Students' Perceptions on Extrinsic Motivation Strategies to Enhance Learning Experience and Fostering Academic Excellence: A Qualitative Study

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the perceptions of university students regarding extrinsic motivation strategies and their potential role in fostering academic excellence in higher education. Using a qualitative approach, the research involved semi-structured interviews with fifteen students to examine how extrinsic motivators influence their engagement, enthusiasm, academic discipline, and overall performance. Thematic analysis of the interview data identified five key themes: enhanced engagement and participation, learning enthusiasm and motivation, reinforcement of academic discipline, influence on learning attitudes and behaviors, and impact on academic performance. Thematic analysis revealed that students anticipate positive impacts from extrinsic motivation on classroom engagement, learning habits, and academic outcomes. Participants expressed varying preferences for specific types of extrinsic motivators, including tangible rewards, social recognition, performance-based incentives, and constructive feedback. Participants suggested that well-designed reward systems could transform passive learning approaches into proactive engagement, potentially leading to improved academic performance and the development of effective study habits. The findings indicate that when properly implemented, extrinsic motivation strategies may complement students' intrinsic motivation, particularly in challenging courses or during periods of diminishing engagement. This research contributes to understanding how teaching practices can be adapted to better support student motivation and academic achievement in higher education settings, highlighting the importance of aligning extrinsic rewards with students' individual preferences, career goals, and learning contexts.

Keywords: learning experience, extrinsic motivation, behavior management, classroom management, higher education, academic performance

INTRODUCTION

Education is a powerful tool for personal and societal development, equipping individuals with the knowledge, skills, and critical thinking abilities required to succeed in an increasingly complex world. At the forefront of this evolution is the concept of equalization and improvement, which aims to provide equitable access to high-quality learning opportunities for all students, regardless of their socio-economic background, and to continuously enhance teaching methodologies to meet the diverse requirements of learners (Fuad et al., 2021). As the educational environment always evolves, the need to understand and foster student motivation has become more critical. Motivated students are more engaged, persist through challenges, and achieve better academic outcomes, making motivation a central factor in the learning process (Ryan & Deci, 2020). As such, educators must continuously explore and implement effective strategies to support and enhance student motivation, which in turn facilitates deeper learning and personal growth.

In the contemporary landscape of higher education, fostering academic excellence remains a primary goal for institutions worldwide. As the demands of a globalized, knowledge-driven economy increase, the need to develop well-rounded, high-achieving students who can thrive in diverse professional settings has become more

critical. One of the most significant factors contributing to students' academic success is motivation, which plays a pivotal role in shaping their learning behaviors, persistence, and overall achievement. While intrinsic motivation—driven by a personal passion for learning and growth—is often considered ideal, extrinsic motivation, which involves external rewards or recognition, has proven to be a powerful tool for enhancing student performance and engagement, especially in formal educational settings (Deci et al., 1999; Manda, 2023; Ryan & Deci, 2020). Therefore, understanding the various strategies that effectively utilize extrinsic motivation is essential for optimizing student outcomes.

Extrinsic motivation strategies are often employed to encourage desired academic behaviors, such as completing assignments, participating in class, and achieving high grades (George & Supreetha, 2021). These strategies may include tangible rewards like prizes, grades, or other incentives, as well as more abstract forms of recognition, such as praise or public acknowledgment (Bilouk, 2015; Liu, 2023; Manda, 2023). Despite the widespread use of these strategies, there remains a gap in understanding how students perceive and respond to them, particularly in the context of higher education. Some scholars argue that extrinsic rewards may undermine intrinsic motivation, leading to short-term engagement rather than deep learning. Others suggest that when appropriately designed, extrinsic motivators can reinforce positive academic behaviors and foster long-term success. However, much of the existing research has focused on quantitative measures of motivation, leaving a gap in understanding students' qualitative perspectives on how these strategies influence their motivation in learning and help them excel in academic (Hussain et al., 2023; Saeed & Zyngier, 2012). Furthermore, extrinsic motivation has been extensively studied in primary and secondary education, but fewer studies have explored its role in higher education settings, where students have different learning autonomy and expectations (Iqbal et al., 2023).

Hence, this study aims to bridge this gap by exploring students' perceptions of extrinsic motivation strategies in higher education and their role in fostering academic excellence. Despite the variety of strategies available, it is essential to recognize that student motivation is complex and multifaceted. What works for one student, or a group of students may not necessarily work for others. As such, understanding students' perspectives on motivation—what they believe supports or hinders their engagement—can provide invaluable insights into how teaching practices can be improved. Using a qualitative approach, this study seeks to explore students' perspectives on the strategies that most effectively enhance their motivation, with a particular focus on extrinsic motivation. It is expected that this research aims to contribute to a broader understanding of how teaching practices can be adapted to better support student engagement, enthusiasm, and academic performance through extrinsic motivation.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical perspective on motivation in learning

Motivation is a fundamental aspect of learning, influencing student engagement, persistence, and academic achievement. Self-Determination Theory (SDT), developed by Ryan and Deci (2000), provides a foundational framework for understanding different types of motivation. According to SDT, motivation exists on a continuum from intrinsic (driven by internal interests and enjoyment) to extrinsic (driven by external rewards or consequences). This distinction has prompted researchers to examine how different types of strategies affect these motivational orientations. In particular, the SDT posits that motivation is driven by the need for autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Fostering autonomy involves providing students with choices and encouraging self-initiated learning activities by allowing students to select project topics, offering various methods for completing assignments, and promoting a classroom environment where their opinions and ideas are valued (Li et al., 2024; Zainuddin et al., 2019). Enhancing competence involves creating opportunities for students to experience success through challenging yet achievable tasks, providing constructive feedback, and celebrating their progress (Xiao & Hew, 2023). Meanwhile, the need for relatedness involves nurturing a sense of belonging and connectedness within the classroom community. Instructors can achieve this by cultivating a supportive and inclusive atmosphere, encouraging collaborative learning, and showing genuine interest in students' well-being (Ratinho & Martins, 2023).

Another prominent theory related to motivation is the Expectancy-Value Theory (EVT). Originally developed from the work of Tolman (1932) and Lewin (1951), EVT conceptualizes motivation as the product of both the

feasibility and desirability of an anticipated action (Achtziger & Gollwitzer, 2018; Schnettler et al., 2020). The modern situated expectancy-value theory, as proposed by Eccles and Wigfield (2020), explains that motivation is driven by two key components: expectations of success and subjective task values. The expectation of success represents individuals' beliefs about their future performance on specific tasks, distinct from self-efficacy in that it focuses on anticipated outcomes rather than present abilities (Wigfield & Eccles, 2000). According to EVT, expectancy refers to a student's belief in their ability to succeed in a given task, while value represents the perceived importance or usefulness of the task. In the context of education, EVT suggests that students are more likely to be motivated when they believe they can achieve success and when they find value in their academic tasks (Urhahne & Wijnia, 2023). Extrinsic motivators such as grades, scholarships, and public recognition can enhance students' perception of value, thereby increasing engagement and persistence. When students recognize that academic success leads to tangible benefits such as career advancement, they are more likely to remain committed to their studies (Eccles & Wigfield, 2020; Schnettler et al., 2020). EVT highlights the importance of aligning extrinsic rewards with students' personal goals to optimize motivation and academic achievement. In the context of extrinsic motivation strategies, EVT suggests that external rewards, such as grades or recognition, can enhance motivation if they reinforce students' beliefs in their ability to succeed and if the rewards align with their personal or professional goals (Bandhu et al., 2024). However, when students perceive the cost of achieving these rewards as too high, or if they doubt their ability to attain them, their motivation may decline.

The role of extrinsic motivation in academic performance

Although intrinsic motivation is often regarded as ideal, extrinsic motivation can also be an effective tool for fostering academic excellence, especially when aligned with students' goals and interests (George & Supreetha, 2021; Khaliq, 2023; Liu, 2023). Studies have demonstrated that extrinsic motivators when appropriately implemented, can complement and potentially enhance intrinsic motivation rather than diminish it (Bilouk, 2015; Morris et al., 2022). This is particularly relevant in higher education settings, where students face diverse challenges and responsibilities that may require various forms of motivation to maintain engagement and achievement, where structured assessments and performance-based outcomes are primary. One of the primary mechanisms through which extrinsic motivation influences academic performance is by increasing student effort and persistence. Studies suggest that when students are provided with clear incentives such as scholarships, financial aid, or competitive awards, they are more likely to devote time and energy to their studies (Manda, 2023). In addition, well-structured extrinsic motivation strategies, such as goal-setting combined with rewards, have been shown to promote self-regulation and academic discipline, particularly among students who may struggle with intrinsic motivation (Bilouk, 2015). Furthermore, extrinsic rewards can serve as positive reinforcement, shaping desirable academic behaviors such as timely assignment submission, active participation in class, and consistent study habits (Hussain et al., 2023).

Despite these benefits, there are concerns regarding the quality of learning and long-term motivation when extrinsic rewards become the primary driving force behind academic efforts. Some scholars argue that students who are heavily dependent on external rewards may focus more on achieving high grades rather than understanding and mastering the material (Saeed & Zyngier, 2012). This phenomenon, often referred to as the "performance-oriented mindset", can lead to strategic learning behaviors, where students prioritize memorization and exam performance over deep comprehension and intellectual curiosity (Jedidiah & Guevarra, 2023; Song & Xu, 2023). Additionally, research has shown that over-reliance on extrinsic motivation can undermine intrinsic motivation, a concept known as the over justification effect (Deci et al., 2001). When students begin to associate learning primarily with external rewards, their natural curiosity and intrinsic drive to explore new knowledge may diminish over time, particularly if the rewards are removed (Ryan & Deci, 2020).

However, recent studies suggest that the impact of extrinsic motivation on academic performance depends on how rewards are structured and perceived (Iqbal et al., 2023). When external rewards are designed to complement students' intrinsic goals—such as linking grades to meaningful feedback or using recognition to validate effort rather than mere outcomes—they can enhance motivation without diminishing intrinsic interest. Additionally, contextual factors such as cultural background, personality traits, and individual learning preferences play a crucial role in determining how students respond to extrinsic motivation strategies (Liu, 2023). For example, in highly competitive academic environments, external rewards may be seen as essential motivators, whereas in more autonomous learning settings such as self-paced online courses, student-centered

classrooms, or project-based learning environments where students are typically encouraged to develop intrinsic motivation and self-directed learning habits, applying excessive reliance on rewards may lead to disengagement.

Nevertheless, extrinsic motivation plays a significant role in shaping students' academic behaviors, influencing their engagement, persistence, and influencing their academic performance. Unlike intrinsic motivation, which is driven by personal interest and enjoyment of learning, extrinsic motivation is fueled by external factors such as grades, rewards, recognition, and social expectations (Deci et al., 1999; Ryan & Deci, 2020). When properly implemented, extrinsic motivations can enhance student engagement, encourage task completion, and reinforce positive academic behaviors, contributing to higher achievement levels (George & Supreetha, 2021). This is evidenced in several studies that highlight the positive impact of extrinsic motivation on academic outcomes. For instance, Chhor et al. (2024) found that extrinsic motivation, driven by external rewards like grades and recognition, significantly influences students' learning and enhances their engagement. Meanwhile, an experimental study by Ode (2018) indicated that students taught with extrinsically-motivated methods significantly outperformed those taught with non-extrinsically-motivated methods, demonstrating a clear advantage for extrinsic motivation in enhancing academic performance.

Moreover, extrinsic motivation has been shown to play a crucial role in sustaining academic persistence, particularly in challenging or less engaging subjects. Research by Linnenbrink-Garcia et al. (2016) suggests that students who receive external reinforcement, such as praise from instructors or tangible rewards, are more likely to persist in difficult coursework and develop self-regulatory strategies that support long-term learning. This aligns with the findings of Iqbal et al. (2023), who emphasize that extrinsic motivators can serve as an initial trigger for engagement, which may later evolve into deeper, more intrinsic forms of motivation.

In higher education, where structured assessments, deadlines, and future career prospects exert significant pressure on students, extrinsic motivation provides necessary support for academic discipline and goal-setting. Ratinho and Martins (2023) highlighted that performance-driven academic environments, such as those found in competitive university programs, naturally integrate extrinsic motivators as key elements of student success. When students perceive external rewards as meaningful—such as obtaining high grades for graduate school admission or securing internships based on academic performance—these motivators can align with their long-term aspirations, fostering sustained academic commitment and even construct their intrinsic motivation (Bilouk, 2015; Morris et al., 2022).

Types of extrinsic motivation strategies: Higher education context

Extrinsic motivation strategies play a pivotal role in enhancing academic performance by leveraging external rewards or recognition to stimulate students' engagement and commitment to learning. These strategies can vary in terms of the type of reward, the manner of its implementation, and its relationship to the student's academic goals.

According to SDT, there are four major subtypes of extrinsic motivation namely external regulation, introjected regulation, identified regulation, and integrated regulation (Ryan & Deci, 2020). External regulation represents the most controlled form of extrinsic motivation, where behavior is driven purely by external rewards or punishments. Introjected regulation occurs when individuals act due to internal pressures like guilt or self-worth maintenance. Identified regulation involves engaging in activities because they are personally valued or considered important. Finally, integrated regulation, the most autonomous form of extrinsic motivation, occurs when behaviors are fully aligned with an individual's values and identity, though still performed for instrumental reasons rather than inherent enjoyment. These four subtypes form a variety of internalization, where the regulation of behavior progressively moves from being externally controlled to being more self-determined. This understanding has significant implications for various fields, including education, workplace motivation, healthcare, and personal development, as it suggests that supporting autonomy and facilitating internalization can lead to more sustained and effective behavioral engagement (Bandhu et al., 2024; Ryan & Deci, 2020).

Prior studies also categorized extrinsic motivations based on the nature of rewards. For instance, tangible rewards, which are the most straightforward and commonly used extrinsic motivators. These rewards often include material incentives such as scholarships, prizes, financial bonuses, or gift cards. Research has shown

that the availability of tangible rewards can significantly influence student engagement, as these rewards offer clear, immediate benefits that can increase motivation for completing assignments, meeting academic expectations, and performing well on exams (Manda, 2023; Xiao & Hew, 2023). These types of rewards often appeal to students' practical needs or desires for career advancement, as the rewards are frequently tied to real-world outcomes such as college admissions or job opportunities (Linnenbrink-Garcia et al., 2016).

Another prevalent form of extrinsic motivation strategy is social recognition and praise. Social rewards, including public acknowledgment, verbal praise, or certificates of achievement, serve as recognition for students' efforts and accomplishments (Chaudhuri, 2020). These rewards tap into the students' social and emotional needs, offering validation and a sense of belonging within the academic community. According to the SDT, external acknowledgment such as praise enhances students' sense of competence and relatedness, which in turn fosters further engagement and motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2000). The effectiveness of praise as an extrinsic motivator depends on its authenticity and specificity. Research suggests that students are more likely to respond positively to praise when it is specific, highlighting particular accomplishments or behaviors, rather than generic or overly inflated praise (Durrani et al., 2022; Hussain et al., 2023; Saeed & Zyngier, 2012). Furthermore, social recognition, such as honors and awards, can motivate students to engage in competition or strive for excellence, especially in academic environments where peer comparisons are common (Iqbal et al., 2023). Several researchers also mentioned that feedback and constructive appraisal can serves as a powerful motivator when tied to external recognition and evaluation (Chaudhuri, 2020; Morris et al., 2022; Ratinho & Martins, 2023). Although feedback itself is not always considered an extrinsic reward, when used effectively, it can provide students with essential information about their performance, helping them recognize their strengths and weaknesses and adjust their strategies accordingly.

On the other hand, performance-based incentives are also a critical category of extrinsic motivation strategies that directly link academic success to tangible rewards. These incentives are often designed to encourage students to achieve specific academic goals, such as obtaining high grades, completing assignments ahead of deadlines, or excelling in examinations (Cao, 2023; Delfino, 2019; Zainuddin, 2018). Examples of performance-based incentives include grade-based scholarships, internships linked to academic performance, and opportunities for advancement based on demonstrated proficiency or achievement (Takashiro, 2017). According to Eccles and Wigfield (2020), performance-based incentives work effectively when students believe they can succeed in their tasks and when the rewards are perceived as valuable or meaningful. For instance, offering performance-based rewards that align with students goals—such as scholarships for graduate school or internships related to their field of study—can enhance both motivation and long-term academic engagement (Morris et al., 2022).

METHODS

This study employs qualitative analysis, focusing on university students as the context subject. This study aims to explore students' experiences and perspectives on extrinsic motivation strategies in the learning process through in-depth interviews. The exploratory nature of the qualitative approach allows data collection in a broader scope (Creswell, 2003; Creswell, 2013). Specifically, this study is mainly derived from the interpretivism philosophy employing small samples but in-depth investigation, allowing the researchers to understand better the phenomenon being studied.

A total of fifteen students (denoted as Student A to Student O) were selected using purposive sampling to ensure a representative range of experiences pertinent to the research objectives. These students aged 19 to 21 years old consist of seven male and eight female respondents. Semi-structured interviews were conducted, with questions guided by five key units of analysis on how the extrinsic motivation strategies; 1) engagement and participation; 2) enthusiasm and motivation; 3) academic discipline; 4) positive learning attitude and behaviors; and 5) academic achievements and performance.

Approximately 30 minutes to 40 minutes are required to complete each interview. This duration was chosen to allow for a comprehensive exploration of participants' experiences while maintaining their attention and engagement throughout the process. The development of the interview questions is guided by Aldemir et al. (2018) and Al-Osaimi and Fawaz (2022) which help to conceptualize the research idea. The interview sessions took place at the researcher's respective offices at a higher education institution in Selangor. Several video

conferencing calls via the Google Meet application were made to conduct the interview sessions for those participants who were unable to attend the physical interview location. Upon respondents' consent, all responses were recorded using the platform function and stored in Google Drive. The Nvivo 12 and the Word application of Microsoft software were used to transcribe the interviews. Each interview was audio-recorded, transcribed verbatim, and anonymized to ensure participant confidentiality.

Data analysis was carried out in three steps according to thematic analysis procedures outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006). First, the researchers familiarized themselves with the data through repeated readings of the transcripts and initial notetaking. Second, initial codes were generated systematically across the entire dataset, collating data relevant to each code. Finally, these codes were collated into potential themes, which were then reviewed and refined to ensure they accurately represented the data and addressed the research questions. Themes were developed through repeated refinement, ensuring they accurately represented the students' perspectives. This approach facilitated an understanding of how students perceive various aspects of their educational environment if extrinsic motivation strategies are applied in the learning process.

Prior to the interviews, participants were provided with detailed information about the study's purpose, procedures, and their rights. Written informed consent was obtained, ensuring that participants understood their involvement was voluntary and that they could withdraw at any time without consequence. To protect participant confidentiality, all identifying information was removed from the interview transcriptions. Data was stored securely and only accessible to the research team. Findings were reported in aggregate form to ensure anonymity using denotation. All research procedures were conducted in accordance with the ethical guidelines and regulations set by the institution.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Extrinsic motivation strategies on students' learning experience and academic performance

The interview results reveal significant insights into the impact of extrinsic motivation strategies on students to the overall learning experience. The findings are segregated into five unit analyses: enhancing student engagement, learning experience and participation, learning enthusiasm and motivation, reinforcement of academic discipline and structure, cultivating positive learning attitudes and learner behaviors, fostering learning achievement and academic performance. The purpose of the interview was to gain in-depth information on how the implementation of extrinsic motivation strategies could influence students' motivation to achieve academic excellence. The following subsection further discusses the responses. The focus on these key responses allows this study to describe how extrinsic motivation strategies can influence the learner's inspiration in their learning process.

Enhancing student engagement, learning experience and participation

Many respondents indicated that extrinsic motivation strategies, such as reward and recognition might enhance their engagement in learning activities. Students appreciated structured incentives, including bonus marks, certificates, and tangible rewards, as these encouraged active participation in classroom discussions and coursework. For example, students became more stimulated to participate in class discussions and ask questions because their contributions were being recognized. This sense of acknowledgment was critical in encouraging students to engage more deeply in the learning process. Bedenlier et al. (2020) stated that student engagement is a multifaceted concept that encompasses how actively students participate in their learning, as demonstrated through their actions, thoughts, and emotions, and can vary in intensity. This behavior led to more frequent and meaningful interactions between students and their peers, instructors, and overall teaching and learning content toward a more responsive learning environment (Cao, 2023; Xiao & Hew, 2023). The following excerpts are examples of the responses by the respondents:

"If I know there is a specific reward or recognition tied to my performance, it gives me something concrete to work toward. It is not just about learning for learning's sake, if there is reward means there is a tangible outcome that makes me want to put in extra effort to achieve it." – Student A

"In my opinion, if there is a reward system in place, whether it is bonus points or recognition, could help students push through difficulties in learning. It is like having an extra reason to keep going when the material itself might not be interesting." – Student C

"...perhaps, when my motivation drops, especially with difficult subjects, I think the possibility of earning rewards would keep me going. It would be that extra push I need when the content itself might not be immediately engaging." – Student G

"...if there were some kind of reward system in place such as bonus points or recognition for completing extra effort or finding the solution to a problem, I believe students would be much more motivated to engage with the learning." – Student I

"I think, extrinsic motivation strategies like tangible rewards will make students more accountable to participate in class, engage with the instructor regularly, including all the teaching and learning process and would positively affect the learning process." – Student K

"Extrinsic motivation strategies such as reward will make learning more interactive. Students may participate more in discussions and stay active during class sessions to earn this reward. It would create a sense of achievement that encourages students to consistently involved in the study." – Student L

From these responses, extrinsic motivation such as reward and recognition can stimulate students to take ownership of their learning, increasing their engagement with the instructional content and the broader classroom environment. These responses align with prior research indicating that external rewards can serve as a catalyst for increasing student engagement, especially in structured learning environments where students are required to meet specific performance expectations (Manda, 2023; Ryan & Deci, 2020). This approach makes them feel valued and acknowledged for their contributions, encourages sustained participation, reinforces learning interest, and a stronger connection with the learning environment. This is also specified in Xiao and Hew (2023), who suggest that extrinsic strategies like rewards can enhance students' intrinsic motivation, behavioral engagement and cognitive engagement leading to a more meaningful and sustainable learning environment.

Learning enthusiasm and motivation

The ability of extrinsic motivation to boost the level of enthusiasm has been acknowledged in prior research (Khaliq, 2023; Legault, 2016; Liu, 2023). In this sense, a behavior can be strengthened by establishing basic stimulus-response associations between an organism and its environment. This means that the likelihood of a specific behavior recurring can be increased by providing a reward contingent upon the desired action or outcome. This creates a link in their mind between the action and the positive outcome, making them more likely to repeat the action in hopes of getting the reward (Hellín et al., 2023; Saifuddin et al., 2023). In this study, several participants described how extrinsic motivation can instill excitement in learning and transform routine academic tasks into more engaging activities. Students expressed that external rewards might not only increase their willingness to engage with course materials but could also transform their emotional relationship with learning itself. The responses showed that extrinsic motivation can become a powerful motivator to engage more deeply with the learning environment as noted in the following excerpts:

"When students get rewarded for participating or completing tasks, I think it will excite them to be more proactive, make them more disciplined in managing their time and engaging with the learning process." – Student A

"For me, extrinsic motivation can keep students improving in their learning because their efforts were being recognized, which encouraged them to stay committed." – Student B

"I think having rewards would make learning feel more like a game and less like a chore. Right now, studying sometimes feels like this obligation I have to force myself through, but if there were milestones with rewards along the way, I believe I would look forward to my study sessions." - Student D

"In my opinion, if the subject courses had concrete rewards for effort and achievement, I think my whole emotional approach to learning would change. I will feel more excited, more engaged, and probably less anxious too." – Student E

"I tend to associate studying with stress rather than enjoyment. But I think if there were any kind of extrinsic motivation along the way, I would start to associate learning with positive feelings instead. Each small achievement would become a moment of satisfaction rather than just another task completed. Over time, those positive associations could completely change how I feel about academics." – Student I

These perspectives suggest that students believe extrinsic motivation strategies could play a significant role in transforming not just their behavioral engagement with learning, but also their emotional relationship with the educational process. Most of them mentioned that this approach would help students develop a sense of learning enthusiasm and motivation by making the academic experience more engaging, enjoyable, and rewarding. Many participants expressed that they felt more encouraged to put effort into their studies when there were external motivators reinforcing their progress. This finding is consistent with prior studies (George & Supreetha, 2021; Hussain et al., 2023; Phungphai & Boonmoh, 2021; Viray-Castillejos, 2022; Xiao & Hew, 2023), which suggests that extrinsic motivation such as rewards can enhance intrinsic motivation when they are aligned with students' personal goals and interests. In this case, external motivation strategies aligned with students' desire for academic success, driving them to interact with enthusiasm and put high interest in learning.

Reinforcement of academic discipline and structure

Extrinsic motivators also played a crucial role in reinforcing students' discipline and time management skills. Participants reported that deadlines associated with graded tasks or incentives encouraged them to be more organized and responsible for their studies. Participants also suggested that extrinsic motivation strategies could be instrumental in developing better academic habits and discipline. They believed that reward systems might help them establish more structured approaches to their studies. The participants asserted that:

"I think the implementation of external motivation strategies in our courses would make me more organized with my study schedule. I would probably start planning and make a strategy to achieve the goals and attain the rewards." – Student J

"If there are any motivation strategies such as reward or recognition, it would likely teach me to be more disciplined with deadlines. When there are clear consequences and benefits, I believe I would procrastinate less and develop better time management skills. Right now, I often leave things until the last minute because there is no immediate benefit to starting early. – Student K

"I am the type of person who needs external structure to stay on track. If my courses implemented a system where completing assignments, attending study sessions, or achieving good grades earned tangible rewards, I honestly think my whole approach to studying would change. I would be more consistent instead of cramming before exams." – Student M

"I believe external motivation strategies for maintaining good grades would keep me focused and remind me to keep up with my study." – Student N

"Knowing that I would be recognized for consistent effort would encourage me to stay disciplined throughout the semester." – Student O

Some students noted that external rewards helped them prioritize academic work over distractions, enhancing their ability to set and meet personal goals. The participants also suggested that structured extrinsic motivation strategies, such as recognition and performance-based rewards, could provide ongoing reinforcement, maintaining their focus and discipline throughout their academic journey. These findings resonate with studies emphasizing the role of extrinsic motivation in fostering self-regulation and disciplined study habits, especially among students who may struggle with intrinsic motivation (Iqbal et al., 2023; Linnenbrink-Garcia et al., 2016).

These responses suggest that students believe extrinsic motivators could serve as scaffolding for developing self-regulatory behaviors that will support academic excellence.

Cultivating positive learning attitudes and learner behaviors

The goals in learning not only envisioned for merely academic excellence but also to foster positive learning attitude, personalities and aptitudes that could shape student's responsibility for their learning (Tong et al., 2022). From the interview, participants expressed how extrinsic motivation strategies would help promote a more constructive and optimistic approach to their studies and interactions. This strategy may not only boost their motivation but also encourage them to adopt a more positive mindset toward both group work and individual learning tasks. It also influenced their approach to challenges, leading them to view difficult tasks as opportunities for growth. This is reflected in the following excerpts:

"I think, external motivation strategies can help students who are passive in class. For example, if there are points for participation, it will make them prepare beforehand and perhaps change their approach to studies to become active and more participate." – Student F

"If I knew there was a reward at the end of a tough project, I would definitely push myself harder to complete it." – Student G

"Public recognition, like being named the top student in a course, would definitely encourage me to keep improving and challenging myself." – Student H

"In my opinion, when I'm motivated by rewards, I approach my assignments with a more positive mindset because I will feel like I'm working towards something meaningful, and that makes studying feel less like a chore." – Student L

"I believe students will start to see learning as something rewarding when there's external recognition. Maybe it can change our mindset and encourage us to behave more proactively in class, paying attention and engaging with the learning material." – Student M

"For me, I will see extrinsic motivation strategies as an approach to shift my attitude. Instead of seeing assignments as a burden, I may them as an opportunity to earn something more…like a reward or recognition. I think it makes me more eager to work hard." – Student O

These responses indicate that extrinsic motivation has the potential to positively alter students' attitudes towards learning. Students suggested that when rewards are attached to learning behaviors, they not only reinforce desirable actions but also foster a more proactive and positive approach to academic tasks. This finding aligns with Morris et al. (2022), who observed that extrinsic motivators can serve as catalysts for developing autonomous learning behaviors when strategically implemented. The shift from external regulation to more identified forms of motivation was evident as students described how initially reward-seeking behaviors gradually transformed into genuine academic interest and self-directed learning habits. As Ratinho and Martins (2023) argue, extrinsic motivation strategies that acknowledge students' efforts rather than merely outcomes can facilitate this transition toward more internalized motivation.

Fostering learning achievement and academic performance

Analysis of the interview data revealed that students perceived extrinsic motivation strategies as potentially beneficial for their academic performance and learning achievements. Participants expressed expectations that this approach would positively influence their grades, knowledge retention, and overall academic outcomes if implemented. Several students anticipated the connection between extrinsic motivators and improved academic performance. The following excerpts projected the responses:

"I believe my grades would improve in courses with extrinsic motivation strategies in place. If there were points for completing additional practice problems or participating in discussions, I would put in more consistent effort

throughout the semester. This would likely lead to better understanding and higher scores on assessments." – Student J

"With extrinsic motivation, I think it would help students to go beyond surface-level learning. To earn something such as rewards or recognition, students are required to work hard throughout the learning process…they need to really understand the concepts and apply them in different contexts. This would probably help them retain information better and perform well not just on tests but in practical applications too." – Student K

"In my opinion, extrinsic motivation strategies may provide clear expectations and would help me manage my time better across all my courses. For example, if I get rewarded for my performance, I would know exactly what I need to do to succeed, which would allow me to focus my energy more productively. My GPA might improve not just in one course but overall." – Student M

"Extrinsic motivation strategies would make students more committed to studying and exploring every aspect of the learning process, gain more knowledge with studying diligently, and this may boost their performance" – Student A

"I think that extrinsic motivation strategies will help students to thrive and train them to compete with their friends. It made them believe in their capacity to succeed and more likely to attempt difficult problems rather than give up." – Student C

These perspectives align with previous research suggesting the potential positive impact of extrinsic motivation on academic performance. As Ode (2018) found in his experimental study, students taught with extrinsically-motivated methods significantly outperformed those taught with non-extrinsically-motivated methods. Similarly, Chhor et al. (2024) established that external incentives can substantially enhance student engagement and academic achievement when properly implemented. The students' expectations also reflect the argument made by Linnenbrink-Garcia et al. (2016) that extrinsic motivators can foster persistence in challenging academic tasks, leading to improved performance outcomes. Moreover, the anticipated development of effective study habits and self-regulatory strategies mentioned by participants corresponds with Iqbal et al. (2023) who suggest that extrinsic motivation can trigger engagement patterns that may ultimately enhance academic achievement.

Preference for specific types of extrinsic motivation strategies

The interviews also revealed students' preferences regarding specific types of extrinsic motivators they believed would be most effective. Many expressed interests in varied opinions about which forms of external rewards would be most effective in motivating their academic engagement and performance. Among the types of extrinsic motivations preferred are tangible recognition such as certificates, extra marks and grade improvement, social recognition, prestige-based reward, financial incentives, and valuable feedback. This is expressed in the following excerpt:

"I think public recognition would be especially motivating for me. Having my work highlighted as an example or being acknowledged for my efforts would probably push me to maintain high standards even more than grade-based rewards would." – Student E

"Small tangible rewards would definitely motivate me, things like extra marks, access to special resources, or even simple certificates of achievement. These benefits would give me something specific to work on." – Student F

"I would be most motivated by tangible rewards like bonus marks or grade improvements. While recognition is nice, at the end of the day, what affects my academic standing directly matters most to me. If I know I can earn extra credit through consistent participation or active in class, I will definitely put in more effort." – Student I

"As a university student with financial responsibilities, scholarship opportunities or financial incentives tied to academic performance would be extremely motivating. These kinds of rewards address practical concerns while

encouraging academic excellence. Even small financial rewards for top performers would make me work harder." – Student J

"Public recognition from instructors would motivate me more than private rewards. If my efforts were acknowledged in front of peers or if there was a public leaderboard showing top performers, I would be driven to maintain or improve my performance. The social aspect makes the achievement more meaningful." – Student K

"I think I would be motivated by incentives tied directly to my career goals, maybe opportunities to connect with industry professionals or access to exclusive workshops. These kinds of rewards would have value beyond the course itself and would really drive me to excel." – Student N

"Detailed, constructive feedback would be more valuable to me than generic praise or simple points. When lecturers take the time to provide specific comments on my work and recognize particular strengths, it motivates me to improve further. It shows they are actually engaging with my efforts, not just assigning a number." – Student M

"I think I would respond best to a system with frequent, smaller rewards rather than just one big reward at the end of the semester. Getting that regular positive feedback would keep me engaged throughout the course instead of just pushing hard at the beginning and end." – Student O

These varied preferences align with the framework proposed by Ryan and Deci (2020), suggesting that extrinsic motivation exists on a continuum from external regulation to more integrated forms. The students' responses indicate that they recognize different types of external rewards as having varying degrees of personal significance and motivational impact. The diversity of preferences expressed by participants also indicates that the effectiveness of extrinsic motivation strategies depends highly on individual factors and contextual elements (Bandhu et al., 2024; Iqbal et al., 2023). Similarly, Liu (2023) emphasized that cultural background, personality traits, and individual learning preferences play crucial roles in determining how students respond to different extrinsic motivation approaches. The diversity of preferences highlights the importance of implementing varied approaches to extrinsic motivation to accommodate different student needs and motivational orientations.

CONCLUSION

This study explored students' perceptions of extrinsic motivation strategies and their potential role in fostering academic excellence in higher education. Through in-depth interviews with fifteen students, the research identified key insights regarding how various extrinsic motivators, such as rewards and recognition, influence student engagement, enthusiasm, academic discipline, and performance. Thematic analysis of the interviews revealed five primary themes that emerged from the data: (1) enhancing student engagement, learning experience and participation, (2) learning enthusiasm and motivation, (3) reinforcement of academic discipline and structure, (4) cultivating positive learning attitudes and learner behaviors, (5) fostering learning achievement and academic performance. These findings align with existing research that supports the use of extrinsic motivators to drive academic behaviors and engagement, while also contributing new insights into how students perceive the potential benefits of rewards in shaping their learning experience.

The findings reveal that extrinsic motivation strategies can positively impact the learning experience by enhancing student participation, reinforcing academic discipline, and improving overall academic performance. The students recognized the value of rewards in boosting motivation, especially during challenging periods or subjects. They also highlighted that extrinsic motivation could alter their attitudes towards learning, fostering a more proactive, disciplined, and enthusiastic approach to academic tasks. The perceptions shared by the participants highlight the multifaceted role they believe extrinsic motivation could play in fostering academic excellence. From their perspective, external rewards and recognition could serve not only as immediate motivators but also as tools for developing essential academic skills, building confidence, facilitating meaningful engagement with content, and preparing for future professional success. These findings suggest that thoughtfully designed extrinsic motivation strategies might be valuable components of higher education pedagogy,

particularly if they support students' transition toward more self-determined forms of motivation and academic excellence.

However, this study also acknowledges several limitations. Firstly, the sample size was relatively small, from a single higher education institution, which limits the generalizability of the findings. To encounter this limitations, future studies could expand the sample size and include a more diverse range of students across different institutions and disciplines to provide a broader understanding of how extrinsic motivation strategies are perceived in various academic contexts. Furthermore, the study primarily focused on students' subjective perceptions of extrinsic motivation, and future research could examine the actual impact of these strategies on learning outcomes through longitudinal studies or experimental designs. Another limitation is the potential bias introduced by self-reporting in interviews, which may not fully capture the complexity of students' experiences with extrinsic motivation. Employing a mixed-methods approach that integrates both qualitative and quantitative data would allow for a more holistic understanding of how extrinsic motivation strategies influence student engagement and learning outcomes. Moreover, longitudinal studies that track the long-term effects of these strategies could provide valuable insights into their sustained impact on student motivation, academic achievement, and overall performance. Besides, exploring how different types of rewards (e.g., intrinsic vs. extrinsic) influence student behavior could offer deeper aspects or strategies for optimizing engagement in various learning environments. A deeper exploration of the long-term effects of extrinsic motivation on students' academic and personal development would be valuable, especially in understanding how sustained extrinsic motivators influence the transition from external to intrinsic motivation. Including the perspective of educators would also be crucial, as their insights and experiences can provide a deeper understanding of how extrinsic motivation strategies are implemented in the classroom, their effectiveness, and the challenges faced in balancing both intrinsic and extrinsic motivators.

In conclusion, while extrinsic motivation strategies have the potential to enhance academic excellence, it is essential that educators design these strategies carefully to ensure they align with students' intrinsic goals and foster a deeper connection with the learning process. By striking a balance between external rewards and intrinsic motivation, educational institutions can create an environment that supports sustained student engagement, academic persistence, and overall success. Addressing the identified limitations and expanding the scope of future research will be crucial in fully understanding the potential of these strategies and in developing more effective, evidence-based approaches to enhancing student engagement in contemporary learning environments.

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