

Student's Perceptions of Reward-Based Systems and Their Impact on Participation in Physical Education

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Abstract: Reward-based systems are widely used in educational settings to encourage student participation and engagement. In Physical Education (PE), rewards such as additional grades, incentives, and teacher recognition may influence students' motivation to participate in class activities. This study explored students' perceptions of reward-based systems and their impact on participation in Physical Education classes. A qualitative phenomenological research design was employed to understand students' lived experiences with reward-based systems. Ten college students enrolled in Physical Education courses at a State University in the Philippines participated in one-on-one semi-structured interviews. Participants were selected through convenience sampling. Data were analyzed using Braun and Clarke's thematic analysis. The findings revealed that students generally viewed reward-based systems positively. Rewards were perceived as important sources of motivation that increased students' willingness to participate and exert greater effort during PE activities. Grades, incentives, and teacher recognition emerged as the most meaningful forms of rewards. Students reported that both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation influenced their participation. While rewards provided additional encouragement, personal interest, enjoyment, and learning goals also contributed to their engagement. Moreover, participants indicated that they would still participate even in the absence of rewards because of academic requirements, personal responsibility, and peer support. However, some students experienced pressure when rewards were linked to group performance and expectations. The study concludes that reward-based systems can effectively enhance student participation and engagement in Physical Education. While extrinsic rewards serve as valuable motivational tools, intrinsic motivation remains essential for sustaining long-term involvement in physical activities. A balanced integration of both motivational approaches is recommended to promote meaningful participation in PE classes.

Keywords: Physical Education, reward-based system, student participation, intrinsic motivation, extrinsic motivation.

1. INTRODUCTION

Physical education plays a vital role in students' physical, mental, social, emotional, and total health. It primarily focuses on improving an individual's physical fitness and health awareness through the integration of diverse physical activities and exercises. Physical Education encourages lifetime physical activity and health well-being (World Health Organization, 2024). In the Philippines, the Commission of Higher Education (CHED) memorandum no.75 series of 2017 and Department of Education curriculum stated the importance of PE to individuals.

Despite the relevance and benefits of physical education, many students lack interest and motivation to participate in P.E subjects. One factor will be academic pressure that leads to prioritizing of another major subject than PE that can result in decreasing the engagement when participating in PE Classes. An existing study mentioned that physical education participation is strongly influenced by motivation, Perceived competence and Environmental support (Martin et al. 2017). A student participation in PE class has been linked into motivation specially the factors intrinsic and extrinsic to maintain the classroom engagement. Some students do not actively participate in physical education classes due to different factors such as lack of self-confidence, fear of instructors and peer pressure. These barriers that can affect the students' involvement and participation in physical education. The study emphasized that students become less engaged and less willing to participate in Physical Education classes due to these barriers (Gapasin et al. 2025).

Teachers employ reward-based systems to encourage positive conduct and performance among pupils. Students were more likely to be intrinsically motivated to participate in physical education programs because they exhibited high levels of both extrinsic and intrinsic motivation (Martin et al., 2017). When students achieve goals or demonstrate effort, they can be rewarded with points, certificates, praise, extra privileges, or prizes. According to Martin et al. (2017), intrinsic and extrinsic motivations have a significant relationship with student participation in Physical Education Classes. Furthermore, it underlines how motivational factors might influence students' physical activity engagement.

When it comes to motivation, extrinsic rewards have a relationship with intrinsic motivation in student engagement, the Self Determination Theory (SDT) comes into play (Deci & Ryan, 2012). This is how students respond to a reward-based system if it improves their performance in Physical Education class. Shuhidan et al. (2025) showed that extrinsic incentive had a favorable impact on students' classroom participation and academic outcomes. The study also showed that extrinsic motivation, such as physical rewards, recognition, incentives, and constructive feedback, might influence participation and involvement.

The aim of the research is to explore how students perceive reward-based systems and how it affects their engagement in physical activity. However, existing studies about reward-based systems in participation in class remain gaps because most of those studies are focused on instructor perceptions or behavioral outcomes, leaving a significant gap in understanding how students perceive such systems. Furthermore, important tensions remain unresolved, little is known about how students perceive the balance of extrinsic rewards and intrinsic motivation, let alone how these beliefs influence their long-term participation in physical activity.

2. METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study employed a phenomenological, qualitative research approach to evaluate learners' perceptions of reward-based systems and how they affect their participation in Physical Education. A phenomenological research design is suited for this study because it allows researchers to delve deeply into how students perceive rewards. It also describes how such rewards seem to affect motivation and involvement, as well as how students interpret the entire system in Physical Education classes. The researchers conducted one-on-one interviews to obtain detailed accounts of the people' thoughts, feelings, and experiences. This technique helps academics have a better grasp of the learner's perspectives and allows them to identify common meanings and themes associated with reward-based systems in Physical Education.

Data Collection

The qualitative data were obtained through one-on-one interviews with the study's participants. The researchers will develop semi-structured questions to help them investigate students' perceptions of reward-based systems and how they affect their involvement in Physical Education. The researchers conducted the interview to learn about the students' experiences and perspectives on the usage of reward systems to encourage participation in physical education programs. Each participant in this study had an individual interview planned. Before beginning the interview, the researchers requested permission and explained the goal of the study. To assure the accuracy of the acquired data, the participants' responses were documented in written and audio form with informed consent. All information acquired for the study were kept confidential

and utilized exclusively for the purposes of the research study. Following the interview, the researchers assessed the individual responses of the participants in order to organize and interpret the essential data for the study.

Participants

The participants were the college PE students from a State University in the Philippines. This study used a convenience sampling, a non-probability sample strategy in which respondents are chosen based on their availability and proximity to the researchers (Etikan et al., 2016). This technique was chosen because the target respondents are easily accessible inside the school setting, and the study requires participants to have direct experience with the reward-based system in Physical Education.

Participants are State University students studying Physical Education in the academic year 2025-2026. These kids were chosen because they can provide information about their perceptions of reward-based systems and how they affect involvement in physical activity. The researchers used convenience sampling to acquire data from students who have used reward-based systems.

Data Analysis

This study utilized Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis to examine qualitative interview data for the study "Students' Perceptions of Reward-Based Systems and Their Impact on Physical Education Participation." Researchers will transcribe and review all interviews multiple times to gain familiarity and document initial observations. Then, check for initial codes, themes, examine themes, define and label themes, and write reports to better comprehend the qualitative data from the interviews. Braun and Clarke (2006) present a thematic analysis approach that begins with familiarization, which requires immersing oneself in the data to build comprehension and preliminary insights. Second, developing initial codes requires coding the data to emphasize relevant parts of it. When developing themes, the initial codes are analyzed to identify emerging topics. Reviewing the selected themes requires verifying that each theme is consistent, distinct, and corresponds to both the data and the larger set of data. Defining and naming themes requires defining the identified theme and giving it a suitable name. Finally, writing up comprises producing the report and analyzing the data. These codes are classified based on students' opinions of a reward-based system for participation in PE classes. Existing literature will be used to support the emerging themes in each code, ensuring consistency and making a fresh addition to the area.

Ethical Considerations

To ensure the credibility and dependability of the study's conclusions, the researcher employed the following strategies: The researcher explains the research purpose, interview duration, data usage, and confidentiality measures in a language/dialect that the participant understands (such as Tagalog, Ilocano, or English), then confirms consent verbally and documents it, with written consent preferred and audio/video recording of consent permitted only with express permission. The researcher ensures that the data appropriately reflects the participants' perspectives by using direct quotations, extended contact with the data, and member verification, in which participants validate the accuracy of their claims. Transferability includes detailed details of the research setting, participants, and conclusions, allowing other researchers to determine whether the findings may be applied in other contexts. Furthermore, the researcher uses a systematic and well-documented data collection and analysis approach to ensure that the study can be replicated under identical conditions.

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This part deliberated the result and discussion of the study based on gathered data and responses. The findings were categorized according to the Statement of the Problem, focusing the student's perception on reward-based system in physical education, Types of meaningful rewards for students, perceive balance intrinsic and extrinsic motivation among students, student experience when reward is absent, rewards as source of pressure or encouragement.

STUDENTS PERCEPTION ON REWARD-BASED SYSTEM IN PHYSICAL EDUCATION

Theme 1: Reward-Based System foster motivation

Reward-Based System foster a motivation into students and keep them motivated in activities;

"It seems motivating, especially when the subject is complicated and something is needed to encourage students." P5

"Rewards become a motivation for participating." P9

"It is more motivating when there is something stated or mentioned, like additional grades or points." P1

These responses reflect that the students have a positive perception on reward-based systems and also the reward-based system as a motivation for students to increase the level of participation in Physical Education classes.

These findings align with the existing research that found participation influenced by motivation (Martin et al, 2016). Similarly, the study found the interest and motivation significantly connected with participation (Muhamad Uyun et al. 2022). Shows Reward can increase the level of participation of students in Classes. In addition, the Self Determination Theory of Ryan and Deci (2000) people are often moved by external factors such as reward systems, grades, and evaluation.

Theme 2: Willingness to Participate

Students feel willingness to participate when reward-based system was involves:

"I become more eager to participate in activities because there are incentives or additional grades." P2

"Well, in a reward-based system, I become even more encouraged to participate because those are extra points." P8

"Yes, because in a reward-based system, I become even more encouraged." P6

Students emphasized the reward-based system can create an eagerness to students to participate more in their Physical Education activities. This result was aligned with the study of Martin et al. (2017) the students with motivation were more likely to participate in activities.

TYPES OF MEANINGFUL REWARDS FOR STUDENTS**Theme 1: Grades as participation driven**

Grades as reward can start an engagement in participation of students in PE Activities:

"Because those are additional grades, they serve as an incentive to achieve higher grades." P2

"Because the majority, almost everyone, wants additional grades." P1

"For me, I become more motivated when grades are involved, if grades are involved, you become more eager to attain that certain thing." P10

Responses indicate that grades act as an extrinsic motivation that encourages students to participate more actively in class. Participants associated "plus grades" with an opportunity to achieve higher academic performance, making them more eager to engage in activities. Statements such as "panghatak para sa mas mataas na grades" and "mas gaganahan kasi pag may grades" suggest that students become more motivated when participation is connected to rewards or additional grades. This implies that participation is often driven by the desire for academic incentives and recognition.

There are similarities in existing studies which discuss how grades function as external motivators that influence students' academic behavior and participation. Their study explained that students often become more engaged when classroom activities are connected to grades and academic rewards (Martin et al, 2017; Chamberlin et al, 2018)

Theme 2: Teacher Recognition

Teachers' recognition also plays a vital role and has a powerful impact beside different rewards to engage the student interest to participate:

"Recognition, because my activeness in class is being recognized." P5

"Recognition, because it motivates me in P.E. class." P9

The above statements show that the practice of recognition leads to students perceived competent and included. Whereas extrinsic motivation is dependent on tangible incentives, teacher recognition leads to emotional affirmation and effortful participation. This finding supports the recognition that teachers highly influenced the perceived competence and encouragement of the students. (Santos et al., 2022).

PERCEIVED BALANCE INTRINSIC AND EXTRINSIC MOTIVATION AMONG STUDENTS

Theme 1: Balance between extrinsic and intrinsic among student perception

Intrinsic and extrinsic motivation play a significant role in students' participation in physical education classes, as these factors influence their willingness and engagement in activities. The participants shared their perspective of how they balance their extrinsic and intrinsic motivation in participating P.E classes. The participant statements revealed that the source of their motivations comes from both of their personal interest and extrinsic reward. The intrinsic motivation provides a personal interest while extrinsic motivation serves as additional encouragement to participate. The participant stated the following:

"Extrinsic, because even if intrinsic motivation is already there, you become more motivated to participate when there is a reward." P2

"It is also extrinsic. Although I already have my own motivation to do it, it feels like an added goal." P7

"For me, it is intrinsic because I enjoy it more even if it is just normal, but it is more enjoyable when there are rewards." P10

These responses indicated that students' do not rely solely on one source, both intrinsic motivation and extrinsic reward influenced their participation in Physical Education classes. The student perceive that the two motivators work together to increase their engagement and participation in activities. Additionally, it serves as their encouragement to involve themselves in P.E classes. While intrinsic motivation provides the student an enjoyment and personal fulfillment to engage, extrinsic motivation serves as positive reinforcement to increase their commitment and dedication to participation. This suggest that a balanced between the two motivational approaches can positively impact the student's participation in Physical Education classes.

The result of the study revealed that students' who participate in physical education classes are both intrinsically and extrinsically motivated (Ferraz et.al 2021; Santos, 2024). It indicated that the two motivational approaches can positively influence student engagement and participation.

Theme 2: Impact of Reward Influence on Students' Extrinsic and Intrinsic Motivation

Rewards could be very enticing, especially if it will benefit us greatly. Knowing that you will be rewarded you will also be motivated to at least participate or even exert effort as much as you can:

"For example, in P.E., when we had to participate in a dance activity and it was announced that there would be additional grades, I became more motivated to participate because it also served as an incentive." P1

"Intrinsic, you are still required to do it or participate in class in order to pass because rewards are not always there." P2

"Extrinsic. Of course, I become more motivated to do the things I want and achieve my goal." P6

"For me, it is extrinsic because that is where I feel more motivated, since I can really feel that I will excel especially when I have a goal that I need to achieve." P8

"Intrinsic, because it makes me happy. Besides, rewards are not always there to motivate you." P1

Students emphasized that rewards such as grades, plus points, recognition and other incentives encourage them to become more active in physical activities. Most of the students identified themselves as being extrinsically motivated since rewards helps them push to achieve their goals, participate more confidently, and perform

better in class activities. On the other hand, some participants also emphasized the importance of intrinsic motivation, discussing that participation should not always depend on rewards, but also with the personal satisfaction, self-interest, and also self-enjoyment. Additionally, there responses suggest that rewards have a positive impact on students' willingness to participate, especially when the tasks are challenging or needed extra effort. However, it also indicates that students recognize the importance of developing inner motivation since rewards are not always present.

The findings aligned with the result that rewards may be conceptualized as either extrinsic incentives (extrinsic rewards) or internal positive feelings that arise from the learning process or from knowledge acquisition itself (intrinsic rewards) (Bardach & Murayama 2025).

STUDENT EXPERIENCE WHEN REWARD IS ABSENT

Theme 1: Active Participation Without Incentives

Absence of reward-based system in PE Class does not really affect the student participation:

"It is just normal. I still participate, but I am more motivated to participate when there are additional incentives or grades." P1

"It is just normal because participation is required in order to pass. Rewards simply make you put in double the effort to obtain them." P2

"It is just normal. After all, you study not only for that reason but also to learn." P4

"It is just normal, but I still do what needs to be done." P10

Students see PE participation as "normal" and do it to pass and learn, but say incentives or grades make them "more motivated" and put in "double the effort." This shows compliance and learning value sustain participation without rewards, while external rewards increase effort. The findings match recent work that expanding student "interest and university engagement in physical education" drives participation (Lobo, Martin, et al., 2024). Thus, rewards boost effort, but intrinsic and required motives keep students engaged even without them.

Theme 2: Peer Support

Even reward is absence the factor of peer support can also encourage student to participate in class:

"Yes, of course. I have friends who are always with me, so when they participate in class, I participate as well." P3

"Yes, there are other people that willing to participate even without rewards" P10

Participants emphasized even without the factor of reward-based system there are another factor that can affect the engagement in class. Participation can still present and more meaningful when students feel peer support (Santos et al. 2021; Gapasin et al 2025).

REWARDS AS SOURCE OF PRESSURE OR ENCOURAGEMENT

Theme 1: Rewards can create pressure

Pressure comes from reward when it comes to doubting the students themselves ability to do it:

"Sometimes it's really pressure-filled, especially during group activities, because I get nervous that the reward might not be achieved because of me." P7

"But the pressure weighs more, because for example in what you're going to do, it feels like you weren't able to give your best, so the points got wasted." P6

Based on the responses of the participants, many of them experience pressure because they are afraid of making mistakes that may affect their rewards, grades, or group performance. One participant shared that they feel nervous especially during group activities because they might be blamed if their group does not receive the reward. Another participant stated that the pressure becomes stronger when they feel that they were not able to give their best and that the points might just go to waste. These responses show that rewards and expectations can create pressure among students while participating in Physical Education activities.

The findings of the study are supported by the study of Putwain and Best (2011) and Martin and Santos (2019), which explained that pressure, fear of failure, and high expectations can increase students' anxiety during school activities. The study stated that students tend to feel nervous and worried when they think their performance may affect their grades or outcomes. This supports the present study because the participants shared that they experienced pressure during Physical Education activities, especially when rewards and group performance were involved. Their fear of making mistakes and disappointing their group members increased their feelings of pressure and nervousness.

Theme 2: Reward as positive reinforcement

Rewards such as Plus points, Grades, and Recognition as a tool to increase the level of motivation and encouragement among the perception of students about reward-based system:

"Mostly, they encouraged me to do my best when executing that task" P8

"Participation becomes more engaging, for example, every performance has plus grades, of course you'd be more encouraged to participate" P1

"It's more encouraging to participate when there's a reward" P2

"If I know there are incentives for what we will do, I will put in double the effort." P3

Students expressed that incentives, such as additional grades or rewards, increase their engagement and willingness to perform tasks effectively. With the statements of students showing that rewards motivate students to give their best performance. further support this idea, according to the study of Dalibaevich (2024), positive reinforcement through rewards and incentives enhances students' engagement, participation, and motivation in learning activities. The study emphasized that rewards encourage students to exert greater effort and improve performance, supporting the findings of the present study where participants expressed that rewards motivated them to participate actively and give their best effort in PE activities.

4. CONCLUSION

The study's findings revealed that students have a positive attitude toward the reward-based system used in Physical Education classes. For students, the most relevant rewards are grades, plus points, incentives, and instructor recognition. Grades and recognition were identified as the most significant rewards because they provide encouragement, academic incentives, and achievement. These are great motivating strategies because they improve students' drive to actively participate and engage in Physical Education programs. Students perceived the rewards as a source of encouragement, increasing their willingness and motivation to participate in activities. These findings suggest that reward-based systems are effective extrinsic motivators that can increase students' participation and engagement in Physical Education programs.

Furthermore, the study found that students' involvement in Physical Education classes was positively influenced by both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. The intrinsic motivation provides personal fulfillment and enjoyment, while extrinsic motivation serves as positive reinforcement to increase their participation and involvement in activities. Overall, the study concludes extrinsic motivation has a favorable influence in participation, however the intrinsic motivation also plays a role in student participation.

5. RECOMMENDATION

The result of this study should be treated with caution due to small sample size. For the future researcher more focus to deep dive about the balances of extrinsic and intrinsic motivation in one student, to strengthen more the consistency of filled gaps of the study

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