

ORIGINAL ARTICLE



MJSSH
Muallim Journal of
Social Science and Humanities

TEACHERS' POSITIVE FEEDBACK PRACTICES ON STRUGGLING READERS IN JUNIOR SECONDARY

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.33306/mjssh/267>

Abstract

Feedback is a cornerstone in education, profoundly influencing students' educational journeys and achievements. This study aims to investigate the impact of positive feedback practices among teachers on struggling readers in Sri Lanka's junior secondary education context. The objectives are to assess the specific positive feedback strategies employed by teachers, to evaluate the perceived effectiveness of these practices, to investigate the challenges and obstacles teachers encounter during their implementation, and to identify effective strategies, and determine the factors that predict positive feedback practices. The research employed a survey-based design, collecting data from 199 junior secondary teachers, randomly selected from various teaching experiences, subjects, and school locations. A purpose-built survey is administered online via Google forms, and data were analyzed using SPSS, involving descriptive statistics, thematic content analysis, and linear regression. The study revealed diverse participant representation, reflecting the multifaceted junior secondary education landscape. Positive feedback practices were prevalent, emphasizing effective feedback, effort encouragement, and a supportive environment. Perceived effectiveness was moderate, suggesting room for improvement. Teachers faced challenges including resource shortages, absenteeism, and student motivation, but offered solutions such as reading programs and parental involvement. Regression analysis identified a significant positive relationship between positive feedback practices and their overall effectiveness, highlighting their crucial role in supporting struggling readers.

Keywords: Positive feedback, Struggling readers, Junior secondary, Sri Lanka

Received 15th October 2023, revised 5th November 2023, accepted 4th December 2023

Introduction

Feedback serves as an indispensable cornerstone within the realm of education, wielding profound influence over students' educational journeys and eventual achievements. While the expectation of receiving positive feedback is inherent to human nature, the consistent anticipation of affirming feedback remains less common (Hepper et al., 2011)¹. Junior secondary education marks a pivotal juncture in the academic odyssey, especially for students grappling with reading challenges. During this critical phase, teachers assume an indispensable role in bolstering these learners. Within the expansive domain of teaching and learning, teacher feedback assumes an unquestionable significance. This study embarks on a deep exploration into the profound relevance of teachers' practices of offering positive feedback, particularly in addressing the distinctive needs of struggling readers within the junior secondary education landscape.

In recognition of the pivotal role that positive feedback plays in the realm of education, this research undertakes a nuanced examination of feedback methodologies. It adopts a focused and systematic approach to meticulously scrutinize the specific impact of positive feedback on struggling readers within the context of junior secondary education in Sri Lanka. Through this comprehensive investigation, our overarching objective is to illuminate the far-reaching implications of positive feedback, deeply rooted in the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) theory, on the educational progress of struggling readers within this distinctive cultural and pedagogical milieu.

Literature Review

Feedback

Feedback is an indispensable compass that guides students on their educational journeys, offering invaluable insights and direction for enhanced learning. It encompasses information from diverse sources, including teachers, peers, textbooks, parents, self-reflection, and practical experiences, providing insights into various facets of a student's performance or comprehension. This exchange typically occurs after instructional activities aimed at imparting knowledge, skills, or specific attitudes (Hattie & Timperley, 2007)².

At its core, feedback represents personalized information, thoughtfully crafted and delivered by feedback providers, empowering recipients to unlock their full potential (Jug et al., 2019)³. The term "feedback" is intrinsically tied to the concept of learning, signifying the adaptation of behavior based on experiences. Within the realm of education, feedback assumes a pivotal role as an external evaluation of individuals' choices, guiding them toward the most suitable path forward (Boero & Novarese, 2012)⁴. Teacher feedback, in particular, serves as information

provided by educators to learners with the intent of bridging the gaps between a student's current understanding and the targeted learning objectives (Fawzi & Mohamad, 2020)⁵.

Furthermore, research underscores that feedback exerts a more pronounced impact on cognitive and motor skill outcomes compared to motivational and behavioral outcomes (Wisniewski et al., 2020)⁶. Students' success in school is substantially influenced by the extent to which they perceive and receive academic and social support from both their teachers and peers, coupled with their active engagement in classroom learning activities (Gamlem & Munthe, 2013)⁷. Interestingly, students' recognition of the role of feedback in enhancing their learning underscores their desire to take an active role in their educational journeys, emphasizing the critical role of student involvement in shaping teaching and learning experiences (Ion et al., 2018)⁸.

Positive Feedback

In the realm of feedback, it is commonly categorized into two fundamental types: positive feedback and negative feedback. These categories encompass a spectrum of qualitative variations, but the two most widely accepted definitions are centered on positivity or negativity. Positive feedback, as delineated by Sprouls et al. (2015)⁹, encompasses verbal, nonverbal, or tangible expressions, including praise, behavior points, awards, and any positive recognition of desired or appropriate behaviors. It's important to note that the term "positive" here pertains to the idea of accelerating or amplifying a process, rather than reflecting the desirability of the ultimate outcome.

Positive feedback, as elucidated by Malinowski (2020)¹⁰, introduces a fascinating dynamic. It tends to induce system instability, resulting in an amplification of its effects and a divergence from the equilibrium state. A hallmark feature of positive feedback loops is their self-reinforcing nature. Even a minor initial change can swiftly grow in magnitude, causing the reaction's outcomes to be amplified at an accelerated pace.

In the educational context, positive feedback manifests as a form of interaction characterized by constructive, supportive, and encouraging comments provided by teachers to their students. It holds the distinction of being a potent tool for motivating, engaging, and enriching the learning experiences of students, as highlighted by the research of Hattie and Timperley (2007)².

Numerous studies have delved into the merits and limitations of feedback, yet only a limited subset has focused on the specific realms of positive and negative feedback. It's worth emphasizing that offering positive feedback is strongly encouraged, as it aligns with students' perceptions, particularly in English, where feedback is often viewed as primarily corrective in nature (Van Der Kleij & Adie, 2020)¹¹. Positive task-oriented feedback emerges as a potent approach, especially for students with a challenge appraisal style. Research by Shin et al. (2020)¹² underscores that in scenarios where positive task-oriented feedback is provided, the challenge appraisal style exhibits the highest acceptance of feedback and motivation for embracing challenges. This positive approach has proven to be instrumental in enhancing student performance.

Incorporating positive feedback alongside performance-gap feedback has yielded notable benefits. Faulconer et al. (2021)¹³ found a significant correlation between this approach and improved academic performance. Students who received both performance-gap and positive

feedback achieved on average an entire letter grade higher than those who received only performance-gap feedback. High-quality positive feedback, as outlined by Plakht et al. (2013)¹⁴, is closely associated with higher grades, greater contributions to clinical practice, and a propensity for students to slightly overestimate their abilities. In a study by Lerkkanen (2018)¹⁵, the success of children in learning the fundamentals of reading was seen as a source of positive feedback, reinforcing their interest and engagement in reading within various learning environments.

The link between positive feedback and happiness among children is a notable finding. Hepper et al. (2011)¹ observed that people tend to have positive expectations about feedback, which correlate with their desire for self-enhancement. This self-enhancement motivation often aligns with the quest for a brighter future and better performance. Happiness itself holds significant importance in the educational context, as it motivates individuals, heightens awareness, fosters creativity, and bolsters social relationships. Talebzadeh & Samkan (2011)¹⁶ emphasize its role in shaping positive attitudes among students and potentially contributing to higher academic achievements and active citizenship. The utilization of one's strengths in schoolwork has been found to be directly and indirectly linked to overall happiness. Vuorinen et al. (2020)¹⁷ emphasize the importance of leveraging strengths, which not only enhances school engagement but also contributes to a sense of happiness within the school environment. Moreover, an intriguing connection exists between feedback and self-esteem, with higher self-esteem correlating with increased systolic blood pressure responses in reaction to both positive and negative feedback (Brown & Creaven, 2016)¹⁸. This suggests a complex interplay between self-perception and the physiological responses to feedback.

On the flip side, negative feedback, while still influential in motivating learning, poses challenges associated with mental health. Brown & Creaven (2016)¹⁸ note that negative feedback can lead to sensitized blood pressure responses and may have adverse psychological effects. Additionally, self-esteem plays a role in how individuals react to feedback, interacting with the type of feedback received. Providing negative feedback is indeed a complex endeavor, as acknowledged by Plakht et al. (2013)¹⁴. It requires careful consideration and tact. It's important to recognize that some teacher feedback may include negative remarks that can detrimentally affect learners' self-esteem. Fawzi & Mohamad (2020)⁵ highlight the shortcomings of such feedback, suggesting that it may not always lead to enhanced learner development.

Positive feedback practices for supporting struggling readers

The significance of teacher feedback in supporting struggling readers, a group of students facing unique challenges in their reading journey, is underscored by research in junior secondary education. Effective feedback strategies hold the potential to empower struggling readers by aiding in the development of critical reading skills, enhancing comprehension, and improving reading fluency (Mellard & Johnson, 2008)¹⁹. The impact of positive feedback on struggling readers cannot be overstated. Positive feedback emerges as a potent tool for bolstering the self-esteem and self-efficacy of struggling readers, consequently fostering heightened motivation and engagement when they encounter reading tasks (Schunk & Usher, 2016)²⁰.

Several studies have uncovered a wealth of effective positive feedback practices aimed at supporting struggling readers on their educational journey. These practices play a pivotal role in providing the essential scaffolding required for these students to overcome reading challenges and

thrive in the learning environment. Ávila et al. (2012)²¹ shed light on the motivational dimension of feedback in the context of motor skill development among children. Their study found that the group receiving positive feedback not only displayed greater accuracy in their motor skills but also reported higher levels of perceived competence compared to the control group. This underscores the motivating influence of feedback on children's learning processes, particularly in the domain of developing motor skills.

One pivotal facet of effective positive feedback revolves around offering specific and targeted feedback concerning the reading progress of struggling readers. By identifying areas for improvement and providing precise guidance, educators empower these students to make substantial strides in their reading abilities. Additionally, effective positive feedback practices underscore the importance of acknowledging effort and progress. Recognizing the diligence and advancement of struggling readers not only bolsters their self-esteem but also reinforces the belief that growth is attainable through dedication (Hidi & Renninger, 2006)²². Providing students with individualized feedback that is skill-based and provides strategies to target chosen areas gives them a far greater understanding of their strengths and weaknesses and how to best target these areas over simply providing an achievement level (Van Der Boom & Jang, 2018)²³.

Formative feedback possesses substantial power when executed effectively. It takes a dual approach, addressing both cognitive and motivational aspects simultaneously. Good feedback provides students with the information needed to gauge their learning progress and determine their next steps—the cognitive factor (Brookhart, 2008)²⁴. Constructive feedback practices assume particular importance when working with struggling readers. This approach revolves around highlighting the strengths of the reader while also addressing areas in need of improvement. By adopting a constructive feedback approach, educators assist struggling readers in recognizing their potential for growth and development in reading skills (Hattie & Timperley, 2007)². Innovative feedback methods have proven effective in enhancing student motivation and performance, as evidenced by the work of Lee et al. (2015)²⁵. Effective feedback transcends mere content; it hinges on the interpersonal relationship between the learner and educator. Constructive feedback should be descriptive, grounded in direct observations, and promote a dialogic process that aids learners in comprehending information and applying it to enhance their work or learning strategies (Jug et al., 2019)³.

Creating a supportive classroom environment stands as another key element in effective feedback practices. Struggling readers flourish when they feel valued, encouraged, and included. Cultivating an atmosphere of support and affirmation can have a significant impact on their motivation and overall learning experience (Hidi & Renninger, 2006)²². Furthermore, feedback should be considered an integral part of the curriculum, seamlessly integrated into the learning process to facilitate continuous improvement and growth (Carless, 2017)²⁶. Timely and supportive feedback benefits students, enabling them to assess the quality of their own work (Jiao, 2015)²⁷.

Students equipped with well-developed feedback literacy possess a deep understanding of their active role within the feedback processes. They continually refine their ability to make informed judgments about their academic work and adeptly navigate the emotional dimensions of feedback. Student feedback literacy encompasses the knowledge, skills, and attitudes needed to make sense of information and apply it to enhance work or learning strategies (Carless & Boud, 2018)²⁸. Interestingly, students appear to perceive interactions more in terms of 'right' or 'wrong'

answers than their teachers (Van Der Kleij & Adie, 2020)¹¹. Although most students still tend to favor teacher-led feedback practices, they generally view and describe this feedback as positive and constructive, suggesting that negative emotional reactions to evaluative comments and grades may be lessened if students perceive such feedback as beneficial for improvement (Harris et al., 2014)²⁹.

The evaluation of feedback should be based on what students do with the information about their work and how this leads to demonstrable improvements in their work and learning strategies (Dawson et al., 2018)³⁰. Perceived teacher feedback is more likely to enhance students' engagement in learning. In contrast, feedback lacking these three factors may either decrease or have no impact on students' learning engagement (Wang & Zhang, 2020)³¹.

In summary, effective positive feedback practices for struggling readers encompass specific feedback on progress, recognition of effort, constructive feedback, and the creation of a supportive learning environment. By implementing these practices, educators can empower struggling readers to overcome challenges, develop their reading skills, and foster a growth mindset.

Theoretical Framework

Developing a strong theoretical foundation is essential when embarking on a research study, as it forms the bedrock upon which the study's principles and methodologies are built. In the context of examining the influence of teachers' positive feedback practices on struggling readers in junior secondary education, Lev Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) theory emerges as a cornerstone that offers invaluable insights and guidance. The ZPD, pioneered by Lev Vygotsky, is fundamentally rooted in social and participatory learning. It delineates the chasm between an individual's independent capabilities and what they can achieve with the guidance of a more knowledgeable counterpart (Ness, 2022)³². Within this zone resides the skills a learner is poised to master, representing untapped developmental potential (Sage, 2022)³³. At its core, the ZPD defines the space where optimal learning takes place under the tutelage or support of someone more proficient, often a teacher or in collaboration with peers (Zaretsky, 2021)³⁴. Central to this concept is the idea of scaffolding, wherein a teacher offers structured assistance to nurture a student's growth and development.

When harnessed in alignment with the ZPD, positive feedback functions as a potent motivator by recognizing learners' advancements within their proximal development zone. It reiterates the belief that, with appropriate support, they have the capacity to achieve more, thus nurturing intrinsic motivation. Simultaneously, positive feedback fortifies learners' self-esteem by acknowledging their accomplishments and efforts within the ZPD, cultivating essential feelings of competence and self-worth for effective learning. This type of feedback further complements guided learning within the ZPD by instilling the confidence that learners are on the right path, fostering a growth mindset that encourages students to undertake more challenging tasks.

The application of positive feedback within educational and developmental contexts cultivates a supportive and nurturing environment that aligns harmoniously with the ZPD theory. Learners are assured that they exist within a safe space conducive to exploration and learning, thereby mitigating anxieties and the fear of failure. Moreover, the acknowledgment and celebration

of achievements by educators and mentors serve as catalysts for learners to progressively advance within their ZPD, igniting a sense of accomplishment and driving them to aspire to higher levels of development. Additionally, the use of positive feedback strengthens the relationships between learners and their peers or educators, fostering effective communication, trust, and collaboration. These elements are vital prerequisites for effective guided learning within the ZPD framework.

In this study's context, positive feedback practices can be likened to a scaffolding mechanism within the ZPD. Teachers, by providing targeted and constructive feedback to struggling readers, offer the essential support and guidance required to bridge the gap between their current reading abilities and their latent potential. This alignment with the ZPD principles underscores the pivotal role teachers play in assisting struggling readers in advancing their reading skills. The ZPD framework elucidates how feedback practices act as scaffolding mechanisms to bolster struggling readers in the junior secondary education milieu.

By intertwining these theoretical perspectives into the study, a robust theoretical framework emerges. This framework not only clarifies the impact of teachers' positive feedback practices on struggling readers in junior secondary education but also lays the groundwork for the research design and analysis. It provides a comprehensive lens through which to investigate the role of feedback in terms of motivation, self-efficacy, and learning outcomes within this specific educational context.

Research Problem

Research indicates that feedback can significantly influence students' learning and achievements. However, the impact of feedback can vary, with the potential for both positive and negative effects. When feedback is predominantly negative, it has been demonstrated to discourage students' efforts and hinder their academic achievements (Hattie & Timperley, 2007)². Students' motivation to learn often relies on positive feedback, which can be seen as a modern approach to reinforcing desirable behaviors. Recent studies have highlighted that happy students tend to learn more effectively than their peers, emphasizing the pivotal role of positive feedback in fostering a conducive learning environment (Piccinin, 2003)³⁵.

In alignment with these findings, Basheer et al. (2016)³⁶ assert that feedback should never discourage students at any cost. While it is essential to address areas where students may be less successful in their studies, the delivery of "negative feedback" should be handled cautiously by educators. Thus, there is a compelling case for presenting feedback in a positive manner, as it can contribute to an improved learning environment, motivating students to excel academically.

In summary, the literature review underscores the critical role of teachers' positive feedback practices in supporting struggling readers during junior secondary education. Effective feedback strategies not only enhance reading skills but also nurture the self-confidence and motivation of struggling readers. However, despite the theoretical foundations and promising findings in the literature, further research is needed to explore the specific positive feedback practices that are most effective in the context of junior secondary education, especially within the unique educational landscape of struggling readers. As existing studies advocate for the use of positive feedback in classroom teaching, it is imperative to investigate the role of positive feedback in

enhancing students' learning and achievements within the Sri Lankan context. This study aims to address this gap by examining teachers' feedback practices and their impact on struggling readers in junior secondary education.

Aim of the study

The aim of this research is to investigate the impact of teachers' positive feedback practices on struggling readers in the junior secondary education context in Sri Lanka. The research objectives are:

- To assess the specific positive feedback strategies employed by teachers,
- To evaluate the perceived effectiveness of these practices,
- To investigate the challenges and obstacles teachers encounter during their implementation, and
- To identify effective strategies, and determine the factors that predict positive feedback practices.

Methodology

This study employed a survey-based research design to gather quantitative data from junior secondary teachers (N=410) within the Puttalam Educational Zone, all of whom possessed experience in working with struggling readers. To ensure a diverse representation of teaching experience, subject areas, and school locations, teachers (N=199) were randomly selected for participation.

Researcher employed a purpose-built teacher survey featuring five distinct sections. The first section sought background details regarding participating teachers. Section two delved into positive feedback practices for students with reading difficulties. Section three was dedicated to evaluating teachers' overall perceptions of the effectiveness of positive feedback practices. The last section facilitated teachers in offering additional insights, discussing challenges encountered, and suggesting improvements for their feedback approaches.

Before the main survey administration, a pre-test of the survey instrument was conducted with 17 junior secondary teachers. This pre-test aimed to refine the survey questions for clarity, relevance, and reliability, with necessary adjustments made based on the feedback received. To establish the validity of the survey instruments, both content and construct validity were considered. Content validity ensured that the survey questions measured their intended concepts accurately. Construct validity confirmed that the survey effectively assessed the intended constructs. The reliability of the surveys was assessed using measures such as Cronbach's alpha to evaluate internal consistency.

The surveys were administered to teachers through online platforms, specifically Google forms. To ensure clarity and facilitate participation, the surveys were distributed via WhatsApp and email. Comprehensive instructions were provided to ensure participants understood the survey's purpose and how to complete it.

Demographic data from participating teachers, including teaching experience, grade level they teach, and other relevant characteristics, were collected. Quantitative data analysis was performed using statistical software, specifically SPSS. To assess the positive feedback practices, descriptive statistics is utilized. This includes calculating frequencies, percentages. The perceived effectiveness of positive feedback practices was assessed through statistical measures of central tendency and dispersion. Additionally, thematic analysis was applied to responses from open-ended questions about effective positive feedback practices. To explore the challenges and barriers faced by teachers in implementing positive feedback practices, thematic content analysis is conducted. And to identify best practices and strategies employed by teachers with positive impacts, qualitative content analysis is performed to gain in-depth insights into teachers' perceptions, challenges, and strategies related to positive feedback practices. Linear regression analysis is used to determine the factors predicting positive feedback practices based on Overall effectiveness of positive feedback practices in supporting students with reading difficulties.

Findings

The findings are structured in alignment with the study's objectives. An initial analysis is conducted to provide an overview of the participants' demographic characteristics. Specifically, data is collected regarding teachers' grade levels, subject areas, and years of teaching experience to address the study's objectives. Table 1 presents demographic characteristics of the participants.

Table 1

The demographic characteristics of the participants.

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	Grade 6	73	36.7
	Grade 7	41	20.6
	Grade 8	33	16.6
	Grade 9	52	26.1
	Total	199	100.0
Valid	Tamil	44	22.1
	Mathematics	27	13.6
	Science	28	14.1
	Social sciences and religion	48	24.1
	Other subjects	52	26.1
	Total	199	100.0
Valid	5 years	68	34.2
	6- 10 years	61	30.7
	11-15 years	25	12.6
	16+ years	45	22.6
	Total	199	100.0

Table 1 provides an overview of the study participants' demographic characteristics. Regarding the grade levels they teach, the majority, 36.7%, are involved in Grade 6 education,

comprising 73 individuals. Grade 7 follows with 20.6% of the participants, equating to 41 educators. Grade 8 is taught by 16.6% of the sample, with 33 individuals. Grade 9 has 52 participants, making up 26.1% of the total. Shifting the focus to the subject areas taught, the breakdown is as follows: 22.1% of participants teach Tamil, 13.6% teach Mathematics, 14.1% teach Science, 24.1% are involved in Social Sciences and Religion, and 26.1% teach Other Subjects. When considering years of teaching experience, 34.2% have 5 years, 30.7% have 6-10 years, 12.6% have 11-15 years, and 22.6% have 16+ years. These statistics illuminate the diverse distribution of educators across various grade levels, subjects, and experience levels, offering valuable insights into the research's representation of the teaching landscape.

Types of positive feedback practices

To assess the positive feedback practices, descriptive statistics is utilized. This includes calculating frequencies, percentages. Table 2 presents the frequencies of the positive feedbacks used in the classroom when interacting with the struggling readers.

Table 2

The frequencies of the positive feedbacks used in the classroom when interacting with the struggling readers

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	Rarely or never	6	3.0
	Occasionally	17	8.5
	Regularly	70	35.2
	Frequently	81	40.7
	Always	25	12.6
Total		199	100.0

According to the Table 2, the majority of teachers, 40.7%, use positive feedback frequently. Additionally, 35.2% of teachers reported using positive feedback regularly, demonstrating a significant emphasis on this practice. Occasional use of positive feedback was reported by 8.5% of teachers, while 12.6% mentioned always providing positive feedback. A smaller percentage, 3.0%, mentioned rarely or never employing positive feedback when interacting with struggling readers. These findings highlight the prevalence of positive feedback practices among the surveyed teachers, with the majority incorporating them either frequently or regularly to support struggling readers in the classroom.

Moreover, researcher analyzed the types of positive feedback practices followed by the junior secondary teachers when interacting with struggling readers, is shown in Table 3.

Table 3

Types of positive feedbacks provided when dealing with struggling readers

		Frequency	Percent
Providing Effective Feedback	Occasionally	22	11.1
	Regularly	114	57.3
	Frequently	61	30.7
	Always	2	1.0
	Total	199	100.0
Encouraging Effort and Growth	Occasionally	12	6.0
	Regularly	71	35.7
	Frequently	82	41.2
	Always	34	17.1
	Total	199	100.0
Creating a Supportive Environment	Rarely or never	1	.5
	Occasionally	30	15.1
	Regularly	79	39.7
	Frequently	87	43.7
	Always	2	1.0
	Total	199	100.0

The results in Table 3 provide insights into the types of positive feedback used when interacting with struggling readers, categorized into three key areas: providing effective feedback, encouraging effort and growth, and creating a supportive environment. For providing effective feedback, it is evident that the majority of teachers, 57.3%, reported using this type of positive feedback regularly. An additional 30.7% stated that they use it frequently, while 11.1% mentioned occasionally providing effective feedback. Only a very small percentage, 1.0%, indicated that they always use this form of feedback when dealing with struggling readers.

In the category of encouraging effort and growth, the results show that 41.2% of teachers use this type of positive feedback frequently. Additionally, 35.7% reported using it regularly, while 6.0% mentioned occasional use. A notable 17.1% of teachers mentioned always encouraging effort and growth when interacting with struggling readers.

Regarding creating a supportive environment, the data reveal that a large percentage of teachers, 43.7%, use this type of positive feedback frequently. Furthermore, 39.7% mentioned regular use, 15.1% reported using it occasionally, and only 0.5% stated they rarely or never create a supportive environment. There was also a minimal percentage, 1.0%, that mentioned always employing this feedback.

In summary, the data suggests that teachers place a significant focus on providing various forms of positive feedback when interacting with struggling readers. This includes regularly and frequently using different types of positive feedback to support these students and foster their growth and development within a supportive classroom environment.

The Effectiveness of Positive Feedback Practices

To determine the perceived effectiveness of positive feedback practices with teaching experience the descriptive statistical analysis is performed. The table 4 shows the descriptive statistics of perceived effectiveness of positive feedback practices with teaching experiences.

Table 4

The perceived effectiveness of positive feedback practices

	N	Min	Max	Sum	Mean	SD
Overall effectiveness of positive feedback practices in supporting students with reading difficulties	199	1.00	5.00	644.00	3.2362	.94254
Valid N (listwise)	199					

According to the Table 4, the descriptive statistics reveal essential insights into the perceived effectiveness of positive feedback practices for supporting students with reading difficulties, as assessed by a sample of 199 participants. On average, the participants rated the effectiveness at approximately 3.24, indicating a moderate level of perceived effectiveness. The ratings ranged from a minimum of 1.00 to a maximum of 5.00, suggesting some variation in participants' perceptions, but the majority of responses clustered around the mean. The relatively low standard deviation of 0.94254 indicates that the ratings were relatively consistent and did not deviate significantly from the mean. These findings highlight that, on average, the teachers perceive positive feedback practices as moderately effective in supporting students with reading difficulties, with a relatively stable consensus among respondents.

Furthermore, the data collected via open ended question on effective positive feedback practices, reveals how teachers employ various positive feedback practices in the context of supporting students with reading difficulties. Among the practices, creating an inclusive and supportive classroom environment for students with reading difficulties is the most frequently adopted, with 24 instances, demonstrating teachers' commitment to fostering an inclusive atmosphere. Additionally, selecting reading materials that align with students' interests or hobbies and providing additional support through small-group or one-on-one sessions are also frequently utilized, with 19 and 18 instances, respectively, indicating a personalized approach to address students' unique needs.

On the other hand, practices such as providing constructive feedback that focuses on specific aspects of reading improvement and using positive language and tone when giving feedback are observed less frequently, suggesting areas where teachers might explore further enhancements. Overall, these insights shed light on the positive feedback strategies employed by teachers in the context of supporting students with reading difficulties and highlight the diversity of their approaches.

The challenges and barriers faced by teachers in implementing positive feedback practices

The feedback from teachers regarding challenges and effective strategies for implementing positive feedback in education can be distilled into several significant themes. These themes encompass resource shortages and the role of parental engagement, issues of absenteeism and student motivation, recommendations for structured reading programs and subject allocation, the benefits of remedial programs and homework assignments, the advantages of peer support and reading competitions, and the importance of creating supportive classroom environments.

Furthermore, teachers recognize the need for enhanced phonological awareness, the promotion of a reading culture, and the use of positive language and feedback to motivate students. There's also an acknowledgment that gender-specific strategies might be pertinent. Many teachers emphasize the value of well-trained educators and, despite some noting a lack of parental involvement as a challenge, they highlight the essential role parents play in their children's reading development. Collectively, these insights depict the intricate landscape of supporting students with reading difficulties and the array of strategies required to address these challenges effectively.

Factors predicts Positive feedback practices

To determine the factors predicting positive feedback practices based on Overall effectiveness of positive feedback practices in supporting students with reading difficulties, linear regression analysis is used. Table 5, 6, and 7 present the linear regression analysis.

Table 5
Model summary of the regression analysis

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.241 ^a	.058	.053	.91719

Table 6
ANOVA of the regression analysis

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	10.174	1	10.174	12.095	.001 ^b
	Residual	165.725	197	.841		
	Total	175.899	198			

Table 7
Coefficients of the regression analysis

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients B	Std. Error	Standardized Coefficients Beta	t	Sig.
1	(Constant)	1.938	.379		5.113	.000
	Positive feedback practices	.383	.110	.241	3.478	.001

According to the Tables 5, 6, and 7, the results of the regression analysis indicate that the model aimed at predicting the overall effectiveness of positive feedback practices in supporting students with reading difficulties is statistically significant ($F = 12.095$, $p = 0.001$). The model summary shows that the predictors, including positive feedback practices, account for approximately 5.8% of the variance in the overall effectiveness of positive feedback practices, with an R-squared value of 0.058. The adjusted R-squared, which considers the number of predictors, is 0.053, indicating a modest fit.

The coefficient for positive feedback practices is noteworthy, with a positive unstandardized coefficient of 0.383. This suggests that an increase in positive feedback practices is associated with higher effectiveness in supporting students with reading difficulties. The significance level of this predictor is highly significant ($p = 0.001$), reinforcing its importance.

In summary, the analysis reveals that positive feedback practices are a strong predictor of the overall effectiveness of positive feedback practices in assisting students with reading difficulties. As positive feedback practices increase, the overall effectiveness also tends to increase, highlighting the importance of such practices in supporting students in their reading endeavors.

Conclusion

This study has yielded several noteworthy findings regarding the implementation and impact of positive feedback practices among junior secondary school teachers working with struggling readers in Sri Lanka. The demographic analysis of the participants revealed a diverse distribution across various grade levels, subjects, and teaching experience, providing valuable insights into the representation of the teaching landscape.

The research further identified the prevalence of positive feedback practices in the classroom, with the majority of teachers reporting frequent or regular use of these practices. The analysis of specific types of positive feedback highlighted the emphasis on providing effective feedback, encouraging effort and growth, and creating a supportive environment when interacting with struggling readers. These findings underscore the commitment of teachers to foster a positive learning environment.

Regarding the perceived effectiveness of positive feedback practices, the study found that, on average, teachers rated these practices moderately effective. This indicates that teachers acknowledge the value of positive feedback in supporting students with reading difficulties, albeit with room for improvement.

The challenges and barriers faced by teachers in implementing positive feedback practices were explored, revealing a range of obstacles, including resource shortages, absenteeism, and a lack of student motivation. However, teachers also offered solutions, such as initiating reading programs, allocating specific subjects for reading, and enhancing parental involvement.

Lastly, the regression analysis identified a significant positive relationship between positive feedback practices and the overall effectiveness of these practices in supporting students

with reading difficulties. As teachers increase their use of positive feedback, the effectiveness of these practices tends to rise, underscoring the vital role of positive feedback in the educational process.

This study emphasizes the importance of positive feedback practices in the context of supporting struggling readers in junior secondary schools. Teachers' commitment to fostering a positive and inclusive learning environment, coupled with their awareness of the effectiveness of positive feedback, highlights the potential for these practices to make a significant impact on students' reading development. Moreover, the study sheds light on the challenges teachers face and provides valuable recommendations for improving reading education in this context. The findings underscore the crucial role of teachers in creating a supportive and encouraging atmosphere for students with reading difficulties, ultimately enhancing their learning experience and outcomes.

Discussion

The current study illuminates the critical role of positive feedback practices in junior secondary schools in Sri Lanka, particularly in supporting struggling readers. This holds substantial implications for educators, school administrators, and policymakers as it underscores the pivotal role of feedback in shaping students' educational journeys. The diverse representation of participants across different grade levels, subjects, and teaching experience mirrors the intricate and multifaceted landscape of junior secondary education in Sri Lanka, highlighting the need for adaptable teaching and feedback strategies that cater to students' diverse needs and abilities (Hattie & Timperley, 2007)². The study identifies the prevalence of positive feedback practices among teachers, indicating their commitment to fostering a positive learning environment, aligning with prior research that emphasizes the critical role of feedback in enhancing students' educational experiences (Ion et al., 2018)⁸.

While teachers acknowledge the value of positive feedback practices, the study's finding that they are rated only moderately effective suggests room for improvement, signifying an opportunity to enhance the quality and impact of feedback practices (Dawson et al., 2018)³⁰. The study uncovers the challenges and obstacles teachers face in implementing positive feedback practices, including resource shortages, absenteeism, and student motivation. Proposed solutions such as initiating reading programs and involving parents underscore the need for collaborative efforts at institutional and policy levels to address these challenges (Carless & Boud, 2018)²⁸. The regression analysis unveils a significant positive relationship between positive feedback practices and their effectiveness in supporting struggling readers, emphasizing the pivotal role of positive feedback in the educational process, especially for students facing reading difficulties (Hattie & Timperley, 2007)².

The findings of the current study align with and extend upon the existing body of research on feedback and its application to supporting struggling readers in junior secondary education, confirming the indispensable role of feedback in guiding students on their educational journeys, particularly in the context of junior secondary education (Hattie & Timperley, 2007)². Prior research underscores the significance of positive feedback, particularly for students with reading difficulties, as it bolsters their self-esteem and self-efficacy, ultimately enhancing motivation and engagement (Schunk & Usher, 2016)²⁰, reinforcing the importance of positive feedback practices

for struggling readers in junior secondary schools. Effective positive feedback practices offer essential scaffolding for struggling readers, aiding in the development of reading skills and enhancing comprehension (Mellard & Johnson, 2008)¹⁹, aligning with the study's findings that highlight the role of positive feedback in helping struggling readers overcome reading challenges.

Both previous research and the current study underscore the significance of specific and constructive feedback in the educational context, empowering students to make substantial progress in their learning by targeting areas for improvement, acknowledging effort, and being skill-based (Van Der Boom & Jang, 2018)²³. The importance of creating a supportive and encouraging classroom environment is emphasized in prior research (Hidi & Renninger, 2006)²², confirmed by the current study, which highlights the positive impact of such an environment on the motivation and overall learning experience of struggling readers. The concept of feedback literacy, as discussed in earlier research (Carless & Boud, 2018)²⁸, is reiterated in the current study, underlining the need for students to develop the knowledge and skills required to make informed judgments about their academic work and effectively navigate the emotional dimensions of feedback.

In conclusion, the current study contributes to the body of knowledge concerning the significance of positive feedback practices in junior secondary education, with a particular focus on supporting struggling readers. By relating these findings to previous research, the study reinforces the pivotal role of feedback in shaping students' educational journeys. The implications provided offer a roadmap for educators, school administrators, and policymakers to enhance feedback practices and improve the learning outcomes of struggling readers, ultimately contributing to the overall quality of junior secondary education in Sri Lanka.

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