

The Factors Influencing Teacher Motivation in Sabah

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Abstract

Recently, the increasing turnover rate among rural teachers has become a significant obstacle to improving education quality. Teacher motivation, particularly in rural areas, has been linked to factors such as perceived organizational support and rewards. However, the exact nature of these connections remains unclear. This study aimed to examine the significance of two key motivational factors—perceived organizational support and rewards—and the moderating influence of teachers' backgrounds (gender, age, and marital status). A total of 161 teachers participated, and the results revealed a strong correlation between perceived organizational support and teacher motivation, as well as between both intrinsic and extrinsic rewards and teacher motivation. However, the background of teachers (gender, age, and marital status) was found to have minimal impact on the strength of the relationship between these two factors and teacher motivation. The study concluded that the main factors influencing teacher motivation in rural primary schools are perceived organizational support and rewards. In rural contexts, providing teachers with appropriate support and rewards is crucial for boosting or maintaining their motivation.

Keywords: Perceived Organization Support, Rewards, Teacher Motivation, Rural Area

Introduction

Over the past decade, research on teacher motivation has increased significantly, highlighting its crucial role in various educational factors such as student motivation, educational reform, teaching practices, and teachers' psychological fulfillment and well-being. The Ministry of Education has taken proactive steps to enhance human resource development in rural areas, addressing various challenges by deploying more qualified and experienced teachers (Devan, 2021). Additionally, the government has improved school facilities to benefit both teachers and students. Teachers play a crucial role and should remain committed to educating students, regardless of the limitations present in schools. Since human capital development begins in the early stages of education, particularly in primary schools, it is important to understand the factors that influence teachers' motivation, whether they are teaching in urban or rural areas (Angrist et al., 2021).

The government in Malaysia has made significant efforts to improve education in rural schools, which face greater challenges compared to urban schools, particularly in terms of

school conditions and socio-economic factors. Efforts to improve education include deploying more graduate teachers, increasing food allowances for students, constructing additional housing for pupils, upgrading school infrastructure and providing more teaching resources (Ahmat et al., 2021). Furthermore, rural primary school teachers will receive additional allowances have been allocated to support teachers. However, rural areas continue to struggle with teacher shortages (Hudson & Hudson, 2008).

Teacher motivation is a critical factor in ensuring quality education, particularly in rural areas where challenges such as rural areas facing isolation, limited resources and high turnover rates (Madigan & Kim, 2021; Ho & Tsai, 2023). Recognizing these issues, the Ministry of Education has implemented policies to attract and retain qualified teachers, including financial incentives, professional development programs and improved school infrastructure (Ahmat et al., 2021). However, despite these efforts, many rural teachers continue to face difficulties that affect their motivation and job satisfaction. Studies indicate that perceived organizational support is crucial in enhancing teacher motivation, as employees tend to be more engaged when they feel appreciated by their institution (Eisenberger et al., 1986; Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002; Liang et al., 2025). Additionally, both intrinsic rewards, like career advancement, and extrinsic rewards, such as salary increases, have been linked to increased motivation and teacher retention (Bishay, 1996; Eisenberger & Shanock, 2003). Given the ongoing challenges faced by rural educators, this study aims to examine how perceived organizational support and rewards influence teacher motivation, offering insights into effective policies for sustaining and enhancing motivation in rural schools.

Problem Statement

Teacher burnout can greatly affect impact on students in multiple ways. When teachers lack motivation, their capacity to teach effectively, engage with students (Heffernan et al., 2022; Li et al., 2023), and provide necessary support diminishes leading to several negative outcomes for students. These include reduced instructional quality, emotional disconnection, increased classroom disruptions, lower student motivation, inconsistent learning experiences, and higher teacher turnover, all of which can negatively affect students' academic performance, well-being, and overall educational experience (Madigan & Kim, 2021). According to Lazarides & Schiefele (2024), teacher motivation influences teaching behaviours and student outcomes, rather than the other way around.

High-quality teachers possess positive attributes such as a strong sense of purpose, adaptability, creativity, openness, motivation, and a passion for teaching (Angrist et al., 2021; Criado-Del Rey et al., 2024). Mastery of subject matter, expertise, skills, empathy, and strong moral values are also essential qualities of an effective teacher. With ongoing efforts to enhance education in rural areas, the Education Ministry hopes that teachers assigned to these regions will strive to deliver the highest quality education.

Numerous studies on teacher motivation have been carried out in various contexts over the years. However, until relatively recently, a reliable measure has not been available to facilitate comparisons and predict significant outcomes over time (Watt et al. 2017b). Currently, a significant difficulty exists in maintaining teachers motivation to consistently enhance their pedagogical abilities to better correspond with present educational demands (Juškevičienė et al., 2024).

Relocating to rural areas can be a challenge for teachers, often leading to a decline in their motivation upon transfer. Will the government's efforts to improve school conditions through better facilities, enhance living conditions with quality housing, and provide additional allowances serve as a benchmark to ensure that teachers in rural schools remain fully motivated?

The key question is whether government support and incentives effectively enhance teacher motivation. This leads to the research questions: What prompted the government to introduce support and rewards for teachers in rural areas? Additionally, what is the relationship between perceived organizational support, rewards, and teacher motivation?

Despite various government initiatives to improve rural education, teacher motivation remains a persistent challenge, leading to high turnover rates and difficulties in retaining qualified educators. Existing research acknowledges the importance of perceived organizational support and rewards in influencing teacher motivation, yet there is a lack of empirical evidence on their effectiveness in rural settings, particularly in Sabah.

The objectives of the study are:

1. To examine the relationship between perceived organisational support on teacher motivation.
2. To examine the relationship between rewards (intrinsic and extrinsic rewards) on teacher motivation.
3. To study the gender, age and marital status as the moderating factors in the relationship on teacher motivation.
4. To assess the combined effect of organizational support and rewards on rural teacher motivation.

Literature Review

Antecedents of teacher motivation refer to the factors that influence a teacher's motivation to their work (Escriva-Boulley et al., 2021; Frahm and Cianca, 2021; Chen, 2021). Despite its importance, there is limited research on teacher motivation, particularly in rural schools. The factors that truly motivate teachers remain somewhat uncertain. Phenix (1975) described motivation as a personal, subjective, and intrinsic force that drives teachers. However, the specific factors that help teachers stay motivated in rural primary schools, and how gender, age, and marital status influence teacher motivation, are still not clearly understood.

Locquiao & DeSutter (2024) conducted a study using multiple regression modelling on data from 202 practicing SETs to analyse the relationship between psychological factors and SET retention, measured by total years of experience in special education teaching. The findings offer initial evidence that internalized and symbolized moral identity are linked to retention, but in contrasting ways—one negatively and the other positively.

However, the study found no significant relationship between BPN satisfaction, motivation (both intrinsic and extrinsic), and SET retention. These findings suggest that examining teacher-level psychological factors could be valuable in understanding and addressing teacher retention challenges in special education.

According to Ho & Tsai (2023), the shortage of teachers in rural areas continues to be a pressing issue, as schools frequently face challenges in recruiting qualified educators, impacting both student learning and overall school development. This challenges the common perception of rural schools as unattractive and difficult to staff. The study suggests that policymakers consider tailored incentives that address teachers' needs to mitigate the impact of teacher shortages in rural areas. In early childhood education, teachers and educators often experience low professional status and demanding working conditions (Beltman et al., 2019). Moreover, leaders in primary and secondary schools are becoming increasingly concerned about their health and well-being (Kaynac, 2020; Shao et al., 2025) due to the growing incidence of offensive behaviours directed toward them (Dicke et al., 2024).

Studies have demonstrated that organizational support is a key factor in enhancing employee motivation, including that of teachers (Armeli et al., 1998; Eisenberger et al., 1997). However, teachers may need more than just support—they also need recognition, often in the form of rewards. The feeling of being acknowledged, along with organizational support, contributes to teachers' productivity and positively impacts student success (Bishay, 1996; Hong, 2012). Improved satisfaction and reduced dissatisfaction lead to greater motivation, enhancing the likelihood of delivering quality education and retaining skilled teachers

Teacher motivation is a well-researched topic, yet its underlying factors, particularly in rural school settings, remain complex and multifaceted (Escriva-Boulley et al., 2021; Frahm & Cianca, 2021). According to Ryan & Deci (2017), motivation is shaped by both intrinsic and extrinsic factors. Intrinsic motivation stems from a sense of purpose, professional growth, and job satisfaction, while extrinsic motivation is influenced by financial incentives and organizational support. Despite the recognition that both factors contribute to teacher retention and performance, research on their specific impact in rural schools is still limited. Many rural teachers face challenges such as inadequate infrastructure, professional isolation, and limited career advancement opportunities, which can significantly affect their motivation and willingness to remain in the profession (Ho & Tsai, 2023). However, the extent to which perceived organizational support and rewards can mitigate these challenges requires further empirical investigation.

Perceived organizational support has been identified as a key factor in employee motivation and job satisfaction across various professional fields, including education (Eisenberger et al., 1986; Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002). Teachers who feel valued and supported by their institutions tend to be more engaged, committed, and resilient in their roles (Hong, 2012). Research suggests that when schools provide professional development opportunities, mentorship programs, and strong administrative support from parents (Qinghua & Ompok, 2022), teachers are more likely to experience higher job satisfaction and motivation (Bureau et al., 2022). However, there is limited research on how rural teachers specifically perceive organizational support and how it influences their motivation. Given the unique challenges of rural teaching, including geographical isolation and resource constraints, understanding the role of perceived organizational support in these contexts is crucial for developing targeted policies to improve teacher retention.

Rewards, both intrinsic and extrinsic, are also significant contributors to teacher motivation. Intrinsic rewards, such as personal fulfilment, recognition, and career progression, have been linked to higher levels of teacher engagement and effectiveness (Ryan et al., 1983; Eghrari & Deci, 1989). Meanwhile, extrinsic rewards, such as salary increases, housing allowances, and performance bonuses, have been found to enhance job satisfaction and reduce turnover rates among educators (Bishay, 1996; Eisenberger & Shanock, 2003). However, some studies suggest that financial incentives alone may not be sufficient to sustain long-term motivation, as teachers also seek a sense of professional purpose and belonging (Lazarides & Schiefele, 2024). In rural schools, where working conditions can be particularly challenging, a combination of financial rewards and strong institutional support may be necessary to keep teachers motivated. This study aims to address this gap by examining how perceived organizational support and rewards collectively influence teacher motivation in rural primary schools.

Perceived Organizational Support

According to Eisenberger et al. (1986), perceived organizational support refers to the degree to which employees feel that their organization values their contributions and cares about their well-being. Eisenberger et al. (1990) suggested that employees view organizational support as discretionary actions that benefit them, reinforcing the belief that the organization cares for their well-being.

Rewards

Rewards are incentives given to individuals when they meet certain performance targets. Steers and Porter (1991) categorized rewards into intrinsic and extrinsic types. Teachers are rewarded when they meet specific performance standards. Intrinsic rewards may include informal or formal recognition, assigning more enjoyable tasks, opportunities for professional development, and a greater role in decision-making (Beltman et al., 2019). Some teachers may also feel rewarded internally when they overcome challenges or accomplish tasks, without external recognition. These internal rewards influence motivation by encouraging teachers to perform at their best (Ryan et al., 1991; Ryan et al., 2017). Extrinsic rewards, such as salary, job security, and fringe benefits, are also important. Job security is typically not an issue, as teaching is a secure profession with competitive compensation based on qualifications (Latham, 1998). Extrinsic rewards might include certificates of appreciation, monetary incentives, or non-monetary incentives like additional vacation time or support in their work.

Hackman and Oldham's (1975) job motivation theory outlines five essential characteristics: skill variety, task identity, task significance, autonomy, and feedback. These elements determine a job's motivational potential, directly impacting employee motivation, including that of teachers. Task significance emphasizes the job's importance, autonomy allows flexibility in task execution, and feedback provides insights into job performance effectiveness.

The Relationship of Perceived Organizational Support and Rewards on Teacher Motivation

Perceived organizational support has a profound impact on employee performance and well-being, ultimately influencing motivation. Eisenberger et al. (1986) suggest that perceived organizational support shapes an employee's belief that their contributions are valued and their well-being is prioritized by the organization. Rhoades and Eisenberger (2002) and Li et al. (2023) further explain that such support fosters a sense of obligation to contribute to the organization's success, as it fulfills both emotional and social needs. Indeed, teachers need to be supported in multiple ways for them to be effective (Adarkwah, 2023).

Rewards help employees feel appreciated and motivated to perform their tasks effectively (Eisenberger & Shanock, 2003). Cognitive evaluation theory, as outlined by Deci and Ryan (1985), suggests that rewards for enjoyable tasks can be perceived as controlling behavior, but when offered equitably and appropriately, rewards enhance motivation. Herzberg et al. (1959) also argued that people are motivated by rewards, as these provide a sense of accomplishment and recognition for their work. However, not all employees seek promotions, as they may prefer the stability of their current position without the added stress.

In conclusion, both perceived organizational support and rewards are crucial in influencing teacher motivation, especially in challenging rural school environments. Providing a supportive environment, along with recognition and fair rewards, can significantly enhance teacher motivation and improve the overall quality of education.

Personal Background and Motivation

Along with the growing awareness of the importance of teachers's motivation in rural area, researchers have become interested in teachers' motivation. According to Bastick (2000), gender, educational background, age, and marital status of teachers have been known to influence teacher motivation. As seen in most cases of motivation, individuals tend to pursue ongoing development when provided with the right support and conditions.

Research Methodology and Framework*Theoretical Framework*

According to Eisenberger et al. (1986), perceived organizational support refers to an employee's belief that the organization values their well-being and supports their needs in carrying out their tasks. Deci et al. (2001) believe that individual needs could be supported in different work contents in order to promote the motivation and well-being of the individual. Based on this understanding, both the organization and the individuals should understand or tolerate each other's needs. The organization should provide their employees with a conducive and supportive working environment in order to motivate them to deliver or be more productive, which will benefit the organization. Employees will feel motivated once they know that their effort is worth the pay and that they are recognized or significantly rewarded by their organization.

Rewards have a significant correlation with people's motivation (Baard et al., 2004; Ryan et al., 1983; Eghrari & Deci, 1989; Ryan & Deci, 2017). In addition, Bishay (1996) suggested that pay incentives (extrinsic rewards) as a means for improving teacher motivation. Furthermore,

Eisenberger and Shanock (2003) proved that extrinsic and socio-emotional rewards could strengthen motivation.

Research Hypotheses

The research hypotheses were developed to examine the relationship with independent, moderating and dependent variables. Research hypotheses that were tested were:

Hypothesis 1: There is a significant relationship between perceived organisational support on teacher motivation.

Hypothesis 2: There is a significant relationship between intrinsic rewards on teacher motivation.

Hypothesis 3: There is a significant relationship between extrinsic rewards on teacher motivation.

Hypothesis 4: There is a significant relationship between rewards (intrinsic and extrinsic rewards) on teacher motivation.

Hypothesis 5: The relationship between independent variables and teacher motivation is moderated by gender.

Hypothesis 6: The relationship between independent variables and teacher motivation is moderated by age.

Hypothesis 7: The relationship between independent variables and teacher motivation is moderated by marital status.

Research Design

The study involved descriptive study method designed using cross-sectional data.

Instrument Design

Perceived Organisational Support

Eisenberger et al. (1986) created a 36-item scale for the Survey of Perceived Organizational Support, along with shorter versions developed in subsequent studies (Armeli et al., 1998; Eisenberger et al., 1990; Lynch et al., 1999; Shore & Tetrick, 1991; Shore & Wayne, 1993). Additionally, the author utilized a condensed version of the perceived organizational support scale, comprising 17 items.

Rewards

An instrument adapted from O'Driscoll and Randall (1999) was used, comprising four items measuring intrinsic rewards and seven items focusing on extrinsic rewards.

Teacher Motivation

Five items were adopted from the Job Diagnostic Survey by Hackman and Oldham (1975) that assessed the degree to which employees are willing to work hard so that they can perform well for their sake-measured motivation.

Research Findings

Table 1 presents an overview of the respondents' demographic characteristics, providing insights into the composition of teachers in rural schools in Sabah. It highlights key aspects such as gender distribution, age range, ethnicity and marital status.

Table 1

Statistical summary for the regression between perceived organisation support and teacher motivation

Variable (N=98)	Category	Responders	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	61	62
	Female	37	38
Age	20 – 30	26	27
	31- 40	44	45
	41 – 50	21	21
	51 – 56	7	7
Race	Dusun	92	94
	Bajau	3	3.0
	Chinese	3	3.0
	Others	0	0
Marital status	Single	21	21
	Married	77	79
Place or origin	Sabah	98	100
	Sarawak	0	0
	West Malaysia	0	0

According to Table 1, out of the 161 teachers surveyed, 98 responses were considered valid for analysis. The majority of respondents were male (62%), while female teachers comprised 37% of the sample. The most represented age group was 31-40 years (45%), followed by 20-30 years (26%) and 41-50 years (21%). The majority of participants belonged to the Dusun ethnic group (94%), while Bajau and Chinese teachers each accounted for 3.0%. Furthermore, a large proportion of the respondents were married (79%).

Reliability of Measures

The study utilized multi-item scales to evaluate both the independent and dependent variables. The reliability of these measures is essential for the integrity of the research. Internal consistency reflects how closely related the items within a construct are. Cronbach's Coefficient Alpha, a widely recognized test for inter-item consistency reliability, is used for multi-point scaled items. Generally, a Cronbach's Alpha below 0.60 indicates poor reliability, between 0.60 and 0.80 is acceptable, and above 0.80 is considered excellent. Table 2 displays the Cronbach's Alpha values for the reliability coefficients of the primary variables in this study.

Table 2

Cronbach's Alpha for tested variables

Variables	Total Number of Items	Total Number of Deleted Items	Cronbach's Alpha	Remarks
Perceived Organisational support	17	0	0.90	Independent
Intrinsic rewards	4	0	0.80	Independent
Extrinsic rewards	7	0	0.70	Independent
Teacher Motivation	5	0	0.80	Dependent

The Cronbach's Alpha value for perceived organizational support, which consisted of 17 items, was 0.90. The Cronbach's Alpha for intrinsic rewards was 0.80, and for extrinsic rewards, it was 0.70. For teacher motivation, which included 5 items, the Cronbach's Alpha value was 0.80. These results indicate that the items measuring perceived organizational support, intrinsic rewards and teacher motivation in the questionnaire were reliable and suitable for use.

Hypotheses 1: There is a significance relationship between perceived organisational supports on teacher motivation.

The study found a significant correlation between perceived organizational support and teacher motivation at a 5% significance level. The F-distribution value of 98.00 confirms the validity of the model. A detailed overview of this relationship is provided in Table 3.

Table 3

Statistical summary for the regression between perceived organisation support and teacher motivation

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics			Durbin-Watson
					R Square Change	F Change	Sig. Change	
	0.70	0.50	0.50	0.40	0.50	98.00	0.00	1.70

Table 4

Coefficients table for perceived organisational support and teacher motivation

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
POS	0.56	0.34	0.70	1.67	0.10
	0.88	0.09		9.90	0.00

The results of the simple linear regression analysis, as shown in Table 3, reveal a significant relationship between perceived organizational support and teacher motivation. With $F = 98.00$ and $p = 0.00$ ($p < 0.05$), perceived organizational support (independent variable) was identified as a significant predictor of teacher motivation. Additionally, the t-value of 9.90 and $p = 0.00$ ($p < 0.05$) further confirm this relationship. The Durbin-Watson value of 1.70 indicates that perceived organizational support has a significant impact on teacher motivation. The

model's coefficient of determination (R^2) is 0.50, suggesting that perceived organizational support accounts for 50% of the variation in teacher motivation, while the remaining 50% is influenced by other factors. These findings confirm a strong positive linear relationship between perceived organizational support and teacher motivation. Consequently, Hypothesis 1 is accepted.

Hypothesis 2: There is a significant relationship between intrinsic rewards on teacher motivation.

The study identified a significant correlation between intrinsic rewards and teacher motivation at a 5% significance level. The F-distribution value of 77.00 confirms the validity of the model. A detailed overview of this relationship is provided in Table 5.

Table 5

Statistical Summary for the regression between intrinsic rewards and teacher motivation

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics			Durbin-Watson
					R Square Change	F Change	Sig. F Change	
	0.66	0.40	0.43	0.42	0.44	77.00	0.00	1.90

Table 6

Coefficients table for intrinsic rewards with teacher motivation

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
	0.84	0.35		22.40	0.02
IR	0.70	0.08	0.66	88.80	0.00

The results of the simple linear regression analysis, as shown in Tables 5 and 6, indicate that $F = 77.00$ and $p = 0.00$ ($p < 0.05$), confirming that intrinsic rewards (independent variable) have a significant impact on teacher motivation. Additionally, $t = 8.80$ and $p = 0.00$ ($p < 0.05$) further support the significant influence of intrinsic rewards on teacher motivation. With a Durbin-Watson value of 1.90, the correlation between intrinsic rewards and teacher motivation was found to be significant. The coefficient of determination (R^2) for this model is 0.43, meaning that intrinsic rewards account for 43% of the variation in teacher motivation, while the remaining 57% is influenced by other factors. These findings confirm a strong positive linear relationship between intrinsic rewards and teacher motivation. Therefore, Hypothesis 2 is accepted.

Hypothesis 3: There is a significant relationship between extrinsic rewards on teacher motivation.

The independent variable, extrinsic rewards, was included in a simple linear regression model with teacher motivation as the dependent variable. At a 5% significance level, the F-distribution value of 134.00 confirms the validity of the model. The results of these relationships are presented in Tables 7 and 8 below.

Table 7

Statistical summary for the regression between extrinsic rewards and teacher motivation

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics		Durbin-Watson
					R Square Change	F Change	
	0.76	0.53	0.57	0.36	0.57	134.00	1.80

Table 8

Coefficients table for extrinsic rewards (ER) and teacher motivation (MO)

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
ER	-0.49	0.38		-1.29	0.20
	1.05	0.09	0.76	11.57	0.00

The results of the simple linear regression analysis in Tables 7 and 8 indicate that $F = 134.00$ and $p = 0.000$ ($p < 0.05$), confirming that extrinsic rewards (independent variable) have a significant impact on teacher motivation. Additionally, $t = 11.57$ and $p = 0.000$ ($p < 0.05$) further support the strong influence of extrinsic rewards on teacher motivation. Based on these findings, there is a significant positive linear relationship between extrinsic rewards and teacher motivation. Therefore, Hypothesis 3 is accepted.

Hypothesis 4: There is a significant relationship between rewards (intrinsic and extrinsic) on teacher motivation.

A simple linear regression analysis was performed with intrinsic and extrinsic rewards as independent variables and teacher motivation as the dependent variable. At a 5% significance level, the F-value of 170.09 confirms the model's significance, indicating a statistically significant relationship between the independent variables (intrinsic and extrinsic rewards) and the dependent variable (teacher motivation).

This result suggests that the combination of intrinsic and extrinsic rewards effectively predicts teacher motivation. The F-distribution value confirms the overall significance of the regression model. Further details of this relationship can be found in the data presented in Table 9 and Table 10.

Table 5

Statistical summary for the regression between rewards (intrinsic and extrinsic) and teacher motivation

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics		Durbin-Watson
					R Square Change	F Change	
	0.79	0.63	0.63	0.34	0.63	170.09	1.82

Table 6

Coefficients table for rewards (intrinsic and extrinsic) and teacher motivation

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	Co-linearity Statistics	
	B	Std. Error	Beta			Tolerance	VIF
(Constant)	-0.78	0.03		-2.16	0.03		
IRER	1.12	0.09	0.79	13.04	0.00	1.00	1.00

The results of the simple linear regression analysis presented in Table 9 reveal that the F-value = 170.09 and $p = 0.00$ (less than 0.05) indicate that both intrinsic and extrinsic rewards (the independent variables) have a significant impact on teacher motivation. The t-value = 13.04 and $p = 0.00$ (less than 0.05) further confirm that rewards (both intrinsic and extrinsic) significantly determine teacher motivation.

The coefficient of determination ($R^2 = 0.63$) suggests that 63% of the variation in teacher motivation can be explained by the independent variables (rewards, including both intrinsic and extrinsic rewards). This indicates that rewards play a significant role in influencing teacher motivation. The remaining 37% of the variation in teacher motivation is likely influenced by other factors beyond the rewards provided. In conclusion, the study confirms that both intrinsic and extrinsic rewards have a substantial and significant relationship with teacher motivation. Based on this analysis, a significant positive relationship between extrinsic rewards and teacher motivation is confirmed. Therefore, Hypothesis 4 is accepted.

Hypothesis 5: The relationship between independent variables and teacher motivation is moderated by gender

The results in Table 11 show that the R^2 change for Step 2 and Step 3 regressions is 0.68 and 0.70, respectively. The F-change values for both steps (0.02 and 0.28) are not significant. Additionally, the significance values for perceived organizational support and gender (Sig. = 0.11), intrinsic rewards and gender (Sig. = 0.21), and extrinsic rewards and gender (Sig. = 0.84) indicate no statistical significance. Therefore, it is concluded that gender does not have a moderating effect on the relationship between the independent variables (perceived organizational support and rewards) and teacher motivation. As a result, Hypothesis 5 is rejected.

Table 11

Hierarchical regression analysis on gender

Variables	Step 1		Step 2		Step 3	
	B	Sig.	B	Sig.	B	Sig.
Perceived Organisational Support (POS)	0.36	0.00	0.34	0.00	0.87	0.01
Intrinsic rewards (IR)	0.22	0.02	0.20	0.03	-0.16	0.57
Extrinsic Rewards (ER)	0.63	0.00	0.65	0.00	0.70	0.05
Gender			0.15	0.02	0.68	0.33
POS*Gender					-0.36	0.11
IR*Gender					0.25	0.21
ER*Gender					-0.05	0.84
R ² Changes	0.66		0.68		0.70	
Sig. F. change	0.00		0.02		0.30	

Hypothesis 6: The relationship between independent variables and teacher motivation is moderated by age

The results shown in Table 12 indicate the R² change for Step 2 and Step 3 regressions are 0.70 and 0.68, respectively. The F changes for both steps are not significant (0.21 and 0.62), suggesting that adding the interaction terms does not significantly improve the model.

Specifically, the interactions between perceived organizational support and age (Sig. = 0.23), intrinsic rewards and age (Sig. = 0.66), and extrinsic rewards and age (Sig. = 0.77) are not significant.

As a result, it is concluded that age does not significantly moderate the relationship between the independent variables (perceived organizational support and rewards) and teacher motivation. Therefore, Hypothesis 6 is rejected.

Table 12

Hierarchical regression analysis on age

Variables	Step 1		Step 2		Step 3	
	B	Sig.	B	Sig.	B	Sig.
Perceived Organisational Support (POS)	0.34	0.00	0.34	0.00	-0.01	0.97
Intrinsic rewards (IR)	0.22	0.02	0.23	0.01	0.33	0.18
Extrinsic Rewards (ER)	0.63	0.00	0.62	0.00	0.68	0.02
Age			0.05	0.21	-0.26	0.53
POS*age					0.18	0.23
IR*age					-0.05	0.66
ER*age					-0.04	0.77
R2 Changes	0.66		0.70		0.68	
Sig. F. change	0.00		0.21		0.62	

Hypothesis 7: The relationship between independent variables and teacher motivation is moderated by marital status

The results shown in Table 13 indicate R^2 change for Step 2 and Step 3 regressions are 0.66 and 0.68, respectively. The F changes for both steps are not significant (0.85 and 0.32), meaning that the interaction terms did not significantly improve the model. Specifically, the interactions between perceived organizational support and marital status (Sig. = 0.58), intrinsic rewards and marital status (Sig. = 0.09), and extrinsic rewards and marital status (Sig. = 0.77) are not significant.

As a result, it is concluded that marital status does not have a moderating effect on the relationship between the independent variables (perceived organizational support and rewards) and teacher motivation. Therefore, Hypothesis 7 is rejected.

Table 13

Hierarchical regression analysis on marital status

Variables	Step 1		Step 2		Step 3	
	B	Sig.	B	Sig.	B	Sig.
Perceived Organisational Support (POS)	0.34	0.00	0.33	0.00	-0.00	0.99
Intrinsic rewards (IR)	0.22	0.02	0.22	0.02	1.12	0.04
Extrinsic Rewards (ER)	0.63	0.00	0.63	0.00	0.44	0.56
Marital status (MA)			-0.02	0.85	0.86	0.47
POS*MA					0.16	0.58
IR*MA					-0.45	0.09
ER*MA					0.12	0.77
R2 Changes	0.66		0.66		0.68	
Sig. F. change	0.00		0.85		0.32	

Discussion

Teacher motivation is influenced by various interconnected factors. While some teachers in rural schools remain highly motivated, others experience lower levels of motivation (Frahm & Cianca, 2021; Watt et al., 2017b). The sources of motivation differ based on teachers' backgrounds and school conditions, including management, psychological factors, infrastructure, and available facilities (Locquiao & DeSutter, 2024). Generally, teachers in rural primary schools aspire to be effective, take on new challenges, and engage in continuous personal and professional development (Butler, 2011; Awwad-Tabry & Levkovich, 2024).

Perceived Organizational Support and Teacher Motivation

It is well understood that people are naturally active and driven to adapt to environmental changes to achieve success. However, when individuals are not in sync with their surroundings, they may face obstacles that hinder success and lower motivation, ultimately reducing job effectiveness (Chen, 2021). In general, teachers are motivated to give their best when they receive something in return from either their students or the school (Hong, 2012). This could come in the form of intrinsic or extrinsic rewards and support, fulfilling their intrinsic needs.

The study found a significant relationship between perceived organizational support and teacher motivation, highlighting its essential role in sustaining and enhancing the motivation of rural teachers. A decline in perceived organizational support can lead to a decrease in teacher motivation (Bureau et al., 2022). Consistent and intentional support from education management is essential in reinforcing teacher motivation, particularly in rural schools. As noted by Eisenberger et al. (1986), when an organization meets employees' expectations by demonstrating care and valuing their contributions, employees are more likely to stay motivated and committed to their tasks. This study highlights that supportive

headmasters, a sense of belonging within the organization, and recognition for their contributions are key aspects of perceived organizational support that teachers need to stay motivated. With this support, teachers can overcome the demotivating challenges associated with working in rural areas (Frahm & Cianca, 2021). When the psychological needs of rural teachers are fulfilled, they are more likely to focus on personal growth and remain engaged in continuous improvement. As seen in most cases of motivation, individuals tend to pursue ongoing development when provided with the right support and conditions (Bastick, 2000). Additionally, teachers are more motivated when they do not feel pressured and when their perspectives and emotions are acknowledged (Eghrari & Deci, 1989; Andoh et al., 2021;). Like other employees, teachers have fundamental psychological needs that must be met to remain effective in their roles, helping them internalize external expectations that contribute to their success.

Rewards and Teacher Motivation

Rural teachers receive many fringe benefits from the government as a means of motivating the rural teachers. Increment and additional allowances for rural teachers have been given to encourage and motivate teachers (Chen, 2021). Based on the study shows that extrinsic rewards significantly influence teacher motivation. Extrinsic rewards given by the government in the form of fringe benefits significantly correlated with teacher motivation. Somehow, some researchers note that rewards are not always the main source of motivation (Baard et al., 2004; Beltman et al., 2019).

The results revealed that both intrinsic and extrinsic rewards significantly contribute to teacher motivation. The study revealed that most of the respondents marked 'satisfied' and 'strongly satisfied' on the items listed in the intrinsic and extrinsic rewards. This indicated that intrinsic and extrinsic rewards are very important for the majority of the teachers in this school.

According to Bishay (1996), pay incentives (extrinsic rewards) are a means for improving teacher motivation. Perhaps due to our standard salary schedule for public school teachers, the salary factor does not have much impact on teacher motivation. On the other hand, Eisenberger and Shanock (2003) proved that extrinsic and intrinsic rewards could strengthen motivation. However, in the teaching profession, extrinsic and intrinsic rewards are complementary to their existing motivation. It also could be explained that even if the teacher is rewarded highly or slightly, their impact on teacher motivation is not significant. Rewards could only complement the self-esteem of the individual teacher and perhaps could strengthen the motivation, as suggested by Eisenberger and Shanock (2003; Ho & Tsai, 2023; Baard et al., 2004; Ryan et al., 1983; Eghrari & Deci, 1989; Ryan & Deci, 2017).

Personal Background and Motivation

Gender, educational background, age, and marital status of teachers have been known to influence teacher motivation (Bastick, 2000). This study revealed that gender, marital status, and age of the teachers did not significantly affect the roles of perceived organization support and rewards in teacher motivation. Teachers' personal backgrounds do have a moderating effect, but not significantly.

Age, for example, will influence the preference types of rewards that significantly contribute to the individual. Older teachers or almost retired teachers (51 and above) who reside within the school compound will not be motivated by the housing facilities that the government had developed for them but will be much more motivated if given the housing allowances. Somehow, for younger teachers who are younger or just married, providing them with better housing facilities within the school will contribute significantly towards their motivation and perhaps motivate them to stay longer in the rural school. Bastick (2000) concluded that older, experienced teachers were significantly motivated by the intrinsic component of motivation compared to younger teachers.

Marital status also did not have any significant mediated effect on the individual teacher motivation that was associated with perceived organizational support and rewards. Either the teacher was neither married nor single; their preferences on perceived organizational support and rewards were the same. Married teachers residing within the school with their spouses and children will not be pressured much by the rural school conditions. Somehow, married teachers who are far or separated from each other will tend to be more demotivated in rural primary schools.

Implication and discussion as derived in this study, rural teachers' motivation was significantly influenced by both rewards and perceived organizational support received by the individual teacher. Further, the effects of these two factors on teacher motivation are not found to be significantly mediated by the teacher's background (age, gender, marital status) (Bureau et al., 2022).

Findings and Discussion

The study's statistical findings confirm that perceived organizational support and rewards significantly impact teacher motivation, but their real-world applications require deeper exploration. For instance, the strong correlation between intrinsic rewards and motivation suggests that non-monetary incentives, such as professional development, mentorship, and career advancement opportunities, could play a crucial role in retaining rural teachers. However, without further discussion on how these rewards should be structured and implemented, policymakers and school administrators may struggle to translate these findings into effective strategies. Similarly, while extrinsic rewards like salary increments and allowances are shown to influence motivation, the study does not address whether these financial incentives alone are sufficient. A more comprehensive analysis could consider whether combining monetary benefits with improved working conditions, school infrastructure, and emotional support would yield better long-term retention and motivation outcomes.

Additionally, the study finds that demographic factors such as gender, age, and marital status do not significantly moderate the relationship between perceived support, rewards, and motivation. This raises important questions about how motivation strategies should be designed. If all teachers, regardless of demographic differences, respond similarly to perceived support and rewards, a broad, inclusive approach to motivation policies may be the most effective. However, the lack of statistical significance does not necessarily imply that individual teachers do not have varying needs and expectations. A qualitative exploration of personal experiences and contextual challenges could provide deeper insights into how different teachers perceive and respond to motivational factors. By integrating these findings

with qualitative data, future research could offer more nuanced recommendations that ensure policies are both evidence-based and adaptable to the diverse realities of rural teaching environments.

Expanding the discussion section to include policy implications and practical recommendations would enhance the study's real-world impact. The findings indicate that perceived organizational support and rewards significantly influence teacher motivation in rural schools, underscoring the need for policies that strengthen both factors. Given the positive correlation between support and motivation (Eisenberger et al., 1986; Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002), education authorities should implement structured mentorship programs, increase professional development opportunities, and ensure that rural teachers feel valued within their institutions. Providing leadership training for school administrators to foster a more supportive environment could further reinforce teachers' commitment and engagement.

Financial and non-financial rewards also play a crucial role in teacher retention and motivation, as shown in previous research (Bishay, 1996; Eisenberger & Shanock, 2003). Policymakers should consider revising rural teacher incentive programs by not only offering higher allowances but also tailoring rewards to teachers' specific needs. For example, early-career teachers may value housing assistance more than salary increments, while experienced teachers might benefit from leadership roles or research grants. A flexible incentive model that adapts to different career stages could enhance long-term teacher retention in rural schools.

Beyond financial incentives, improving rural school infrastructure and teaching conditions is essential. Research suggests that a well-equipped and conducive teaching environment can significantly boost teacher motivation (Lazarides & Schiefele, 2024; Madigan & Kim, 2021). Schools should be provided with better connectivity, teaching aids, and student learning resources to alleviate some of the burdens faced by teachers in remote areas. Moreover, addressing social isolation by facilitating teacher networking events or community engagement initiatives can help build a more resilient rural teaching workforce.

The study also found that demographic factors such as gender, age, and marital status had minimal impact on the relationship between organizational support, rewards, and teacher motivation. While this suggests that motivation strategies can be applied broadly, future policies should still consider the diverse challenges faced by different teacher groups. For instance, younger teachers may struggle with adapting to rural living, while those with families might face difficulties due to the lack of nearby educational facilities for their children (Ho & Tsai, 2023). Providing additional support, such as spousal job placement assistance or childcare services, could make rural postings more attractive to a wider range of teachers.

The study highlights the importance of structured organizational support and targeted reward systems in enhancing rural teacher motivation. Education policymakers should adopt a holistic approach, integrating financial, professional, and infrastructural support to create a more sustainable and appealing work environment for rural educators. Further research should explore additional factors affecting rural teacher retention, such as community involvement and mental health support, to develop more comprehensive policy solutions.

Limitation of the Study

Few obstacles or limitation factors hindered the progress of the study. The only foremost limitation factor is the time. A longer period for conducting the survey will enable the researcher to personally experience the real situation in the selected school. Nevertheless, due to the time limitation, the researcher only managed to get the result through the questionnaire via the headmasters. A longer time period may permit the researcher to get more intense with the real rural primary school situation, and teachers' experience even though the research by herself as a teacher in one of the selected schools.

A primary limitation of this study is its reliance on self-reported data from teachers, which may lead to response bias, as participants might have given socially desirable responses rather than entirely objective ones. Furthermore, the study exclusively utilized quantitative analysis, which restricts the depth of insight into teachers' personal experiences and the specific challenges they face in rural schools. A mixed-methods approach incorporating qualitative interviews or focus groups could provide richer insights into how perceived organizational support and rewards influence teacher motivation. Additionally, the study was confined to Sabah, which may restrict the generalizability of the findings to other rural areas with varying socio-economic and cultural contexts. Future research should broaden its scope to include diverse rural settings and adopt longitudinal designs to examine motivation trends over time.

Conclusion

This study revealed that perceived organizational support and rewards (intrinsic and extrinsic) significantly correlated with the motivation of rural primary school teachers. This study also revealed that even the teacher's background (age, gender and marital status) did not have any significant impact on the two components of the motivation sources tested. This implies that education management should emphasize the perceived organizational support and rewards program for improving their teacher motivation with minimal consideration of the background of the teachers (age, gender, marital status). However, this did not mean that teachers of different backgrounds had similar motivation sources. External sources of motivation (extrinsic rewards and perceived organizational support) need to be emphasized in influencing teacher motivation. A school with good infrastructure and connectivity could hold back more teachers for more hours. These are among the reasons why the government allocated and gave additional allowances to the teachers and improved the school infrastructure. Finally, the conclusion drawn from this study is that rural teachers' motivation is the antecedent of perceived organizational support and reward that they received from the school and the government. Motivation by reward is not a permanent motivation. If the rewards provided hold little meaning or significance for individual teachers, they may have minimal impact on their motivation levels. Further research is necessary to explore the key factors influencing teacher motivation in rural areas. Practically, this study offers implications for enhancing teacher motivation. Given that teacher motivation is a key determinant of both student motivation and teaching effectiveness, the findings can assist educational administrators and teachers in developing practical strategies to boost student motivation and improve teaching and learning outcomes.

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