LEADING EDUCATION CHANGE THROUGH REWARD STRATEGIES ON STUDENT MOTIVATION AND ACHIEVEMENT IN PUBLIC SCHOOLS

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ABSTRACT

Rewards and motivation are central and essential in effective classroom management, which shapes student behavior and fosters a positive and productive learning environment. This study explores the impact of educational leadership's reward strategies on student motivation and academic achievement in public schools in Balochistan, Pakistan. Anchored in Self-Determination Theory, this research examines how intrinsic and extrinsic rewards are framed and delivered through school leadership practices and how they affect students' engagement and performance. A qualitative research design was employed, involving twelve purposefully semi-structured interviews with teachers from four public schools to gain in-depth insights into their experiences. The findings reveal that motivation is central to increasing students' willingness to participate in learning activities. Leadership practices incorporating intrinsic and extrinsic rewards such as verbal praise, recognition, and tangible incentives significantly boost student motivation. Additionally, timely feedback and interactive teaching methods contribute to academic success and encourage a classroom atmosphere through goal-setting. The study emphasizes addressing students' psychological needs for autonomy and competence. It also recommends emphasizing a balanced reward system combining intrinsic and extrinsic incentives. Additionally, the study highlights how ongoing professional development and training for teachers are crucial in motivational strategies to cultivate a supportive and achievement-focused learning environment.

Keywords: **New academic achievement, Balochistan, motivation, leadership, rewards, students.**

INTRODUCTION

In the current landscape of public education, improving student academic performance is a top priority for educational leaders, policymakers, and researchers (Suleiman et al., 2024). Therefore, student motivation and academic performance remain at the forefront of educational reform efforts (Dogan, 2015; Iqbal et al., 2023). Rewards and motivation play a vital role in strengthening desirable academic achievements. The interplay between motivation, rewards, and student behaviour is a critical area of focus in educational psychology (Aseery, 2024; Howard et al., 2020). However, the effectiveness of reward systems is highly contingent on the leadership practices that guide implementation. Leadership shapes a school's vision, expectations, and climate, which affects how rewards are perceived and how motivational strategies unfold (Pinkas, 2021).

Educational leadership plays a critical role in shaping school culture, enhancing teacher performance, and improving student learning outcomes (McKay et al., 2025). Various leadership tools and reward strategies encompass both intrinsic and extrinsic forms of recognition to influence student behaviour and promote academic achievement (Lepper & Malone, 2021). However, extensive research indicates that while extrinsic rewards can boost performance for uninteresting tasks, they often undermine intrinsic motivation, especially when rewards are expected or tied to performance (Engels et al., 2021). Conversely, positive verbal feedback (an informational reward) supports intrinsic motivation. Previous research is based on well-resourced, urban, or high-income settings, which limit our understanding of how reward strategies function in public schools with limited resources.

INTRINSIC MOTIVATION IN EDUCATION

According to Deci and Ryan (2013), intrinsic motivation is fostered through autonomy, competence, and relatedness. For instance, Arooj et al. (2025) found that inherent motivators in graduate-level health professions significantly shaped educational identity and deepened engagement. Mai (2025) emphasizes that online learning environments must embed personalization and autonomy to sustain students' intrinsic interest. Project-based and inquiry-based learning remain powerful tools, particularly when students can choose topics aligned with their interests (Stanley-Pierre, 2025).

EXTRINSIC MOTIVATION AND ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE

While intrinsic motivation is ideal, extrinsic motivation (e.g., grades, rewards) has strategic utility. Amayreh and Arshad (2025) showed that extrinsic incentives can increase job satisfaction among primary school teachers, especially when integrated with perceived organizational support. Similarly, Stanley-Pierre (2025) emphasized how external factors, such as feedback and recognition, positively impact students from a low socio-economic background. However, in line with Mai's (2025) critique, recent findings reaffirm the caution that extrinsic rewards, if overused, can dampen intrinsic motivation. That rewards should be in line with the student's goals finds simultaneous support in Owhor's (2025) study of teacher morale, where fair and transparent reward systems correlated with enhanced professionalism.

LEADERSHIP'S ROLE IN MOTIVATION

Leadership plays a pivotal role in cultivating motivationally rich learning environments. Transformational and distributed leadership styles emphasizing empowerment, shared responsibility, and innovation are strongly associated with increased teacher engagement and student performance (Owhor, 2025). Clark (2025) found that emotionally intelligent leadership enhances intrinsic motivation by fostering a sense of belonging and autonomy. Furthermore, Sonam and Namgay (2025) demonstrated that leadership practices that integrate both extrinsic and intrinsic motivators lead to improved teacher performance in Bhutanese schools.

Blending extrinsic and intrinsic motivators remains a best practice. Morris et al. (2022) showed that leadership styles that reward effort and recognize individual growth, rather than just outcomes, led to sustainable teacher commitment in Islamic schools. Effective educational environments depend on a nuanced understanding of motivational drivers. Modern research increasingly emphasizes the importance of balance, strategically using extrinsic rewards to initiate engagement while designing systems that ultimately foster intrinsic motivation. Educational leaders are central to this effort, setting the tone through policy, communication, and reward structures (Kotera et al., 2023).

Empirical research consistently supports the use of positive reinforcement strategies such as praise and rewards in fostering desired academic behaviours (Sigalingging et al., 2023). The importance of motivation in education cannot be overstated. It acts as a factor that drives pupils to initiate, endure, and guide their learning (Kalita, 2023). Motivation is now widely recognized as a multidimensional construct influenced by self-efficacy, task value, and goal orientation, each of which contributes to sustained academic engagement (Gorghiu et al., 2024). Intrinsic motivation is driven by a desire that is related to learning and growth, encouraging students to engage deeply in educational activities to gain knowledge (Javed et al., 2022). Motivation is a crucial aspect in promoting student engagement, which is necessary for consistent academic efforts toward success. Intrinsic motivation results in increased determination, creativity, and active engagement in educational endeavours (Howard et al., 2021). This kind of motivation fosters students' preference for studies, encouraging long-term academic performance (Kruglanski et al., 2018). Contrastingly, extrinsic motivation involves rewards, including praise and recognition. The term is related to the desire of individuals to succeed and perform well in academic activities. This strategy emphasizes confidence in their ability to succeed academically to boost their performance (Khaliq et al., 2023).

In learning, rewards significantly influence a student's motivation in bolstering their confidence to achieve academic success (Sun & Gao, 2020). Intrinsic rewards refer to a sense of achievement that aligns with the objectives of academic pursuits, fostering a sense of personal responsibility and perceived proficiency. Extrinsic rewards refer to concrete prizes provided to students in response to their conduct, while intrinsic rewards pertain to the sense of achievement derived from the process of learning (Karayanni & Nelken, 2022). Extrinsic rewards are tangible incentives used to encourage people, as opposed to achieving short-term changes in behaviour (Newman et al., 2024). Nevertheless, both forms can enhance students' social-emotional competencies, including empathy and self-discipline, when embedded in a supportive school culture (Liu et al., 2020). The correlation between incentives and academic performance indicates that factors such as intrinsic motivation, goal orientation, and task value have an impact on students' achievement.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study used Self-Determination Theory (SDT) as a theoretical framework, which underscores that human motivation is formed by the fulfilments of three innate psychological needs: autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Deci & Ryan, 2013). This encompasses the concepts of making choices, having the necessary skills and abilities to succeed, and being productive in one's endeavours. Satisfying the psychological needs of pupils improves their inherent and self-directed motivation. Intrinsic motivation arises from the desire for external outcomes rather than extrinsic rewards. This approach highlights the key components of motivational autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Ahn et al., 2021). Educational leaders play a critical role in designing reward systems that either support or hinder these motivational needs. Rewards that recognize students' efforts and competencies can strengthen a sense of autonomy and relatedness, thereby fostering intrinsic motivation (Sun & Gao, 2020). According to SDT, the impact of rewards depends on whether they support or hinder students' sense of autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Deci & Ryan, 2013). In cultures where collective goals and external affirmation are emphasized, such as Pakistan, extrinsic rewards may have more positive short-term effects without immediately undermining intrinsic motivation (Howard et al., 2021).

Complementing SDT, Maslow's hierarchy of needs and Herzberg's two-factor theory further explain how motivational processes operate in educational settings. Maslow's model suggests that once students' basic physiological and safety needs are met, higher-order needs for belonging, esteem, and self-actualization drive learning motivation. Similarly, Herzberg's theory differentiates between hygiene factors (such as external rewards or school environment) and motivators such as achievement and recognition (Howard et al., 2020, 2021). According to Xu et al. (2021), reward systems and student motivation are primarily centred in Western educational settings. Consequently, there is limited insight into how school leaders in underrepresented regions like Balochistan implement reward strategies to influence student learning and motivation, highlighting a significant research gap that this study seeks to address. School leaders may unintentionally reinforce inequities, reduce intrinsic motivation, or fail to produce meaningful improvements in academic achievement without evidence-based guidance (Leithwood et al., 2002). Drawing on SDT, the conceptual model posits that leadership practices that align with autonomy-supportive reward systems enhance students' motivation, which, in turn, positively influences their academic performance (Sakineh & Ali, 2020; Sigalingging et al., 2023).

In Balochistan, Pakistan, public schools face persistent challenges related to low student motivation, poor academic performance, and high dropout rates (Ali et al., 2021). Despite numerous educational reforms and policy interventions, the region struggles with underachievement, especially in rural and marginalized communities (Ali et al., 2025). One contributing factor is the inconsistent and often ineffective application of reward systems within schools (Wilson & Corpus, 2001). In Balochistan, where school leadership training is limited, this misalignment is a plausible concern. There is a lack of strategic understanding among school leaders regarding how to implement rewards in ways that align with students' psychological needs and learning goals. This study aims to explore how educational leadership can utilize strategic reward systems to enhance student motivation to improve academic achievement. This study aims to provide a nuanced understanding of how leaders can balance extrinsic and intrinsic motivators to foster sustained educational success, addressing a critical gap in local educational leadership research and practice.

This study adopts the following research questions to explore the interplay between educational leadership, reward strategies, and student motivation in public schools in Balochistan, Pakistan:

1. How do educational leaders in public schools in Balochistan implement reward systems?
2. What is the perceived impact of different reward strategies (intrinsic vs. extrinsic) on student motivation and academic performance in Baluchistan's public schools?

METHODS

This research utilized a qualitative semi-structured interview methodology to investigate the impact of motivation and incentives on pedagogical practices and student performance within educational contexts. A qualitative methodology facilitates a comprehensive examination of participants' lived experiences, perspectives, and contextual reality (Creswell & Poth, 2016). It offers profound, detailed insights into educators' attitudes and the significance they ascribe to their experiences (Nowell et al., 2017). This interpretivist paradigm was appropriate since the research aimed to comprehend how instructors perceive and implement motivating and incentive techniques in authentic school settings (Barkhuizen, 2014; Caine et al., 2019).

Research Design and Rationale
The semi-structured interview method was chosen for its adaptability in exploring deeper significances while ensuring a uniform framework across participants (Braun & Clarke, 2021). This approach allowed the researcher to examine teachers' personal narratives and professional views on motivation and incentives inside their educational institutions. The open-ended style enabled participants to expand upon their experiences, resulting in the identification of nuanced viewpoints often overlooked in quantitative surveys (Creswell & Clark, 2017). The design

adhered to a constructivist framework, acknowledging that knowledge is collaboratively generated by both the researcher and participants (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The study's emphasis on incentives and rewards correspond with this epistemology, given that teachers' interpretations are constrained by their experiences, school culture, and leadership practices.

Setting and Participants

The study was carried out in Usta Mohammad District, Balochistan, chosen for its socio-economic and infrastructural variety. A purposeful sampling technique guaranteed that participants could furnish substantial, pertinent information (Palinkas et al., 2015). Twelve instructors (six male and six female) from four public schools took part. They taught different courses and had been teaching for five to twenty years. This sample size was suitable for qualitative research, guaranteeing data saturation and a comprehensive understanding (Guest et al., 2020). The interviews took place from February to March 2024 and lasted around 45 to 60 minutes apiece. Conversations were conducted in the participants' preferred languages (Urdu or Balochi) to guarantee authenticity and comfort. Later, bilingual specialists transcribed and translated them into English to make sure they were correct in both language and culture (Squires, 2009).

Data Collection Procedures

Data collection included semi-structured interviews informed by a flexible question protocol addressing subjects such as educators' perspectives of motivation, incentive systems, and their impact on student involvement. This style prompted participants to convey comprehensive instances and feelings associated with their work experiences (Creswell, 2021). With permission, all interviews were videotaped and then transcribed word for word. Participants also checked the transcripts for correctness (member checking) to make the research more credible (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Field notes were kept to record observations about the setting and the researcher's thoughts (Moser & Korstjens, 2018).

Data Analysis

Thematic analysis was used to look at the data, following the six steps laid forth by Braun and Clarke (2006, 2021). The procedure involved (1) becoming acquainted with the data, (2) creating preliminary codes, (3) identifying themes, (4) evaluating themes, (5) delineating and labelling themes, and (6) compiling the final report. Coding was both inductive (based on facts) and deductive (based on theory), which made sure that new insights fit with the study's conceptual framework (SDT). A CAQDAS software to keep track of codes and ensure there is a clear audit trail. Repetitive reading of transcripts and iterative coding guaranteed analytical precision and reduced researcher bias (Nowell et al., 2017).

Trustworthiness and Rigor

To ensure methodological rigour, the study adhered to Lincoln and Guba's (1985) four trustworthiness criteria:

Table 1
Ensuring Trustworthiness Criteria for The Study

Criterion	Strategy Used	Explanation
Credibility	Prolonged engagement, member checking, triangulation	The researchers spent sufficient time in the field, validated interpretations with participants, and cross-verified data using field notes and narratives.
Transferability	Thick description	Detailed contextual information about schools, participants, and cultural background allows readers to assess applicability to other settings.
Dependability	Audit trail, reflexive journaling	The researchers documented every decision and coding process for transparency.
Confirmability	Reflexivity and peer debriefing	Researcher bias was mitigated through reflective memos and consultation with an independent qualitative expert.

This systematic approach enhanced the study's credibility and established a transparent research process that can be followed and evaluated by others (Moser & Korstjens, 2018; Nowell et al., 2017).

Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval was obtained from the Institutional Review Board of Universitas Sebelas Maret, Indonesia. Participants received written consent forms explaining the study's purpose, confidentiality measures, and voluntary participation rights. Pseudonyms replaced real names to protect identities. All digital recordings and transcripts were stored securely with password protection accessible only to the research team (Orb et al., 2001). Cultural sensitivity was maintained throughout the process, respecting local customs and communication styles.

Data Collection

The study was carried out in Usta Mohammad District, Balochistan, an area that poses distinctive educational difficulties, selected purposively to reflect a diversity. The study utilized purposive sampling to select a diverse array of schools across Balochistan, reflecting various geographical locations, academic settings, and socio-economic backgrounds. Four public schools were chosen for this research, ensuring that the sample accurately reflects the educational environment in the area, which has socio-economic and infrastructural challenges. Data was collected via semi-structured interviews with 12 teachers from February to March 2024. The selection criteria ensured gender balance and diversity in age to meet the research objectives, teachers' direct involvement in implementing and observing reward strategies that influence student motivation. The inclusion criteria required participants to be public-school teachers with verified awareness of motivational and reward-based practices with at least five years of teaching experience. Semi-structured interviews allowed participants to speak freely. As participants relate comprehensive tales, this strategy helps participants gain deeper insights into their lives (Creswell & Clark, 2017).

The interviews were conducted in the native languages, Balochi and Urdu, to ensure participants could express their views with comfort and clarity. All interviews were carefully translated into English by bilingual researchers familiar with both educational terminology and the local dialects. This language-sensitive approach contributed to the trustworthiness and authenticity of the qualitative data. Data saturation was achieved after the tenth interview, when no new ideas or themes were emerging from the data; however, two additional interviews were completed to confirm and verify that saturation had been reached. All data were stored securely, and only the researcher and supervising faculty had access to the recordings and transcripts. This sample size is consistent with qualitative research principles (Barkhuizen, 2014) and was considered sufficient to ensure a comprehensive exploration of the phenomenon under investigation.

Ethical Considerations

Before data collection, ethical approval for the study was obtained from the Institutional Review Board of Universitas Sebelas Maret Indonesia. The study followed strict ethical guidelines, and the research kept teachers' identities private. Participants were fully informed about the purpose of the study, their rights, and the voluntary nature of their participation. All participants provided informed written consent before the interviews commenced, understanding the study's goal and their rights to preserve anonymity and confidentiality. These ethical practices, combined with culturally sensitive and methodologically sound approaches, ensured the credibility, authenticity, and depth of the qualitative data collected.

Table 2
Demographic Profile for Participants

Participant	Age	Gender	Teaching Experience	Subject
P1	35	Male	10	Science
P2	31	Female	6	English
P3	41	Male	15	Mathematics
P4	38	Female	12	English

P5	33	Male	8	Social Studies
P6	30	Female	5	Religion
P7	44	Male	18	Urdu
P8	29	Female	6	General Knowledge
P9	39	Male	13	Science
P10	31	Female	7	Mathematics
P11	45	Male	20	English
P12	36	Female	9	Science

DATA ANALYSIS

Thematic data analysis is a qualitative research technique that involves the identification, analysis, and reporting of patterns present in the data. This method allows for a dynamic and iterative analysis process, where the researcher continuously refines and deepens their understanding of the data as the study progresses (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Data analysis began with the coding of interview transcripts, a critical step in thematic analysis. Segments of the data were labelled with descriptive codes representing significant ideas, behaviours, or perceptions expressed by the participants. These codes were developed through a combination of inductive insights (emerging directly from the data) and deductive reasoning (based on the study's objectives and conceptual framework). The goal of coding was to break down the data into manageable and meaningful units, which served as the foundation for later theme development. Codes were initially developed using both inductive reasoning emerging organically from the data and deductive logic informed by the study's aims and theoretical framework. Each segment of the data was assigned descriptive labels representing key insights, such as "intrinsic motivation," "interactive teaching strategies," "reward effectiveness," and "academic performance." These codes were then clustered to form four overarching thematic areas: Motivation in the Context of Education, Successful Motivational Strategies in the Classroom, Student Motivation Influences Academic Achievements, and Motivating Students with Rewards.

The instructors' deeper settings and experiences were revealed by analysing story structures and rhetorical aspects (Clarke & Braun, 2017). The researcher then grouped these codes into thematic divisions to establish educational motivation and reward topics. Subsequently, these codes were systematically categorized into overarching themes that include noteworthy trends. Teachers' rich narrative data, which included insights into the motivational obstacles and triumphs in their classrooms, served as the foundation for the thematic development. For example, themes about teacher duties emphasized the value of using storytelling, real-world examples, and student autonomy to create a safe and stimulating learning environment. As recommended by Clarke and Braun (2017), these themes were further developed by examining rhetorical signals and narrative patterns in the interviews, which exposed the more profound sociocultural circumstances affecting motivation.

After that, themes were examined and verified to make sure they appropriately represented the data. The "Effective Rewards" theme, for instance, was inspired by several teacher narratives that stressed the necessity of a flexible and well-balanced incentive system that combines praise, certificates, educational presents, and student-specific adaptive tactics. Although there were possible drawbacks, such as an overdependence on outside incentives, teachers also noted noticeable increases in student engagement and performance as a result of well-designed rewards. A strong relationship between student involvement and academic success was highlighted by the theme on motivation's impact on achievement, which was supported by both direct teacher assessments and observational data. The results were conveyed in a logical and consistent storyline, bolstered by substantial evidence derived from the data.

RESULTS

The following table presents a thematic analysis derived from qualitative data exploring the relationship between

motivation, reward systems, and academic achievement in educational settings. The analysis is organized into four overarching themes: motivation in the context of education, successful motivational strategies in the classroom, the influence of motivation on academic performance, and the role of rewards.

Table 3

Factors Influencing Student Motivation and the Role of Rewards

Themes	Subthemes	Description	Frequency
Motivation in the Context of Education	Factors that influence motivation	Parental participation, environmental circumstances, personal interests, and the desire for self-improvement all have an impact on motivation. This emphasizes the importance of teachers in creating a motivating atmosphere.	P2, P5, P8
	Description of Motivation	Motivation is the result of both internal and external influences that stimulate pupils to participate in learning activities or attain objectives.	P2, P7
	Teacher's Role in Motivation	Teachers recognize crucial elements such as establishing a nurturing atmosphere, using practical illustrations, and providing independence and feedback to amplify student motivation.	P5, P6
Successful Motivational Strategies in the Classroom	Motivation Strategies	Effective tactics include establishing attainable objectives, fostering a friendly classroom ambiance, acknowledging achievements, and providing constructive criticism.	P1, P3, P5
	Interactive Teaching Methods	Increasing student engagement via interactive techniques such as experiential learning, narrative-based instruction, and practical activities boosts motivation.	P1, P6
Student Motivation Influences Academic Achievements	Motivation and Academic Performance	Motivated pupil exhibits greater academic performance, demonstrating excitement and exerting effort in their studies.	P08, P11
	Motivation and Achievement Correlation	The correlation between motivation and academic success is strong, as driven students tend to exhibit greater levels of involvement and participation.	P6, P9
Motivating Students with Rewards	Balanced Rewards	The effectiveness of the reward system includes a combination of praise, recognition, and tangible incentives such as scholarships, prizes, and tailored to meet the individual requirements of pupils.	P3, P4, P8,
	Flexibility in Reward Systems	It is essential to have the ability to adapt incentives based on ongoing evaluations and ensure they align with individual learning goals to motivate individuals effectively.	P4, P8,
Effectiveness of Rewards in Academic Achievement	Monitoring of Reward Effectiveness	Observational methods, questionnaires, and academic performance data are used to analyze incentive systems' effects on student motivation and achievement.	P2, P7, P9
	Potential Negative Impacts of Rewards	Relying excessively on external incentives may result in adverse effects, including addiction to rewards and a decline in internal drive over time.	P9, P12

FINDINGS

The findings section has been organized, showing the precise meaning of the role of motivation and rewards in increasing academic output in the public schools of Balochistan, Pakistan. The following interview data analysis showed their impacts on student achievements.

Motivation In the Context of Education

Most participants highlighted that motivation in education is influenced by various factors, including parental involvement, environmental conditions, personal interests, and the desire to improve oneself.

> Motivation in education is internal and external factors that make a student move into learning activities, take up challenges, and achieve those goals (P8).

> Motivation initiates a purpose for change; therefore, it is the driving force to propels one towards their desired aims. Motivation gives direction and purpose towards the right goals (P2).

Academic motivation includes both intrinsic and extrinsic factors that motivate students to engage in learning, overcome challenges, and achieve educational goals. Motivation often begins with the intention to change and acts as a driving force that guides individuals toward their goals, providing them with direction and clarity regarding their goals.

Most teachers identified that supportive environments, such as real-life examples, autonomy, and feedback, motivate students. The approach includes sharing personal experiences through motivational speeches to create a good learning environment.

> Teaching methodologies, particularly hands-on approaches, foster a deeper understanding of contemporary educational trends. By engaging students in active, experiential learning, comprehension is enhanced. Teachers play a key role in offering support beyond academics, inspiring students to succeed in all aspects of life (P5).

> Education's transformative potential inspires students to foresee a brighter future. Additionally, this provides a holistic support beyond academics, aiming to inspire students to thrive in all aspects of their lives (P1).

Intrinsic motivation is given utmost importance for its lasting impact. It emphasized the role of storytelling and personal experiences in making education applicable and inspiring, emphasizing the transformative power of education.

Successful Motivational Strategies in the Classroom

Motivation can be achieved by setting achievable goals, nurturing a better classroom atmosphere, and providing constructive feedback. Effective classroom management and lesson planning emphasize a healthy teacher-student relationship to empower students.

> I have implemented a few motivational strategies to encourage students to work together as a team and learn from each other. A conducive atmosphere to achieving goals in the classroom using dynamic methods (P3).

> I motivate students to make sure they are involved in the lecture and understand it easily. I usually share stories of famous and successful people to keep students motivated (P1).

Successful motivational strategies in the classroom include setting realistic goals, creating a conducive learning environment, and recognizing achievement. The relevance of lessons to real life and rewards that increased points

highlighted achievements, while personal storytelling fostered resilience in moments of disappointment. Strategies focus on group work, constructive feedback, and the use of interactive learning tools.

Student Motivation Influences Academic Achievements

A myriad of teachers believe student motivation is crucial for academic success. Motivated students usually perform well and learn lessons with enthusiasm.

P11 observed that motivation significantly influences the student's academic performance and achievement through positive attitude, efforts, and learning process engagements. Therefore, student motivation is important to create an academically successful environment.

> Motivation plays a crucial role not only in academic terms but also in people throughout life (P6).

> I always measure the direct correlation that exists between motivation and improved performance. I monitor their progress in activities and efforts to improve grades in academics (P4).

Together, these approaches emphasize the multifaceted nature of student motivation and its essential role in shaping academic achievement. They highlight the need for strategies that recognize individual learning styles, promote active engagement, and support students' intrinsic motivations beyond the lure of external rewards.

Effective Rewards to Motivate Students

Most of the participants stressed that a balanced reward system includes praise, scholarships, prizes, and tangible rewards for a better educational learning atmosphere.

> A combination of rewards for the motivation of students includes praise, recognition, certificates, badges, field trips, class parties, and achievement ceremonies (P6).

> Continuous assessments and assignments are necessary for fostering flexibility in student motivation. Striking a balance between external incentives and intrinsic motivation promotes active participation and personal development (P4).

> I assess the student's performance and reward based on the student's performance. I always prefer giving books and paintings. Adding colours to colourless things make your sense of happiness come true, and books give you companionship (P3).

P11 verified significant improvements in student behaviour and performance in class, engagement, and task completion. The use of rewards motivated students, enhanced both classroom involvement and academic outcomes.

The collective experiences of teachers confirm the effectiveness of a balanced and student-centred reward system, seeing significant improvements in student behaviour, participation, and academic achievement. This feedback emphasizes the importance of continuous assessment, flexibility, and collaboration with students in designing and implementing reward systems that not only motivate but also support student growth and love of learning.

Effectiveness of Reward Systems in Academic Achievement

Teachers appraise rewards' impact on student performance differently. They use pre- and post-test results to track student academic performance. Most of the time, written assignments and quizzes are used to evaluate the effects of rewards on motivation and academic performance.

> Tangible rewards have produced positive effects on student academic achievements (P7).

Potentially, rewards have a negative impact, such as the development of reward addiction, increased sensitivity to punishment, and decreased intrinsic motivation (P9).

P12 advocates for a balanced and combined external and intrinsic rewards approach for recognizing individual efforts. Flexibility from teachers and parents is essential, especially in resource-limited contexts.

This shows that rewards have a transformative impact on students' academic endeavours, creating determination and encouraging excellence. Recognizing positive behaviours, such as active participation, can create a more favourable learning environment. However, the importance of maintaining fairness and inclusiveness within this cannot be underestimated, as their absence can reduce motivation. While extrinsic rewards may initially increase motivation, there's a concern that they could detract from intrinsic motivation over time, especially if students become overly dependent on external incentives.

DISCUSSION

This narrative inquiry research provides valuable insights into teachers' experiences and strategies related to motivating students through rewards. The findings highlight how motivation and rewards play a vital role in boosting academic performance in public schools, underscoring their effectiveness in enhancing educational outcomes. Motivation, influenced by both intrinsic and extrinsic variables, significantly impacts students' educational experiences. The research highlights that extrinsic motivation positively influences social self-efficacy, which is the most potent, horizontal factor, reflecting higher intentions to participate in studies (Liu, 2020). Motivation is a powerful force that defines a student's learning journey, positively influencing their academic success. This aligns with the findings of previous research (Kalita, 2023; Leitão et al., 2022; Newman et al., 2024), which established a constant correlation between an intrinsic drive for motivated students to engage deeply with studies and high academic achievements. This consistency across research supports inherent motivation as a significant technique for increasing educational results.

The study offers a detailed and refined understanding of how intrinsic and extrinsic motivation interact with each other. This study's results found that motivated students demonstrated better academic performance and engagement in the classroom. The findings align with existing studies, which found that intrinsic motivation prevails after the initial success phase (Dierendonck et al., 2023; Dong et.al, 2024; Suharnadi et al., 2024). According to Ngware et al. (2014), in Sub-Saharan Africa, the reliance on extrinsic motivators increased short-term academic compliance but had a limited impact on sustained learning unless accompanied by intrinsic enablers. These findings resonate with this trend, particularly the emphasis placed by teachers on autonomy and constructive feedback. Furthermore, academic motivation has a substantial influence on students' academic achievement, playing a crucial role in this process. Additionally, positive reinforcement, such as praise for good behaviour and effort, keeps students' motivation at the desired level (Liu et al., 2020; Wu et al., 2020). The present research finding is reminiscent of research findings conducted in the low-income educational context of India. Schwerter et al. (2023) observed that goal-oriented praise and personalized recognition strategies significantly boosted student motivation, especially in marginalized groups, aligning with teachers' practices. This finding adds to the continuing discussion in educational psychology about the lasting impacts of various motivational policies for future studies on the progress of motivation in academic environments. The use of narrative-driven motivation techniques was observed in parallel findings. Rosales (2024) demonstrated the value of storytelling and real-life role models in sustaining student engagement, underscoring the cross-cultural efficacy of such practices.

The research findings endorse that school leadership plays a central role in fostering student motivation, who encourage and empowers students to participate in the learning process actively. These results align with Nahid et al. (2023), which emphasised the role of teacher-student relationships, engaging instructional practices, and positive feedback in a spontaneous learning environment. The findings indicate that educators who effectively

foster motivation via instructional materials, constructive feedback, and participatory approaches see enhanced student involvement and scholastic achievement. This enhances educational results and provides students with the ability for continuous learning (Cahyanti et al., 2024; Tobgay, 2021).

Rewards are powerful incentives in education that drive students to desirable behaviours. The study established that effective rewards motivate students to achieve learning goals in a conducive learning environment (Mamat et al., 2023; Nahid et al., 2023). Some key strategies researchers have identified and found effective include praise, recognition, tangible rewards, and educational experiences as compelling student motivations. The study highlights the effectiveness of balanced intrinsic and tangible rewards to optimize experiential field trips for learning opportunities. It presents a practical strategy for motivating students for long-term academic achievement. Sigalingging et al. (2023) advocate for these incentives to enhance academic achievement and spark intrinsic enthusiasm in students. This aligns with previous research studies by Dong et al. (2024), Newman et al. (2024), and Suharnadi et al. (2024) and provides more evidence that competition in rewards impacts both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation in students.

Conversely, extrinsic rewards increase motivation levels, balancing them with intrinsic motivation, which is also very important to achieving sustained communication (Kusumawati et al., 2023). Although extrinsic incentives are beneficial, the research also cautions against over-reliance on extrinsic rewards since they might reduce intrinsic motivation and meaningful academic engagement. Although some teachers observed only positive impacts from reward systems, others highlighted concerns about dependency and reduced internal drive. This contradiction reveals the nuanced reality of classroom motivation strategies. These differences may stem from teachers' exposure to professional training, student characteristics, or cultural perceptions of authority and achievement. Research by Bear et al. (2017) and Taylor et al. (2014) similarly notes that reward effectiveness varies based on delivery style, timing, and student agency.

This study is significant, offering context-specific insights into motivating practices that are rarely examined, particularly in under-resourced public schools in Balochistan. This work is essential in filling a crucial research gap. The results confirm that while short-term engagement is increased by extrinsic rewards like praise and recognition, long-term academic success depends on cultivating intrinsic motivation through relatedness, competence, and autonomy. Teachers play a pivotal role in shaping motivation through positive reinforcement, participatory teaching, and culturally relevant strategies like storytelling. The study provides insights for educators and policymakers to enhance student results in underserved situations by highlighting the significance of leadership support, professional development, and balanced reward systems in establishing sustainable learning environments.

THEORETICAL AND PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

The study refines motivation theory by highlighting that the impact of rewards depends on leadership framing, cultural context, and resource conditions. It extends Self-Determination Theory by showing that autonomy support can include culturally valued recognition and storytelling. Integrating Herzberg's hygiene-motivator model, the study emphasizes that fair, stable classroom environments are prerequisites for rewards to act as genuine motivators of mastery and growth. Leadership emerges as a key link between policy and classroom motivation.

Practically, leaders should establish balanced reward systems that blend low-cost recognition, such as praise, certificates, and public acknowledgment, with intrinsic supports like feedback, collaboration, and student choice. Clear criteria and equitable access ensure fairness and preserve inherent interest. Continuous monitoring of engagement and achievement helps maintain developmental intent, while professional training in autonomy-supportive practices sustains motivation and performance in resource-limited schools.

CONTRIBUTION OF THE STUDY

This research advances knowledge in three significant ways. First, it extends Self-Determination Theory by demonstrating how, in under-resourced and collectivist school settings, extrinsic rewards can complement rather than crowd out intrinsic motivation when delivered as informational acknowledgment of progress and competence. Second, it clarifies educational leadership's mediating role: leaders shape the climate, expectations, and routines that determine whether rewards support autonomy and competence or become controlling and inequitable. Third, it addresses a geographic and scholarly gap by offering empirically grounded, context-specific insights from Balochistan, an under-researched region, showing how motivational theory translates into practice under material constraints and diverse cultural norms.

CONCLUSION

This study examined how educational leadership utilizes reward systems to enhance student motivation and academic performance in Balochistan's public schools. Drawing on Self-Determination Theory through qualitative narrative inquiry, the research explored teachers' experiences with motivational strategies in resource-constrained settings. Findings reveal that motivation operates as a multidimensional construct where intrinsic and extrinsic elements interact depending on context and leadership framing. In collectivist, resource-limited environments, extrinsic rewards can complement rather than undermine intrinsic motivation when delivered as informational acknowledgment of competence. Teachers who balanced praise, recognition, and autonomy-supportive practices observed enhanced engagement without fostering dependency. Narrative-driven techniques proved particularly effective across diverse student populations. Educational leadership emerged as critical in mediating between theory and practice, shaping climates where rewards either empower or control students. This study demonstrates that strategic, culturally responsive leadership combined with balanced reward systems can transform educational outcomes in challenging circumstances.

RECOMMENDATIONS

School leaders should establish balanced reward frameworks that integrate both intrinsic and extrinsic motivators, prioritizing low-cost recognition such as verbal praise, certificates, and personalized feedback while using tangible rewards strategically for initiating engagement among struggling learners. Clear criteria must ensure equity across gender, socioeconomic status, and ability levels, with transparent monitoring to prevent favouritism. Teachers should emphasize effort and improvement over outcomes, employ culturally responsive practices including storytelling and local role models, and gradually transition students from external rewards toward intrinsic supports like constructive feedback and self-reflection. Policymakers must integrate motivation targets into school improvement plans, invest in professional development focused on autonomy-supportive practices, and allocate resources for recognition materials and experiential learning opportunities. Effective implementation requires ongoing dialogue between leaders and teachers about contextual effectiveness, with regular monitoring of engagement data disaggregated by demographic variables to identify unintended consequences and ensure fairness in motivational practices across diverse student populations.

DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research should employ longitudinal designs to track how motivational strategies impact student outcomes across multiple academic years, examining whether early dependence on extrinsic rewards transitions to internalized motivation or persists as students' progress through different educational stages. Cross-cultural comparative studies examining motivational dynamics across individualist, collectivist, and hybrid cultural contexts would refine the theoretical understanding of when extrinsic rewards support versus undermine intrinsic motivation. A systematic investigation of how different leadership styles, transformational, distributed, or

instructional, differentially impact reward system effectiveness would provide targeted guidance for leadership development programs. Research examining optimal balances between intrinsic and extrinsic motivators across age groups and academic disciplines could yield developmental and subject-specific frameworks for practical implementation. Experimental studies testing specific reward interventions would strengthen causal claims about effectiveness, while incorporating student voices directly would reveal motivational dynamics that teachers may not fully recognize, honouring learners as legitimate participants in shaping educational research and practice.

DECLARATION OF COMPETING INTERESTS

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