selected sample using structured instruments, such as questionnaires, to measure specific variables. It was applied to describe population characteristics, behaviors, attitudes, or opinions, particularly for large samples. Its advantages included efficient data collection, standardized and reliable questions, flexible administration, and production of quantitative data suitable for statistical analysis (McCombes, 2025).

The study utilized three adapted questionnaires to gather data. The first was from Senados (2023), which measured positive reinforcement in the classroom and examined strategies such as verbal praise, rewards, and encouragement, with 15 items and high reliability (Cronbach's alpha = 0.884). The second was by Ramadhani et al. (2023), which assessed negative reinforcement and explored corrective actions, verbal warnings, and other teacher-imposed measures, comprising 15 items and demonstrating high reliability (Cronbach's alpha = 0.899). The third was by Pongpanya (2019), which evaluated students' behavior in English learning, covering classroom participation, attentiveness, cooperation, and engagement, with 40 items and high reliability (Cronbach's alpha = 0.909).

➤ Data Analysis Technique

In this research, descriptive, correlation, and multiple regression analyses were used to examine and interpret the data. Descriptive analysis was used to summarize the main features of a dataset, providing an overview of trends and patterns (Trochim & Donnelly, 2021). Correlation analysis was used to examine the strength and direction of relationships among two or more variables, helping identify associations without implying causation (Cohen et al., 2013). Lastly, multiple regression analysis allowed the researchers to predict the value of a dependent variable based on the influence of two or more independent variables, determining their relative contributions while controlling for other factors (Field, 2018).

For the descriptive analysis, the subsequent page presented a matrix detailing the scale, descriptive levels, and the corresponding interpretations assigned to each variable included in this study. This was used to describe the levels of positive and negative reinforcement and students' behavior during English learning.

Table 1 Negative Reinforcement and Students' Behavior During English Learning

Range	Descriptive Level	Positive Reinforcement	Negative Reinforcement	Behavior in Learning English
3.26 – 4.00	Very High	Very Strong	Very Strong	Very Good
2.51 – 3.25	High	Strong	Strong	Good
1.76 – 2.50	Low	Weak	Weak	Poor
1.00 – 1.75	Very Low	Very Weak	Very Weak	Very Poor

To measure and interpret the standard deviation, the following standard schemes were followed.

Table 2 Measure and Interpret the Standard Deviation

Standard Deviation	Level of Variability	Interpretation
1.50 and above	High	Widely spread, varied perceptions
1.00 – 1.49	Moderate	Moderate differences
0.50 – 0.99	Low	Relatively consistent with minimal differences
0.00 – 0.49	Very Low	Highly consistent with a tight clustering around the mean.

Moreover, the correlation analysis utilized the Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Coefficient to assess the link between positive and negative reinforcement and behavior in learning English. To interpret the r-value, this study used the scale proposed by Guilford (1956).

Computed r	Descriptive Interpretation
+/- 1.00	Perfect correlation
Between +/- 0.75 – +/- 0.99	High correlation
Between +/- 0.51 – +/- 0.74	Moderately high correlation
Between +/- 0.31 – +/- 0.50	Moderately low correlation
Between +/- 0.01 – +/- 0.30	Low correlation
0.00	No correlation

Lastly, multiple linear regression was used to test the significance of positive and negative reinforcement on students' poor behavior during English learning. To interpret the Beta (β) coefficient strength, the Cohen (1988) and Hair et al. (2019) scales were used.

β Value Range	Strength of Prediction
$\pm 0.00 - \pm 0.09$	Very Weak
$\pm 0.10 - \pm 0.29$	Weak
$\pm 0.30 - \pm 0.49$	Moderate
$\pm 0.50 - \pm 0.69$	Strong
± 0.70 and above	Very Strong

➤ **Ethical Considerations**

The researcher first ensured ethical compliance by securing an approval certificate from the Society for Moral Integrity and Legal Ethics (SMILE) and an endorsement letter from the Graduate School Dean to obtain institutional permission. Subsequently, ethical considerations were further observed by obtaining parental consent from respondents aged 17 or below, informed consent from those aged 18 or above, and assent from minors. Moreover, respondents were oriented about their rights, risks, and benefits, and voluntarily signed consent forms before answering the printed survey questionnaires. Afterward, the questionnaires were administered with clear instructions, and completed surveys were checked while unused copies were immediately shredded to maintain confidentiality. Finally, the collected data were organized and tabulated in

Microsoft Excel and analyzed using appropriate statistical tools for interpretation.

III. RESULTS

The findings of the study are presented in this section; specifically, the descriptive, correlation, and regression analysis, and the summary.

➤ **Descriptive Results**

Table 3 presents the descriptive analysis. It included the variables in this study: positive reinforcement, negative reinforcement, and behavior in learning English, and their corresponding interpretation. It also contained the sample size, standard deviation, mean, and corresponding descriptive level.

Table 3. Descriptive Table

Variables	Sample Size	SD	Mean	Descriptive Level
Positive Reinforcement	134	0.38	3.36	Very high
Tangible Reward		0.42	3.39	Very High
Praise		0.45	3.40	Very High
Caring Behavior		0.48	3.30	Very High

Negative Reinforcement	134	0.39	3.29	Very High
<i>Verbal Warning</i>		0.42	3.47	<i>Very High</i>
<i>Scolding/Threatening</i>		0.49	3.29	<i>Very High</i>
<i>Penalty/Punishment</i>		0.59	3.09	<i>High</i>
Behavior in Learning English	134	0.35	3.32	Very High
<i>Behavior Attitude</i>		0.41	3.27	<i>Very High</i>
<i>Cognitive Attitude</i>		0.42	3.38	<i>Very High</i>
<i>Emotional Attitude</i>		0.38	3.29	<i>Very High</i>
<i>Inside Class</i>		0.44	3.36	<i>Very High</i>

Specifically, Table 3 shows that the positive reinforcement variable obtained a mean of 3.36, which was described as very high. It indicated that the positive reinforcement provided to the students is very strong. All indicators were at a very high level. The standard deviation of 0.38, described as very low, indicates that students' responses were highly consistent, with tight clustering around the mean. Moreover, the negative reinforcement variable obtained a mean of 3.29, which was described as very high. It indicated that the negative reinforcement provided to the students is very strong. Two of its indicators were rated very high, and one was rated high. The standard deviation of 0.39 indicates that students' responses are highly consistent, with tight clustering around the mean. Lastly, students' behavior during English learning had a mean of 3.32, which was described as very high, indicating that their behavior

during English learning was very good. All indicators were noted as very high. The standard deviation of 0.35 indicates that students' responses were highly consistent, with tight clustering around the mean.

The results showed that both positive and negative reinforcement indicated strong reinforcement strategies. Similarly, it was determined that students' English learning behavior was very good.

➤ *Correlation Results*

Table 4 presents the correlation analysis. It also presented the correlational results for the predictive and criterion variables. It included the r-value, p-value, decision on the null hypothesis, and interpretation.

Table 4. Correlation Table

Variables	Behavior in Learning English			
	R	p-value	Decision on H ₀	Interpretation
Positive Reinforcement	.560	.000	Reject	Moderately High Positive, Significant Correlation
Negative Reinforcement	.663	.000	Reject	Moderately High Positive, Significant Correlation

Level of Significance: 0.05
Decision Rule: Reject H₀ if p < 0.05

Table 4 specifically shows that the correlation between positive reinforcement and students' behavior in learning English had a p-value of 0.000, which was less than the 0.05 level of significance; hence, the null hypothesis was rejected. It indicated that the correlation between positive reinforcement and English learning behavior was significant. The r-value of .560 denoted that the correlation between variables was moderately high. Furthermore, the correlation between negative reinforcement and students' behavior in English learning had a p-value of 0.000, which was less than the 0.05 level of significance; hence, the null hypothesis was rejected. It indicated that the link between negative reinforcement and students' English learning behavior was significant. The r-value of .663 indicated a moderately high correlation between these variables.

The results showed that both positive and negative reinforcement were significantly associated with students' behavior during English learning. However, negative reinforcement showed a stronger association with students' learning behavior than positive reinforcement.

➤ *Regression Results*

Table 5 presents the regression analysis. It contained the predictive and criterion variables. It also contained the unstandardized beta coefficient, standard error, standardized beta coefficient, t-value, p-value, decision on hypothesis, and interpretation.

Table 5. Regression Table

Predictors	Behavior in Learning English						
	Unstandardized Coefficient			Standardized Coefficient			
	B	Std. Error	Beta	T	Sig	Decision on H ₀	Interpretation
(Constant)	1.073	.217	-	4.935	.000	-	-
Positive Reinforcement	.210	.079	.223	2.650	.009	Reject	Strong Significant Influence
Negative Reinforcement	.471	.076	.518	6.164	.000	Reject	Strong Significant Influence

Model Summary:

$$R=0.648 \mid R^2 = 0.468 \mid F(2,131) = 57.663 \mid p=0.000$$

Level of Significance: 0.05

Decision Rule: Reject H₀ if p < 0.05

$$\text{Predictive Model: BLE} = .210 \text{ PR} + .471 \text{ NR} + 1.073.$$

Specifically, Table 5 reveals that the predictive model for students' English learning behavior, using positive and negative reinforcement as predictors, is $\text{BLE} = .210 \text{ PR} + .471 \text{ NR} + 1.073$. The p-value obtained was 0.000, which was less than the 0.05 level of significance, indicating that the predictive model is significant. With an r-value of 0.468, the model's strength was indicated as moderate. This finding implies that for every unit change in positive reinforcement, holding other variables constant, there is a corresponding .210 increase in behavior in learning English. Likewise, for every unit change in negative reinforcement, holding other variables constant, there was a corresponding .471-unit increase in positive behavior in learning English.

The model showed that both positive and negative reinforcement significantly predicted students' behavior during English learning. The model's overall strength was moderate.

IV. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

- Positive and negative reinforcement, as well as the behavior during English learning, were both correlated.
- The positive and negative reinforcement significantly predicted behavior in learning English.

V. DISCUSSIONS

This section contains the discussion of the results, the conclusion, and the recommendations.

➤ *Positive and Negative Reinforcement Significantly Correlate with Behavior in Learning English*

The findings of this study indicate that positive and negative reinforcement significantly correlate with students' behavior in learning English. This current finding supports the study of Wang et al. (2021), which highlighted that both types of reinforcement affect learner engagement, promoting greater persistence in commitment. In addition, this present finding aligns with the assertion of Sahabuddin et al. (2023) that using

operant conditioning to reward students during speaking sessions enhances their confidence, motivation, and success. Likewise, positive and negative reinforcement, as well as the correlation between English learning behavior and reinforcement practices, support the idea of Zahid and Cheema (2023), who demonstrated that reinforcement practices in university settings affect students' motivation and learning behaviors. Finally, this finding aligns with Natassi's (2023) claim that reinforcement has beneficial effects in basic and secondary education.

In contrast, the idea that reinforcement correlates with learning behavior in English learning opposes Fitriati et al. (2020), who found that inconsistent reinforcement strategies decreased learning behavior, suggesting that reinforcement alone may be inadequate. Similarly, the finding of positive and negative reinforcement linked to behavior in learning English contradicts Manzoor's (2023) assertion that negative reinforcement sometimes reduced students' self-esteem and enthusiasm, consequently impeding English language acquisition. While Fitriati's study involved two teachers and Manzoor's study had 120 respondents, the present study had 134 respondents, providing more reliable and updated findings.

➤ *Behavior in Learning English Predicted by Positive and Negative Reinforcement*

The finding of positive and negative reinforcement predicts students' behavior in English learning. This current finding affirms the study of Torres and Beltrán (2023), which emphasized that reinforcement-based routines enhanced participation and reduced off-task behavior among Hispanic multilingual learners. Likewise, the finding of this study that English learning behavior is predicted by reinforcement supports Kim and Park's (2022) idea that frequent praise and corrective feedback enhance task engagement and self-regulation among Korean EFL learners.

On the other hand, the reinforcement that predicts English learning behavior opposes the assertion of Liu et al. (2020). In

his previous research, Liu found that reinforcement had a limited effect when intrinsic motivation guided students' behavior. Similarly, this present finding contradicts the study of Sari and Suryadi (2023), which examined 80 secondary school students and reported that reinforcement did not significantly shape behavioral engagement, emphasizing peer interaction and learning interest instead.

VI. CONCLUSION

Based on the findings, it is concluded that positive and negative reinforcement significantly predicted students' English learning behavior to a moderate degree (46.8%). Hence, this result partially affirms the Reinforcement Theory of Motivation, which posits that the environment influences behavior.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the conclusion, future research may be pursued using other variables, such as the concepts of reinforcement strategies highlighted in the theory but excluded in this study. The aim of applying other variables is to trace the remaining 53.2% of the variance in English learning behavior that was not explained by the predictors. Qualitative research may help identify the variables needed. Additionally, teachers may, with caution, intensify the use of reinforcement strategies to foster positive behavior in English language learning.

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