
| RESEARCH ARTICLE**Paper Title:****REWARDING PRODUCTIVE EMPLOYEES IN PRIVATE SCHOOLS OF NEPAL****Dhanapati Subedi, Anjana Malla, Dolaraj Bhandari and Laxmi Shrestha Nirajan Thapa and Nilam Shrestha**

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| ABSTRACT

A motivated and enthusiastically engaged employee is crucial in educational institutions, just as it is in any other sector. However, the teaching profession in many countries attracts a lower salary compared to other professions. Teachers in private schools in Nepal often complain that the reward system has not been linked to improving their performance, and they also question the fairness of the evaluation system used for rewarding them.

| KEYWORDS

Employee performance, Pay, Reward, Intrinsic Reward, Extrinsic Reward

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A motivated and enthusiastically engaged employee is crucial in educational institutions, just as it is in any other sector. However, the teaching profession in many countries attracts a lower salary compared to other professions. Teachers in private schools in Nepal often complain that the reward system has not been linked to improving their performance, and they also question the fairness of the evaluation system used for rewarding them.

Although efforts have been made gradually to understand the effectiveness of teacher rewards. The effectiveness of reward and recognition programs depends on how institutions establish reward criteria or schemes to link reward to performance and institutional productivity. Sometimes, monetary incentives work well in motivating teachers. At other times, non-monetary also appears promising. This study, therefore, aimed to investigate the criteria for rewarding productive employees in private schools in Nepal. Employing a qualitative research design, this study collected data from four participants purposively selected from four different private schools through in-depth interviews. The collected information was coded, categorized, and analyzed to identify patterns and develop themes. The meanings were interpreted using the lens of Maslow's motivation theory—the hierarchy of needs. The research concluded that private schools in Nepal have been using both performance-based and traditional pay as criteria for rewarding employees. It is hoped that the findings of this study will be helpful to Principals, managers, in-charges, Parent-Teachers Committees, and policymakers in developing informed policies or decisions on how the reward system should be implemented.

Background of the Study:

Nepal is a developing country in South Asia, renowned for its diverse geography, rich culture, and ancient significance. The school education sector plan (2022-2032) has envisioned mainly two types of schools in Nepal. They are private and public schools. Private schools are referred to as institutional schools. They are privately run and fee-paying schools. The public schools are government-funded. They are more affordable compared to private schools.

Individual performance in the private schools has long been a topic of discussion. Rewards are designed to motivate employees for better performance (Flynn, 1998). Rewards increase an employee's motivation to perform, leading to higher performance (Zigon, 1998). The primary goal of any reward and recognition program is to enhance employee performance.

In this connection, rewards are given to employees to elevate their performance (Jimenez, 2002). Similarly, Armstrong (2001) categorizes rewards as comprising compensation, benefits, and career incentives. He also emphasizes the importance of reward as a system that encompasses non-monetary incentives, such as recognition, praise, achievement, responsibility, and professional growth, as well as performance management processes in many cases.

In the education system, there are commonly three reward models. The merit-based model, performance-based, and collective effort-based (Odden & Kelley, 2002). In this regard, Bett et al (2013), Ismail (2014), Alam (2011), Kirimi, Gikunda, Obara, and Kibett (2013), Armstrong (2009), and Lindbald (2008) argue that pay has to be linked with employees' performances, either based on their merit, performance or collective effort to make something happen in the organization. However, in the education sector, the debate and discussion center on performance-based rewards to improve the overall education system. High-performing teachers add value to schools; therefore, they should be rewarded to maintain their legacy. Highly motivated teachers perform well to improve students' learning. This is why they are treasures to any school. Hence, possible measures are to be taken to retain them, including implementing an attractive school-based reward system. However, a reward system that works in one institution may not be effective in all other institutions. Thus, the management must know how to structure the rewards beforehand to avoid wasting resources.

A social psychologist, Thomas Maslow, developed a hierarchy of needs theory (Huffmire & Holmes, 2006). His hierarchy of needs attempts to explain a series of progressive needs, ranging from physiological to self-actualization. Maslow's hierarchy of needs is applied to the school environment to motivate employees from their initial recruitment and selection through training and development. It is often tricky to determine what is more beneficial for motivating productive employees in a school setting. It would be helpful to understand which criteria, rewards, and recognition will prove most effective in cultivating motivation among the teaching staff (Webb, Perry, & Fennelly, 2015).

Problem Statement

Rewards have been given due emphasis to motivate employees and enhance an organization's productivity. Many teachers working in private schools in Nepal are demotivated. The reason for this could be that they are not linking their performance to a rewards system. In many schools, teachers often perform more than required without any incentives or motivation. Low pay and a lack of proper motivation through rewards compel a large proportion of teachers to earn a secondary income from private tutoring and other activities. Consequently, standards of professional conduct and performance are low and falling in many private schools. Despite the efforts of private school management to reward teachers for providing better services to students, the teachers do not seem to exhibit signs of being well-rewarded workers. As a result, problems such as high labour turnover, teachers working part-time in two or more schools, late arrival, and a lack of commitment to the job, which consequently result in poor performance by teachers and, hence, students. In the context of Nepal, the following arguments have yet been unanswered. They are: how do principals or managers describe the rewarding productive employees in their schools in Nepal? What criteria are set by them in rewarding the productive employees? How influential are the requirements of rewarding employees in motivating teaching staff in their school? How are these reward criteria effective in catering to the different hierarchy of needs of teaching staff? Quantitative researches on relationship between effects of satisfaction packages on employee performance, employee turnover reduction and extrinsic rewards, factors driving employee salaries, pay factors and employee satisfaction have been conducted (Nick, 2010; Halefom, 2019); Pratik, 2012; Thomas, 2012) have conducted researches on employee reward motivation. However, due to the dearth of literature, very little is known about the schemes and criteria of reward and recognition within and across countries. To date, no qualitative study has been undertaken to explore the criteria for rewarding productive employees in schools in Nepal. This raises curiosity, and hence the need to explore the criteria for rewarding employees in private schools is felt.

Purpose of the Study:-

The purpose of this research is to explore the criteria for rewarding productive employees in private schools. In addition, this study aims to explore the perceptions of principals and managers regarding the reward system and its role in motivating teachers.

Research Questions

Based on the above purpose, this study is guided by the following research questions.

- How have the School Management Committees (SMCs) of private schools in Nepal established criteria for rewarding their school employees?
- How do principals and managers perceive the employee reward system in private schools?

Methodology:-

This study employed a qualitative approach to understand the state of criteria for rewarding productive employees in private schools from the perspectives of the in-charges and principals who work to coordinate the functioning of these employees. The research design is qualitative and based on an interpretative approach. We selected four participants for this study. They were two principals, one manager, and one in charge of private schools in Nepal. They were selected purposively because they met the purpose of our study. Before conducting the in-depth interview, consent was obtained from each participant. Information from participants was collected through in-depth interviews, multiple visits to their locations, and several meetings. Altogether, we conducted five cycles of interviews with each participant in this study. The collected information was stored and organized, creating separate files on the computer. We collected information in the Nepali language and then translated it into English. Each participant's information was transcribed and coded to understand the cruxes expressed by the participants in their responses. Based on code themes, participants' information and interpretation were presented. All these themes were presented with information, and meanings were derived by interpreting them through signature literature and merging relevant theories.

Key Insights

The study aimed to explore the criteria for rewarding productive employees in private schools, as well as participants' perceptions of the reward schemes in these schools. The four participants who were interviewed are the in-charges, managers, and principals of four private schools – two from Lalitpur district and one each from Kathmandu and Kavre. The total number of employees in these schools ranges from 25 to 365. The descriptions of the participants and the criteria for rewarding their productive employees that they have shared during their in-depth interview with the researchers are described in the following themes:

School policy guides the criteria for rewarding employees.

All four participants acknowledged that the framework or criteria for rewarding their productive employees is determined by the policy (including bylaws and regulations) of their respective schools. The principal of School A, who heads an institution with more than 370 students, shared that they have a separate 'Staff Evaluation Policy' guided by the school's mission and vision. The employees are evaluated annually. During the evaluation, an employee is assessed by themselves and then by the principal. Highlighting the performance review, the principal of School A shared, " We evaluate the performance of our teachers very differently. Unlike in other schools, the academic results of students carry only about ten percent of the weight in the performance review of teachers. Ninety percent weightage has been given to the development of students' character building. This means, teachers who perform well in building characters like honesty, morality, ethics, faithfulness, and creativity in students deserve a better chance for reward in our schools." The principal also stressed that when teachers are provided with training opportunities, the training firm also reviews the teacher every five years and submits a report to the principal.

School A is a not-for-profit institution, and approximately forty percent of its students belong to disadvantaged communities. Hence, the principal accepted that, given the students' background in the schools, pressure to achieve excellent results is unusual. It is also because they never sell the results in the market to attract students. Instead, they are focused on making students with good character. The principal of School A emphasized that he has understood that employees in the teaching profession care least about monetary value. What they value most is personal and professional growth. Hence, School A has been practicing rewards such as salary increases and grade increments, as well as opportunities to participate in long and expensive training workshops, for the most deserving teachers and employees. Additionally, titles like Teacher-Staff of the Year have been awarded to the most productive employees. Similarly, free education is provided to the employees' children (only two), as well as short training and workshop opportunities, medical insurance, thank-you notes, birthday gifts, and class teacher allowances.

School B, too, has a by-law that guides the reward criteria for employees. According to the by-law, teachers are evaluated in various areas, including teaching methods, lesson plans, classroom performance, students' achievement, engagement in school activities, number of leaves taken, relationship with the school administration, qualifications, and training. Teaching employees in School B are evaluated from appraisals – self-appraisal and appraisal from the principal every six months. The principal of School B confidently shared, " Our school by-laws govern everything in our school, and the same law also determines HR criteria." School B honors the best-performing employee with a monthly cash bonus of Rs. 1,000. Similarly, the productive employees are given a 'feast' to honor their hard work.

Similarly, School C, an institution with more than 300 employees, has established criteria for rewarding its employees in accordance with the school's policy. This school also evaluates its teaching employees every six months with an appraisal form. Specifically, teachers are evaluated, as guided by the policy, based on the academic results of the students in their respective subjects, their conduct in the school, and students' feedback. The most productive employees are rewarded with monetary benefits and other forms of recognition, such as in-charge status.

The principal of School D also acknowledged that school regulation is the bedrock for any kind of reward, compensation, and other recognition of employees. He added, "We are guided by School Regulations and HR practices, along with other areas of school administration, which is firmly structured on the regulations. Nothing happens beyond the written document." All four schools have written policies that guide their HR practices. However, written policies are implemented as the major criteria for rewarding employees in only two non-profit schools.

Performance-based reward speaks louder in private schools.

Performance-based reward is practiced as the major criterion in all four private schools. Compensation—salary increment, grade pay, medical insurance, teacher award, and other recognition like training and development, free education to employees' children, added responsibilities and challenges, etc, are provided on the basis of the performance of teachers. A performance evaluation system was found to be in place in schools under all management structures, although it differed slightly in nature and form across these schools. The performance of the employees is evaluated through performance appraisals.

The principal of School A shared that promotion is completely based on the performance of the teachers. He revealed, "Our Staff Evaluation Policy clearly reads that promotion is not a right, but must be earned. Time of service and age are not significant." School A reviews teachers annually, whereas Schools B, C, and D evaluate teachers and employees every six months. In School A, yearly student results count least, as they have prioritized the social conduct of students. And, teachers are reviewed on how successful they are in installing these character-building ingredients. However, in Schools B, C, and D, students' results in one of the major criteria for determining the performance of teachers. Apart from this, the performance review of teachers is also conducted based on their ability to handle the class, taking into account their behavior and any complaints, as well as evaluations from parents. Moreover, participants of all four schools believed that such a system would be fairer than a uniform increment in pay and would incentivize them to improve continuously. Experience and formal qualification still dominate reward criteria.

A reward scheme that prioritizes experience and formal qualifications over performance remains prevalent in private schools. Except for School A, in all three private schools, employees are compensated for their specific knowledge and skills, which are required to meet higher performance expectations. This means that the higher the educational qualifications and the longer the length of service, the higher the performance-linked pay. However, determinants such as educational qualifications and length of service are not criteria for employee rewards in School A. The principal of School A opined, "Schemes which reward experience and formal qualifications instead of performance are unfair to highly motivated, effective, and efficient teachers whose extra efforts are not rewarded." The leadership of the other three private schools agreed that they could not neglect teachers' qualifications and the time they have served in the institution while evaluating their performance. The manager of School C expressed, "When a teacher teaching in Grade X, for example, possesses a Master's degree and another teacher in the same grade possesses an M.Phil degree, we should respect the knowledge of the latter."

Non-monetary rewards are important.

The information collected from the four principals shows that they are in favor of both monetary and non-monetary rewards in their institutions. In addition, principals of School A and School B opined that non-monetary rewards are more important for a profession like teaching. The principal of School B remarked, "To some extent, teachers are concerned about the financial gain they get for their work, but ultimately they get satisfaction when they are rewarded with non-monetary rewards. I personally don't give better compensation in comparison to the market; however, many teachers have been working with me just for the relational value that we have built and their passion for teaching." Similarly, the manager of School C shared, "In the initial stage, teachers and employees look for better salary and other compensation. Ultimately, they look for their personal and professional growth. At the same time, when they are given added challenges with more responsibility, they are more motivated to work. In our school we have flexible working arrangements, birthday card, family picnic and staff of the month as non budgetary rewards system" Similarly, the principal of School D mentioned, "In a school like ours, the brand is very important. Therefore, teachers want to be part of the brand value to boost their self-esteem. Mostly, teachers feel a sense of security for their job when they start their career here."

Based on the information provided by the participants above, we understand that employees in their organization value non-monetary rewards. This entails that employees wish to build a relationship as a reward. They are motivated by their work through non-benefits rewards like flexible working arrangements, birthday cards, family picnics, and being the staff of the month.

Discussion:-

This section discusses the findings of the study. Both research objectives are to explore the criteria for rewarding productive employees in private schools and to understand the perceptions of principals, in-charges, and managers regarding the reward system and its role in motivating teachers.

The criteria for reward serve the psychological needs of employees in private schools.

Motivating employees in an educational institution is an important responsibility of leadership. However, creating an atmosphere that fosters employee motivation is a herculean task for even the most experienced supervisor or leader. There is no one-size-fits-all approach to fostering a positive and engaging work environment. Each employee is unique and represents different personalities and cultural ideologies that may or may not respond to motivational techniques. Therefore, understanding the basic psychology of motivation and applying effective techniques facilitates meeting the needs of diverse employees.

The interpretation of information obtained from in-depth interviews with the leadership of all four institutions reveals that these schools have established criteria for rewarding employees, taking into consideration most of the psychological needs presented by Maslow (1943). Each level can be linked from an employee's initial hiring through promotion, training, and leadership development. This theory posits that human motivation is founded on a hierarchy, beginning with basic (physiological) needs and culminating in self-actualization. Maslow's theory identifies five fundamental human needs: physiological needs, safety needs, belongingness and love needs, esteem needs, and self-actualization ([Webb, Perry, Fennelly, 2015](#)).

In all four private schools, the employees' reward system is based on the school policy (regulations and bylaws). These school policies have attempted to fulfill at least four levels of Maslow's hierarchy of needs. Performance-based reward system in all four schools has a provision of rewarding the productive employees with salary increment, grade pay, medical insurance, class teacher and allowance, social security, welfare fund, job guarantee, and retirement plan, which serve the most basic fundamental needs of an individual (physiological and self-preservation). In all four private schools, employee performance is evaluated through performance appraisals (PAs). Some organizations use PA to motivate high-performance employees and to discipline poor-performance employees (Kondrasuk, 2011; Kim & Holzer, 2016). However, leadership in these schools has used PA to evaluate their employees. And, generally, they use the result of the evaluation to reward the productive employees rather than punish them. Two kinds of appraisal— self-appraisal and appraisal from the principal— are most common in all four schools. The leadership usually evaluates employees based on the job they have performed. Additionally, the same appraisal evaluates employees' personality traits, such as initiative, enthusiasm, cooperation, judgment, and job-related standards, including task accomplishment, speed, implementation, and knowledge of work procedures.

A study conducted by Nick (2010) also concluded that a positive relationship has always existed between satisfaction and pay factors. The leadership of the schools shared that new employees are motivated to join the institution to meet their fundamental needs and maintain employment that fulfills their need for self-preservation. Similarly, for employees, as one need is met, the next level of desire becomes essential. Maslow's hierarchy suggests that employees begin to seek acceptance from coworkers and staff after their physiological and safety needs are fulfilled (Huffmire & Holmes, 2006). In School A, children of employees are offered the opportunity to study at the school free of charge. Similarly, a tradition of recognizing others' work is practiced. The principal of School A remarked, "We have a tradition of sending handwritten 'Thank You Notes' and birthday gifts." Though a small gesture, these acts foster a sense of satisfaction and belongingness in employees." Similarly, every year, School B organizes 'Feast for Teachers' and takes teachers for an outing. Such gestures, according to the school leadership, make employees feel valued, treasured, and needed by the institution; hence, creating a sense of belonging and ownership among the teachers. Though it is a simple and humble gesture, but sends out a lot of love and togetherness in an educational institution like a school.

Level 4 of Maslow's hierarchy of needs seeks to meet self-esteem needs. Employees, after having a sense of belongingness and relatedness, aspire to develop self-esteem. Here, an employee desires to be developed, appreciated, and communicated. Helena (2013) has argued that performance-based pay, along with merit-based pay, can exert the better way forward for rewarding employees in organizations. In performance-based pay, all four institutions have been focusing on the self-esteem psychological need of their employees. Similarly, a traditional reward system that values the experience and formal qualifications of employees for rewards such as promotion and training/workshop opportunities also serves the need for self-esteem. School A's practice of awarding 'Teacher/Employee of the Year' opportunity for expensive training, sponsorship in further educational degree, thank you note; School C's 'recognition, like awarding challenging job and responsibility, and School D's opportunity for exposure and good network, and status serve the self-esteem needs of employees.

Finally, Level 5 of Maslow's hierarchy of needs is self-actualization. A priority to this level was not evident when setting the criteria for rewarding employees in all four private schools. However, employees in School D, one of the country's reputed educational brands, do feel valued and secure in their employment and look for ways to make their experience even more fulfilling. The school provides opportunities for employees to achieve higher professional and personal goals. Moreover, the manager of School C added, "When our Yoga teacher retired, he got a sum of 8 lakh as his gratuity. But donated 3 lakh in our employee welfare fund."

Monetary reward is important, but non-monetary reward is more important.

All four private schools have focused on balancing monetary and non-monetary rewards for deserving employees. All four leaders acknowledged the need to address the balance between monetary and non-monetary rewards. Compensation being the major determinant in their school policies, all four institutions have allocated ample space for other non-monetary recognitions, such as appreciation, training and development, and a sense of relatedness and belonging, while determining the criteria for rewarding productive employees. In addition, Schools C and D have gone a step up in providing the self-esteem needs of their employees. It is found that the larger the institution, the higher the chances of fulfilling psychological needs, such as social needs and self-esteem. Tehseen and Hadi (2015) have identified dimensions such as satisfaction derived from teaching, recognition, enjoyment of teaching, career development, the challenging and competitive nature of teaching, and teaching as a life goal as motivating factors. Aligning with this fact, along with extrinsic rewards, the leadership of the four private schools has emphasized the need to motivate their employees intrinsically, setting determinants in their criteria for rewarding employees accordingly.

Conclusion:-

Rewards, such as benefits, prizes, and appreciation, are given to productive employees in the organization to motivate them to perform well and contribute to organizational productivity. However how does a institution set criteria for offering such rewards are crucial to motivate employee. Based on the key insights of this study, we conclude that private schools in Nepal have established criteria for rewarding productive employees, incorporating performance-based pay, length of service, and formal qualifications, as guided by their school policies. Although the evaluation weightage differs, employees are evaluated on a similar basis as students, focusing on their academic achievement, conduct, teaching methodology, relationship with administration and parents, innovation and creativity, formal qualifications, and length of service. Similarly, the leadership in all four schools has acknowledged that monetary rewards are important, but non-monetary rewards play a vital role in retention, job engagement, and satisfaction among teachers and other employees. These are the unique criteria of rewarding productive employees in the private schools in Nepal.

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