

Analyzing the Relationship Between Employee Motivation and Performance in Public Universities: A Case Study of Bahawalpur District, Pakistan

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Abstract

This study examines the impact of motivation on employee performance within public sector universities in the Bahawalpur district of Punjab, Pakistan. Recognizing that employee motivation plays a central role in organizational effectiveness, the research focuses on key motivational factors including salaries and benefits, employee recognition, job satisfaction, job security, and training and development. Grounded in Goal-Setting Theory, the study adopts a quantitative research approach using a cross-sectional design. Data were collected through structured questionnaires from 410 academic staff members, including professors, associate professors, assistant professors, and lecturers. The findings reveal that not all motivational factors equally influence employee performance. Specifically, salaries and benefits, employee recognition, and job satisfaction did not show a statistically significant relationship with performance. In contrast, job security and training and development demonstrated a strong and significant positive impact on employee performance. These results highlight the importance of intrinsic and stability-related factors in public sector institutions where financial incentives may be limited. The study concludes that improving employee performance in public universities requires a strategic focus on long-term motivation, particularly through job security and professional development opportunities. The findings provide practical insights for policymakers and university administrators to design effective motivational strategies that enhance employee engagement, productivity, and institutional performance.

Keywords: Motivation, Salaries & benefits, Employee recognition, Job satisfaction, Job security, Training & development, Employee performance.

1. Introduction

1.1 Overview of the Study

In the modern organizational landscape, human resources are widely recognized as the most valuable asset for achieving institutional success and sustainability. Organizations are no longer solely dependent on financial capital or technological advancement; instead, the effectiveness of human capital has become a decisive factor in determining organizational performance. In this regard, employee motivation has emerged as a critical element that influences how individuals perform their tasks, interact within the workplace, and contribute to organizational objectives.

Motivation refers to the internal and external forces that initiate, guide, and sustain goal-oriented behaviors. It determines the level of effort, persistence, and commitment that employees exhibit in their roles (Robbins & Judge, 2017). A highly motivated workforce is

more likely to demonstrate increased productivity, creativity, and job satisfaction, which ultimately enhances overall organizational performance (Armstrong, 2014). On the other hand, a lack of motivation can lead to poor performance, low morale, and high employee turnover, posing significant challenges for organizations.

In the context of public sector institutions, particularly universities, the role of employee motivation becomes even more crucial. Universities are knowledge-driven organizations where academic staff play a central role in teaching, research, and community development. Their performance directly impacts the quality of education, institutional reputation, and national development. Therefore, understanding the factors that influence motivation and performance in such settings is essential.

1.2 Concept of Employee Motivation.

Employee motivation is a multidimensional concept that encompasses both intrinsic and extrinsic factors. Intrinsic motivation refers to the internal satisfaction derived from performing a task, such as personal growth, achievement, and a sense of purpose. In contrast, extrinsic motivation is driven by external rewards such as salary, recognition, and job security (Deci & Ryan, 2000).

The distinction between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation is particularly relevant in public sector organizations, where financial rewards may be limited compared to the private sector. In such environments, non-monetary factors like recognition, professional development, and job stability play a significant role in shaping employee motivation (Gagné & Deci, 2005). Research suggests that intrinsic motivation often leads to more sustainable and long-term performance outcomes, as it is closely linked to personal satisfaction and internal commitment (Ryan & Deci, 2017). Moreover, motivation is not a static concept; it evolves based on organizational culture, leadership practices, and individual expectations. Managers and policymakers must therefore adopt a holistic approach to motivation by addressing both financial and non-financial factors.

1.3 Employee Performance in Organizational Context.

Employee performance is defined as the degree to which an individual successfully fulfills the tasks and responsibilities assigned to them within a specified time frame. It is typically measured in terms of quality, quantity, efficiency, and effectiveness of work (Dessler, 2011). High employee performance is essential for achieving organizational goals, maintaining competitiveness, and ensuring long-term success.

In educational institutions, employee performance extends beyond routine job tasks. Academic staff are expected to engage in teaching, research, curriculum development, and administrative responsibilities. Their performance significantly influences student outcomes, institutional ranking, and overall educational quality (Wibowo, 2010).

Several factors influence employee performance, including skills, experience, organizational support, and motivation. Among these, motivation is considered one of the most influential determinants, as it directly affects employees' willingness to exert effort and achieve desired outcomes (Locke & Latham, 2002).

1.4 Relationship between Motivation and Employee Performance.

The relationship between motivation and employee performance has been widely discussed in organizational and behavioral studies. Theoretical and empirical evidence consistently suggests that motivated employees tend to perform better than those who lack motivation. Motivation enhances employees' commitment, encourages proactive behavior, and improves their ability to achieve organizational goals (Judge & Robbins, 2017).

Goal-Setting Theory, developed by Locke and Latham (2002), provides a strong foundation for understanding this relationship. The theory argues that specific and challenging goals, combined with appropriate feedback, lead to higher levels of performance.

When employees are motivated to achieve these goals, they are more likely to demonstrate improved productivity and efficiency.

Similarly, Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000) emphasizes the importance of autonomy, competence, and relatedness in fostering intrinsic motivation. Employees who feel empowered and valued are more likely to exhibit higher performance levels. These theoretical perspectives highlight the critical role of motivation in shaping employee behavior and outcomes.

1.5 Motivation in Public Sector Universities.

Public sector universities operate under unique conditions that differentiate them from private organizations. These institutions often face challenges such as limited financial resources, bureaucratic procedures, and increasing academic demands. As a result, traditional motivational strategies based solely on financial incentives may not be sufficient.

In such contexts, factors like job security, recognition, and opportunities for professional development become more significant. Employees in public universities often prioritize stability and career growth over monetary rewards (Ahmed et al., 2021). Therefore, understanding the specific motivational needs of academic staff is essential for improving their performance.

Furthermore, the performance of university employees has a direct impact on the quality of education and research output. A motivated academic workforce contributes to innovation, knowledge creation, and the development of skilled graduates, which are vital for national progress (Bogler & Nir, 2012).

1.6 Research Context Bahawalpur District.

The Bahawalpur district in Punjab, Pakistan, provides a unique setting for examining the relationship between motivation and employee performance. Public universities in this region play a crucial role in providing higher education opportunities and contributing to regional development. However, they also face several challenges, including resource constraints, high student-to-teacher ratios, and administrative limitations.

These challenges make it important to identify effective motivational strategies that can enhance employee performance despite existing constraints. By focusing on key motivational factors such as salaries and benefits, employee recognition, job satisfaction, job security, and training and development, this study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of how motivation influences performance in this specific context.

2. Purpose of the Study.

The primary purpose of this study is to examine the impact of employee motivation on performance in public sector universities in the Bahawalpur district. The research seeks to identify which motivational factors have the most significant influence on employee performance and how these factors can be effectively utilized to improve organizational outcomes. By providing empirical evidence and practical recommendations, this study aims to assist policymakers, administrators, and human resource managers in developing strategies that enhance employee motivation and performance. Ultimately, the research contributes to improving the effectiveness and quality of public sector universities.

3. Significance of the Study.

The present study holds substantial significance in both theoretical and practical domains, particularly within the fields of public administration, human resource management, and higher education. By examining the impact of employee motivation on performance in public sector universities of the Bahawalpur district, this research contributes valuable insights that can support organizational improvement and academic excellence.

3.1 Academic Significance.

From an academic perspective, this study contributes to the existing body of knowledge by providing empirical evidence on the relationship between motivation and employee performance in a developing country context. While numerous studies have explored this relationship in private sector organizations and developed economies, limited research has focused on public universities in Pakistan. Therefore, this study helps to bridge this gap by examining how different motivational factors operate within public sector educational institutions.

Furthermore, the study integrates established theories such as Goal-Setting Theory and Self-Determination Theory to explain the role of motivation in influencing performance. By applying these theoretical frameworks in a real-world context, the research strengthens their relevance and applicability in public sector settings (Locke & Latham, 2002; Deci & Ryan, 2000). It also provides a foundation for future researchers to explore similar relationships in other regions or sectors.

3.2 Practical Significance.

The findings of this study are highly valuable for practitioners, particularly university administrators, policymakers, and human resource managers. By identifying the key motivational factors that significantly influence employee performance—such as job security and training and development the study provides practical guidance for improving organizational practices.

In resource-constrained environments like public universities, it is not always feasible to rely heavily on financial incentives. Therefore, understanding the importance of non-monetary motivators enables administrators to design cost-effective strategies that enhance employee engagement and productivity (Armstrong, 2014). For instance, investing in professional development programs and ensuring job stability can lead to improved performance outcomes.

Additionally, the study highlights areas where traditional motivational factors, such as salaries and recognition, may not have a significant impact. This insight helps decision-makers allocate resources more efficiently and focus on strategies that yield better results.

3.3 Policy Implications.

This study also carries important implications for policy development in the higher education sector. Government bodies and educational authorities can use the findings to formulate policies that promote employee motivation and performance in public universities. By emphasizing factors such as job security and continuous professional development, policymakers can create supportive work environments that encourage long-term commitment and institutional loyalty among employees. Such policies can contribute to improving the overall quality of education and strengthening the higher education system in Pakistan.

3.4 Organizational Significance.

At the organizational level, the study provides insights that can help universities enhance their internal management practices. A motivated workforce is essential for achieving institutional goals, improving teaching quality, and fostering innovation. When employees feel secure in their jobs and have opportunities for growth, they are more likely to perform effectively and contribute positively to the organization (Gagné & Deci, 2005). Moreover, improving employee performance leads to better student outcomes, increased research productivity, and enhanced institutional reputation. This is particularly important for public universities that aim to compete at both national and international levels.

3.5 Societal Significance.

Beyond organizational benefits, this study also has broader societal implications. Public universities play a critical role in developing human capital and contributing to social and economic development. By improving employee performance through effective motivation strategies, these institutions can produce better-educated graduates who are capable of contributing to national progress. In this way, the study indirectly supports the development of a skilled workforce, which is essential for the growth and sustainability of the country's economy.

4. Background of the Study

Employee motivation has long been recognized as a key factor influencing organizational performance and effectiveness, as it determines how individuals direct their efforts toward achieving institutional goals. Classical theories by Abraham Maslow and Frederick Herzberg emphasize that both basic needs and workplace factors such as recognition, achievement, and job security play a crucial role in motivating employees. In modern organizational contexts, motivation is broadly categorized into intrinsic and extrinsic forms, where intrinsic motivation relates to internal satisfaction and personal growth, while extrinsic motivation is driven by external rewards such as salaries and benefits (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Employee performance, defined as the effectiveness and efficiency with which individuals complete their assigned tasks, is directly influenced by these motivational factors (Dessler, 2011). This relationship is particularly important in public sector universities, where financial incentives are often limited, and non-monetary factors such as job security, training, and professional development become more significant (Gagné & Deci, 2005). In developing countries like Pakistan, public universities face additional challenges, including resource constraints, bureaucratic structures, and increasing academic demands, which can affect employee motivation and performance. The Bahawalpur district, as an important educational region, reflects these challenges, making it essential to examine how different motivational factors influence employee performance in this specific context. Therefore, this study is grounded in the need to explore the role of motivation in enhancing employee performance, drawing on theoretical foundations such as Goal-Setting Theory, which suggests that properly motivated employees are more likely to achieve higher levels of performance (Locke & Latham, 2002).

5. Problem Statement

In public sector universities, particularly in the Bahawalpur district, employee motivation is a critical determinant of institutional effectiveness and performance. These universities face unique challenges, including limited financial resources, high student-to-staff ratios, bureaucratic constraints, and infrastructural limitations, which can negatively impact employee performance if not addressed. Despite recognition of motivation as a key factor influencing employee productivity, the precise effects of specific motivational elements, such as salaries and benefits, employee recognition, job satisfaction, job security, and training and development, remain underexplored in the context of Pakistani public universities. Existing literature predominantly focuses on private sector organizations or public institutions in developed countries, leaving a significant research gap in understanding how motivation functions in resource-constrained educational settings (Ami, Boaten, & Yamoah, 2015; Khan et al., 2012; Masum, Azad, & Beh, 2015). Moreover, while factors such as competitive compensation and recognition have been shown to enhance job satisfaction and performance in general, the interplay between intrinsic and extrinsic motivators within Pakistani universities is less clear (Ahmed et al., 2021; Busienei, 2020). This study addresses this gap by examining how various motivational factors influence employee performance in public universities in the Bahawalpur district. By identifying which elements significantly

impact performance, this research aims to provide actionable insights for university administrators and policymakers to design targeted motivation strategies that enhance employee engagement, productivity, and institutional effectiveness.

6. Objectives of the Study

The main objective of this study is to analyze the impact of motivation (salaries & benefits, employee recognition, job satisfaction, job security, training & development) on employee performance among the employees of the public sector universities in the Bahawalpur district.

1. To identify the impact of salaries & benefits on employee performance among the employee of public sector universities located in Bahawalpur district.
2. To identify the impact of employee recognition on employee performance among the employee of public sector universities located in Bahawalpur district.
3. To identify the impact of job satisfaction on employee performance among the employee of public sector universities located in Bahawalpur district.
4. To identify the impact of job security on employee performance among the employee of public sector universities located in Bahawalpur district.
5. To identify the impact of training & development on employee performance among the employee of public sector universities located in Bahawalpur district.

7. Research Hypothesis

H1: There is no significant relationship between salaries & benefits and employee performance among the employee of the public sector universities located in Bahawalpur district.

H2: There is no significant relationship between employee recognition and employee performance among the employee of the public sector universities located in Bahawalpur district.

H3: There is no significant relationship between job satisfaction and employee performance among the employee of the public sector universities located in Bahawalpur district.

H4: There is a significant relationship between job security and employee performance among the employee of the public sector universities located in Bahawalpur district.

H5: There is a significant relationship between training & development and employee performance among the employee of the public sector universities located in Bahawalpur district.

8. Literature Review

8.1 Motivation

Motivation is related to "the reasons underlying behavior" (Guay et al., 2010). According to Gredler, Broussard, and Garrison (2004), Motivation can be generally defined as "the attribute that moves us to do or not to do something." This concept encompasses both intrinsic Motivation and extrinsic Motivation. Intrinsic Motivation is characterized by being driven by personal pleasure and genuine curiosity in the activity itself. As Deci, Vallerand, Pelletier, and Ryan (1999) highlight, "intrinsic motivation energizes and sustains activities through the spontaneous satisfactions inherent in effective volitional action." This kind of Motivation is evident in activities like play, curiosity, and the seeking of tasks and people challenges that people undertake with the intention of being rewarded. Rather, they do it for the fun of it. In contrast, extrinsic Motivation refers to being engaged in activities due to external reinforcement or rewards, such as praise, grades, or tangible benefits. Researchers often emphasize that, habitually, educators consider intrinsic Motivation is more beneficial in educational contexts, as it is associated with deeper engagement, better learning outcomes, and sustained interest over time (Deci et al., 1999). According to Duică (2008), Motivation encompasses all internal and external forces that drive individuals to be involved in activities

that define the boundaries and methods of those activities and direct them toward achieving specific objectives. However, is there truly a link between Motivation and employee performance? Research by Gagné and Deci (2005) suggested that a significant connection exists between these two factors. An individual's employee performance in an organization is closely related to their motivation levels.

Table 2.1: Definitions and Concepts of Motivation from the Past Research

Author	Definition and Concept
Reeve (2024)	Motivation is the process of influencing others to behave in a certain way by offering the potential for rewards or benefits.
Filgona et al. (2020):	Motivation refers to the processes through which urges, drives, desires, aspirations, or needs guide, regulate, or account for human behavior.
Brown (2023):	Motivation refers to the procedure of stimulating individuals to take action in order to achieve goals that they wanted.
Beck (2003): physiological subsequently	Motivation is the process that starts with a or psychological need or deficiency, which triggers behavior or a drive to reach a goal or secure an incentive.

Various scholars have provided different definitions of Motivation. Broussard and Garrison (2004) defined Motivation as the assigned drives of individuals to act or refrain from acting. Kreitner (1995) viewed Motivation as a psychological process that imparts aim and direction to behavior. Buford, Bedeian, and Lindner (1995) described the concept of Motivation as a tendency to engage in purposeful behavior aimed at meeting specific unmet needs. Herzberg (1959) characterized Motivation as an organizational process that supports individuals to perform better for the overall gaining of the organization by addressing their unfulfilled needs. Furthermore, Motivation can be viewed as the initiation of goal-directed behavior, encompassing two main types: intrinsic and extrinsic (Buford, Bedeian, & Lindner, 1995). work with organizational psychology, Motivation is defined as the ongoing energetic processes that initiate, direct, intensify, sustain, or maintain activities within or outside the person (Pinder, 1998). Motivation is a crucial determinant of job performance. When Motivation is lacking, it can lead to costly outcomes such as excessive employee turnover, higher operational costs, diminished morale, and an increased demand for management's time (Jobber, 1994). Furthermore, Dobre (2013) argued that Motivation assists organizations in the development of a competitive edge since its aphorism encourages employees to focus on proactive achievements.

In the study, the following dimensions of Motivation (independent variable) were identified by the researcher to examine the influence of Motivation with dimensions: salary and benefits, employee recognition, job satisfaction, job security, training, and development on employee performance (dependent variable). The first dimension is salaries and benefits; a well-remunerated employee will have a strong desire to perform best for the company. The second variable is employee recognition, which entails acknowledgment of employee accomplishment by the employer or other employees. The third dimension is job satisfaction, which is defined as the level of satisfaction an employee has with his/her job and the wages paid with the intent of producing more. The fourth dimension of Motivation is job security, which provides certainty about the future of the employee's position, further motivating them

to excel in their role. Lastly, employee training and development, therefore, aims at upgrading the employee's skills and knowledge to improve employee performance outstandingly for the employer's advantage.

8.2 Employee Performance.

Employee performance is defined as the outcome of an individual's efforts in completing assigned tasks, utilizing their skills, experience, and dedication within a given time frame (Khan et al., 2017). It is a multidimensional concept that encompasses the quantity, quality, and timeliness of work. In the context of higher education, employee performance is not merely about teaching hours; it includes research output, administrative contributions, and community service. According to Armstrong (2014), performance is a behavior—what employees do—rather than just an outcome. However, in public universities, performance is often measured by the effectiveness of service delivery and the institution's ability to meet educational objectives. Elvina and Chao (2019) argue that the quality of human resources directly determines an organization's ability to execute operations effectively.

8.3 Relationship Between Motivation and Employee Performance.

The relationship between motivation and employee performance has been a central theme in organizational psychology. Motivation acts as the energizer that initiates and sustains goal-directed behavior. According to Locke and Latham's (2002) Goal-Setting Theory, clear and challenging goals lead to higher performance, provided that the individual is motivated to achieve them. Previous studies suggest a positive correlation between motivation and performance. For instance, highly motivated employees demonstrate higher levels of commitment, productivity, and job satisfaction (Gagné & Deci, 2005). However, the nature of this relationship can vary depending on the specific motivational factors (intrinsic vs. extrinsic) and the sector (public vs. private).

8.4 Theoretical Foundation: Goal-Setting Theory.

Drawing upon the goal-setting theory (GST) of motivation, this study examines how specific motivational factors influence performance. Locke and Latham (1990) developed the Goal-Setting Theory, which states that specific and challenging goals lead to higher performance. The theory posits that goals function as a directive function; they direct attention and effort toward goal-relevant activities. In the context of public universities, where goals such as academic excellence and research output are paramount, understanding how motivation drives these goals is critical.

8.5 Research Framework.

Based on the theoretical underpinnings of Goal-Setting Theory and Self-Determination Theory, this study proposes a framework where specific motivational factors (Salaries & Benefits, Employee Recognition, Job Satisfaction, Job Security, and Training & Development) serve as independent variables influencing the dependent variable (Employee Performance).

9. Research Methodology

9.1 Introduction

This section outlines the research design, target population, sampling techniques, data collection methods, and statistical tools employed to examine the impact of motivation on employee performance.

9.2 Research Design and Method

The study adopts a cross-sectional study design and employs a quantitative research method. This approach is suitable for quantifying the relationship between variables (motivation factors and employee performance) and testing the formulated hypotheses. A survey strategy was chosen to collect data from a large sample size efficiently.

9.3 Population and Sampling

The population of the study consists of all teaching employees (Professors, Associate Professors, Assistant Professors, and Lecturers) working in public sector universities in the Bahawalpur District, Punjab, Pakistan. A sample size of 410 employees was selected using a stratified random sampling technique to ensure representation across different job cadres and universities.

9.4 Data Collection

A self-administered questionnaire was developed to collect primary data. The questionnaire utilized a five-point Likert scale (ranging from 1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree) to measure the variables.

9.5 Data Analysis

The collected data was analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). Descriptive statistics were used to analyze demographic profiles. Inferential statistics, specifically Pearson Correlation and Linear Regression Analysis, were employed to test the hypotheses.

10. Results.

10.1 Response Rate: Out of the distributed questionnaires, the study achieved a high response rate, with a significant majority of the 410 targeted respondents returning completed forms suitable for analysis.

10.2 Descriptive Statistics: The demographic analysis revealed the distribution of respondents regarding gender, age, position level, nature of employment, and years of experience.

10.3 Correlation and Regression Analysis: Pearson correlation and regression analysis were computed to test the hypotheses.

10.4 Hypothesis Testing Results

H1: The analysis revealed that there is no significant relationship between salaries & benefits and employee performance.

H2: The study found no significant relationship between employee recognition and employee performance.

H3: The analysis showed no significant relationship between job satisfaction and employee performance.

H4: The study found a significant positive relationship between job security and employee performance.

H5: A significant relationship was found to exist between training & development and employee performance.

11. Discussion.

The primary objective of this study was to investigate the impact of motivation on employee performance in public universities in Bahawalpur. The findings present a compelling contrast between extrinsic factors (salary, recognition) and intrinsic/psychological factors (security, development). The lack of a significant relationship between Salaries & Benefits and performance challenges the traditional assumption that financial incentives are the primary driver of work output. In the public sector context of Pakistan, where pay scales are regulated and less variable, salary might be viewed as a "hygiene factor" rather than a performance motivator. Crucially, the significant impact of Job Security aligns with the socio-economic context of the region. In an environment where private sector opportunities may be scarce or unstable, the security provided by a public sector job allows employees to focus on long-term goals. Finally, the significance of Training & Development underscores the importance of professional growth in the academic sector.

12. Conclusion and Recommendations.

12.1 Conclusion

This study concludes that Job Security and Training & Development are the critical drivers of employee performance in this context. Conversely, extrinsic factors like Salaries & Benefits, Employee Recognition, and Job Satisfaction did not show a statistically significant impact on performance outcomes. These findings suggest that strategies focused on intrinsic motivators are more effective in driving performance than traditional financial incentives in the public sector.

12.2 Recommendations

- **Prioritize Professional Development:** Universities should implement robust training programs.
- **Enhance Job Security Policies:** Management should maintain transparent policies regarding tenure.
- **Review Recognition Systems:** Universities should restructure recognition programs to be more merit-based.
- **Focus on Non-Monetary Incentives:** HR departments should focus on autonomy and administrative support.

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