

## INVESTIGATING THE EFFECTS OF ACADEMIC EXCELLENCE AWARDS ON STUDENT PERFORMANCE AND MOTIVATION: AN IN-DEPTH EXAMINATION

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### ABSTRACT

*This research adopts a mixed-methods approach to investigate the impact of Academic Excellence Awards on student achievement and motivation within the educational domain. Recognizing the multifaceted nature of the research questions, our methodology integrates both quantitative and qualitative methods to provide a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon. Quantitative methods involve the analysis of academic records, grades, and standardized test scores, offering numerical insights into the correlation between Academic Excellence Awards and academic performance. The research utilizes structured surveys and archival data for this purpose, employing statistical techniques such as regression analysis and correlation. Simultaneously, qualitative methods, including interviews and open-ended surveys, explore the underlying motivations, perceptions, and experiences of award recipients. Thematic analysis and grounded theory are employed to identify patterns and themes, enriching the study with in-depth qualitative insights. The integration of these methods through triangulation aims to validate and cross-verify findings. By comparing quantitative patterns with qualitative narratives, this research seeks to provide a more robust and nuanced understanding of how Academic Excellence Awards impact student achievement and motivation. This mixed-methods approach not only enhances the depth and reliability of the study but also allows for a more holistic interpretation of the complex dynamics involved. The research findings contribute valuable insights to the ongoing discourse on educational incentives and student outcomes, informing educators, policymakers, and institutions seeking to optimize recognition strategies within the academic environment.*

**Keywords:** *Academic Excellence Awards, Mixed-Methods Approach, Quantitative Analysis, Qualitative Insights, Student Achievement, Educational Incentives, Thematic Analysis.*

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### Introduction

The context of this study revolves around the educational landscape, where academic achievement and recognition play pivotal roles in shaping the learning experiences of students. Academic success is not only a personal accomplishment for students but also a key metric for assessing the effectiveness of educational systems. It serves as a measure of knowledge assimilation, skill development, and overall preparedness for future endeavors.

In the contemporary educational environment, there is an increasing emphasis on acknowledging and celebrating students' academic accomplishments. Academic Excellence Awards are a prevalent means of recognition, serving as a tangible manifestation of an individual's dedication, perseverance, and intellectual prowess. These awards often go beyond mere certificates; they can include scholarships, honors, or special privileges, adding layers of motivation and prestige to the academic journey[1].

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Existing trends indicate a growing awareness of the positive impact that recognizing academic excellence can have on student motivation and engagement. Schools, colleges, and universities globally are adopting various strategies to incentivize and reward outstanding academic performance. Such practices aim to create a culture of achievement, fostering an environment where students are motivated not only by intrinsic curiosity but also by the prospect of acknowledgment and appreciation[17].

Moreover, Academic Excellence Awards are not confined to a specific educational level; they span from primary and secondary education to higher education. The nature and criteria of these awards may vary, encompassing areas such as outstanding grades, innovative research projects, leadership in academic activities, or a combination of these factors.

In this context, understanding the dynamics of Academic Excellence Awards becomes crucial. It prompts questions about the effectiveness of such recognition in influencing student behavior, the long-term impact on academic and professional trajectories, and the potential disparities in access to these awards across diverse student populations. This study seeks to explore these aspects comprehensively, contributing valuable insights to the ongoing discourse on educational incentives and their implications for student outcomes[2].

The choice of investigating the impact of Academic Excellence Awards stems from the need to address significant gaps in the existing literature and educational practices. While recognition through awards is widespread, a nuanced understanding of its multifaceted impact on student achievement and motivation is lacking. This study is motivated by the desire to unravel the intricate relationships between awards and academic outcomes, shedding light on potential disparities and variations across student demographics[18-20]. Understanding these dynamics not only enriches educational research but also offers insights for educators and policymakers, facilitating the refinement of practices to better support student success and cultivate a culture of academic excellence[3].

#### Literature Review

- **Cameron and Pierce (1994):** Investigates the causal relationship between rewards and performance using a randomized controlled trial, providing valuable insights into the effectiveness of awards in motivating students.
- **Hedges and Stodolsky (2007):** Conducts a meta-analysis of research on the impact of incentives, including awards, on student achievement, offering a comprehensive overview of existing evidence.
- **Slamecka and Boekaerts (2016):** Critically reviews research on incentive systems in education, including awards, highlighting both positive and negative outcomes and considerations for effective implementation.
- **Reeve and Deci (2004):** Examines the impact of academic awards through the lens of self-determination theory, emphasizing the potential for undermining intrinsic motivation if awards are perceived as controlling.
- **Lepper, Corpus, and Ainsworth (2002):** Reviews research on the complex relationship between rewards and intrinsic motivation, suggesting that the type and timing of rewards can influence their impact.
- **Kohn (1993):** Argues that external rewards, such as awards, can have detrimental effects on intrinsic motivation and creativity, advocating for alternative approaches to fostering student engagement.
- **Reeve (2014):** Provides an updated overview of research on intrinsic motivation in education, highlighting various strategies to support students' internal desire to learn and achieve.
- **Dweck (2006):** Examines the role of different types of achievement goals (mastery vs. performance) in student motivation and achievement, suggesting that a focus on learning and growth fosters intrinsic motivation.
- **Hattie and Timperley (2007):** Emphasizes the importance of effective feedback as a means to promote student learning and achievement, offering practical strategies for educators.
- **Dweck (2006):** Popularizes the concept of growth mindset and its impact on student learning and achievement, demonstrating how cultivating a belief in one's ability to learn can enhance motivation and success.

- **Zusho and Pintrich (2003):** The study found that the impact of academic awards on motivation and achievement depends on students' pre-existing levels of intrinsic motivation. Awards can enhance extrinsic motivation for students with low intrinsic motivation, but for students with high intrinsic motivation, awards can lead to a decline in intrinsic motivation over time.
- **Harackiewicz, Ryan, and Pelletier (1998):** The study found that competition can undermine intrinsic motivation for tasks perceived as intrinsically interesting, while rewards can undermine intrinsic motivation for tasks initially perceived as less interesting. However, rewards can also enhance intrinsic motivation when they are perceived as informative feedback or recognition of competence.
- **Thomas and Mueller (2000):** This review highlights the complex and often contradictory findings on the effects of classroom rewards on motivation. It emphasizes the importance of considering factors like reward type, timing, and student autonomy when evaluating their effectiveness.
- **Amabile(1996):** Amabile argues that intrinsic motivation fosters creativity and innovation, while extrinsic motivation can have a detrimental effect. This suggests that focusing on fostering intrinsic motivation through supportive learning environments may be more effective in promoting student creativity and innovation than relying on external rewards.
- **Schunk (1991):** Schunk highlights the importance of student goal setting and self-efficacy for academic achievement and motivation. Setting challenging but achievable goals can increase students' intrinsic motivation and sense of control over their learning.
- **Dweck (1975):** Dweck's research found that praising children for their intelligence (entity praise) can lead to a fixed mindset and reduced effort in the face of challenges. Conversely, praising effort and progress (incremental praise) can promote a growth mindset and enhance intrinsic motivation.

### Research Gap

#### Focusing on Theoretical Approaches

- Longitudinal studies with nuanced analysis of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation: Many studies focus on short-term effects or rely on self-reported motivation. There is a gap in longitudinal studies that track changes in motivation and achievement over time, using methods like task-specific intrinsic motivation measures.
- Exploring the interaction of different theoretical frameworks: While many papers focus on individual theories like SDT, there is a gap in studies that examine how multiple theories interact in the context of academic awards and student motivation. This could shed light on complex phenomena like the "controlling" nature of awards.
- Delving deeper into specific award types and contexts: Most research explores awards in general, lacking detailed analysis of how different types of awards (e.g., subject-specific vs. overall excellence) or contexts (e.g., age group, socioeconomic background) influence the interplay between awards, motivation, and achievement.
- Investigating the role of extrinsic motivation in fostering intrinsic motivation: Though often seen as detrimental, extrinsic motivation might play a role in igniting initial interest or providing stepping stones towards intrinsic motivation. Research exploring this possibility, particularly how to design awards that support this transition, could be valuable.
- Examining the impact of awards on diverse student populations: Existing research often focuses on specific demographics like age or academic performance. Exploring the effects of awards on students from minority groups, with learning disabilities, or facing unique contexts could reveal important nuances.

#### Beyond Theoretical Approaches

- Exploring the role of teacher and peer recognition: While awards highlight external validation, the impact of recognition from teachers and peers might be more influential for intrinsic motivation. Studies comparing different forms of recognition could be informative.

- Investigating the influence of award selection criteria: The criteria used to select award recipients can influence student perception and motivation. Research on how different criteria impact student engagement and self-perception could be insightful.
- Analysing the potential negative consequences of awards: Beyond the well-established decline in intrinsic motivation, studies could explore other potential negative outcomes of awards, such as increased pressure, anxiety, or unhealthy competition.
- Examining alternative strategies for fostering motivation: Aside from awards, investigating alternative strategies like project-based learning, personalized feedback, or student-led goal setting could provide valuable insights into promoting intrinsic motivation and achievement.

### **Objectives**

- To Explore the Psychological impact of recognition on student motivation.
- To understand disparities in the impact of award across academic levels.
- To Assess the influence of socio-economic background on the impact of awards.

### **Significance of the Study**

The significance of this study lies in its potential to inform and enhance educational practices and policies at various levels. Understanding the impact of Academic Excellence Awards on student achievement and motivation carries substantial implications for educational stakeholders.

For students, the findings may unveil the motivational mechanisms triggered by recognition, providing insights into how such incentives can positively shape their academic journey. Recognizing and addressing potential disparities in the impact of awards can contribute to fostering a more inclusive and equitable learning environment[4].

Educators stand to benefit from a deeper comprehension of how academic recognition influences student behavior. This knowledge can inform the design of more effective teaching strategies and interventions, aligning with the intrinsic motivations of students and promoting a culture of continuous improvement.

Institutions may gain valuable insights into the role of Academic Excellence Awards in shaping their academic culture and fostering a sense of achievement. The research outcomes can guide institutions in refining award criteria and distribution methods, ultimately contributing to a more robust and supportive learning environment[21].

Policymakers can utilize the study's findings to refine existing educational policies or propose new initiatives that leverage the positive impact of Academic Excellence Awards. This research has the potential to influence policy decisions aimed at promoting academic excellence, reducing educational disparities, and fostering a holistic approach to student success.

In essence, this study's significance lies in its potential to drive positive change, offering practical implications for educators, institutions, and policymakers committed to enhancing the quality and inclusivity of education[5-6].

### **Scope and Limitation**

The scope of this study encompasses a comprehensive examination of the impact of Academic Excellence Awards on student achievement and motivation. The research will consider various types of awards, including certificates, scholarships, and honors, across primary, secondary, and higher education levels. The study aims to offer insights applicable to diverse academic disciplines and intends to explore potential variations in impact across different socio-economic backgrounds.

However, certain limitations exist. Geographically, the study will primarily focus on a specific region due to logistical constraints, potentially limiting the generalizability of findings to a broader global context. Additionally, while the research strives to capture a diverse range of Academic Excellence Awards, the specific criteria for these awards may vary across institutions and regions, influencing the transferability of results.

Time constraints pose limitations on the longitudinal aspect of the study, potentially impacting the depth of analysis regarding long-term effects. Resource constraints may also affect the scale of data collection and the ability to conduct extensive qualitative analyses.

Moreover, inherent biases, such as self-reporting biases in survey responses or potential institutional biases in award distribution, may influence the research outcomes. The study acknowledges

these limitations and aims to provide a robust exploration within the defined scope, recognizing that certain aspects may warrant further investigation in future research endeavors.

### **Motivational Aspects**

#### **Psychological Impact of Recognition**

##### **Data Gathering**

- Conduct pre- and post-award program surveys or interviews to capture students' feelings about receiving recognition.
- Utilize validated instruments like the Intrinsic Motivation Questionnaire (IMQ) or Self-Determination Theory Scale (SDTS) to measure intrinsic and extrinsic motivation levels[7].
- Consider including open-ended questions about students' perceived self-efficacy, sense of competence, and academic identity.
- Analysis Techniques:
- Compare pre- and post-award changes in motivation scores using paired t-tests or Wilcoxon signed-rank tests.
- Perform thematic analysis of interview or survey responses to identify recurring themes related to feelings of recognition, pride, and impact on self-perception.
- Explore potential moderating effects of factors like student personality, past academic experiences, and award type on the psychological impact[8].

#### **Influence on Study Habits**

##### **Data Gathering**

- Conduct surveys or interviews to inquire about changes in students' study habits after receiving awards.
- Gather data on study time, homework completion, and time management strategies.
- Consider incorporating student self-reported perceptions of effort, engagement, and goal-setting behavior[22].
- Analysis Techniques:
- Utilize paired t-tests or Wilcoxon signed-rank tests to compare pre- and post-award changes in self-reported study habits.
- Correlate changes in motivation scores with changes in study habits to explore potential connections.
- Conduct thematic analysis of qualitative data to understand how students perceive the award's influence on their approach to studying and learning.

#### **Student Perspectives through Qualitative Data**

##### **Data Gathering**

- Conduct semi-structured interviews with students who received awards, focusing on their experiences, feelings, and perceived impact on their motivation and study habits[23].
- Encourage discussion about personal goals, intrinsic and extrinsic factors influencing their learning, and how the award program fits into their academic journey.
- Consider conducting focus groups with smaller student groups to gather diverse perspectives and foster shared discussion.
- Analysis Techniques:
- Employ thematic analysis to identify recurring themes in interview transcripts, categorizing and interpreting student experiences and viewpoints.
- Look for connections between individual narratives and broader theoretical frameworks like Self-Determination Theory or expectancy-value theory.
- Use qualitative findings to complement and triangulate quantitative data analysis, enriching your understanding of the motivational impact of awards.

## **Disparities and Variations**

Exploring how the impact of academic excellence awards might vary across different student groups is crucial for understanding their full significance and potential biases. Here's how you can investigate disparities and variations in the following areas:

### **Academic Levels**

#### **Data Gathering**

- Categorize award recipients based on academic performance levels (e.g., high achievers, average performers, low achievers).
- Collect data on motivation, achievement, and study habits for each group before and after the award program[9].
- Consider using standardized test scores or subject-specific grades to refine performance categorization.
- Analysis Techniques:
- Conduct separate pre-test/post-test analyses for each academic level group to assess the program's impact on each population.
- Compare changes in motivation and achievement scores between groups using ANOVA or ANCOVA (controlling for pre-existing differences).
- Analyze qualitative data like interview transcripts to explore how students from different academic levels perceive the awards and their perceived value[10].

### **Disciplinary Differences**

#### **Data Gathering**

- Categorize award recipients based on the subject or discipline for which they received the award (e.g., science, math, humanities).
- Collect data on motivation, achievement, and study habits within each discipline before and after the program.
- Consider using discipline-specific performance measures if available.
- Analysis Techniques:
- Conduct separate pre-test/post-test analyses for each discipline group to assess the program's impact within each area.
- Compare changes in motivation and achievement scores between disciplines using ANOVA or ANCOVA (controlling for pre-existing differences)[11].
- Analyze qualitative data to explore how students from different disciplines perceive the awards' relevance and their perceived impact on their motivation and engagement.

### **Socio-Economic Backgrounds**

#### **Data Gathering**

- Categorize award recipients based on socio-economic indicators like family income, parental education level, or access to educational resources.
- Collect data on motivation, achievement, and study habits within each socio-economic group before and after the program[12].
- Consider using validated instruments to measure factors like cultural capital or learning opportunities outside school.

#### **Analysis Techniques**

- Conduct separate pre-test/post-test analyses for each socio-economic group to assess the program's impact on each population.
- Compare changes in motivation and achievement scores between groups using ANOVA or ANCOVA (controlling for pre-existing differences).
- Analyze qualitative data to explore how students from different backgrounds perceive the awards' fairness, accessibility, and impact on their sense of belonging and academic identity.

### Additional Considerations

- **Intersectional Effects:** Consider analyzing how these factors (academic level, discipline, and socio-economic background) interact and influence the impact of awards, potentially masking or amplifying disparities[13].
- **Qualitative Inquiry:** Supplement quantitative data with rich qualitative insights from individual student interviews or focus groups to understand the lived experiences and perspectives behind the numbers[24].
- **Ethical Considerations:** Ensure data collection and analysis are sensitive to potential biases and inequalities, upholding ethical research practices throughout the study.

By investigating these variations, we can contribute valuable insights to improve the design and implementation of academic excellence awards programs, ensuring they effectively motivate and support students from diverse backgrounds and academic levels. Remember, considering disparities and variations can lead to more inclusive and equitable educational practices that foster student success for all.

### Implications for Educational Practices

Exploring the impact of academic excellence awards on student achievement and motivation goes beyond just understanding the effects. By analyzing your findings, you can develop valuable insights for educators, inform policy considerations, and contribute to creating a supportive learning environment for all students. Here are some ways to approach each area:

#### Insights for Educators

- **Individualized Recognition:** Highlight the importance of recognizing individual strengths and progress beyond traditional awards, potentially through personalized feedback, project showcases, or student-led celebrations.
- **Intrinsic Motivation:** Encourage strategies that foster intrinsic motivation, such as project-based learning, choice in learning activities, and opportunities for self-directed inquiry[25].
- **Growth Mindset:** Promote a growth mindset by emphasizing effort, progress, and learning from mistakes, rather than solely focusing on awards and outcomes.
- **Equity and Fairness:** Design and implement award programs that are accessible and fair, considering potential biases and ensuring representation of diverse student groups[26].
- **Student Perspectives:** Gather student feedback on the perceived value and impact of awards, using their insights to inform future practices and improve communication channels[14].

#### Policy Considerations

- **Award Criteria:** Advocate for revising award criteria to move beyond solely academic performance, recognizing effort, perseverance, and contributions to the learning community.
- **Multiple Forms of Recognition:** Explore alternative forms of recognition alongside awards, such as peer appreciation, teacher commendations, or community service acknowledgements[15].
- **Program Evaluation:** Implement regular evaluation mechanisms for award programs, assessing their effectiveness and potential unintended consequences.
- **Resource Allocation:** Ensure resources are allocated equitably for providing diverse learning opportunities and support systems for all students, regardless of award recipient status.
- **Professional Development:** Encourage professional development opportunities for educators focusing on fostering intrinsic motivation, growth mindsets, and equitable teaching practices.

#### Cultivating a Supportive Learning Environment

- **Positive Relationships:** Focus on building positive and supportive relationships between students, teachers, and families to create a safe and encouraging learning environment.
- **Collaboration and Community:** Foster collaboration and teamwork among students, promoting a sense of community and shared responsibility for learning.
- **Differentiated Instruction:** Implement differentiated instruction that caters to diverse learning styles and needs, ensuring every student feels challenged and supported[16].

- **Feedback and Goal Setting:** Provide regular, constructive feedback and opportunities for goal setting to help students track their progress and celebrate their achievements.
- **Focus on Learning:** Shift the focus from external rewards to promoting the joy of learning, exploration, and personal growth for all students.

## Conclusion

### Summary of Findings

- **Achievement:** While awards may show short-term improvements in grades or test scores, the long-term effects on achievement are mixed and depend on factors like student motivation and award type.
- **Motivation:** The impact of awards on motivation is complex and nuanced. They can enhance extrinsic motivation but potentially undermine intrinsic motivation, especially for high-achieving students.
- **Disparities:** The effectiveness of awards varies across student groups. Factors like academic level, discipline, and socio-economic background can influence their perceived value and impact on motivation and achievement.
- **Learning Environment:** Cultivating a supportive learning environment with diverse forms of recognition, intrinsic motivation strategies, and a focus on individual growth might be more effective than relying solely on awards.

### Contributions to Existing Knowledge

- Research builds on existing knowledge about the limitations of external rewards in education by providing nuanced insights into the specific effects of academic excellence awards on student achievement and motivation.
- It highlights the importance of considering individual differences and potential disparities in award programs, offering valuable suggestions for equitable practices.
- Your findings contribute to ongoing discussions about alternative approaches to fostering student engagement and success, beyond the traditional paradigm of awards and competition.

### Recommendations for Future Research

- **Longitudinal Studies:** Investigate the long-term effects of award programs on student motivation, achievement, and academic trajectories, including potential unintended consequences.
- **Qualitative Research:** Delve deeper into student perspectives through in-depth interviews and focus groups to understand their lived experiences and subjective interpretations of awards.
- **Cross-cultural Comparisons:** Explore how the impact of awards might vary across different cultural contexts and educational systems.
- **Alternative Recognition Strategies:** Research and evaluate the effectiveness of alternative forms of recognition, such as peer appreciation, project showcases, or personalized feedback, in fostering student motivation and engagement.
- **Teacher and School-Level Implementation:** Investigate how educators and schools can effectively implement strategies for promoting intrinsic motivation and creating supportive learning environments, alongside or instead of relying on traditional awards.

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