

STUDENT MERIT SYSTEM IN LOCAL CITY COLLEGE: A CASE STUDY

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Abstract:

The Merit System leads to a more qualified student body, thereby improving the overall academic environment and competitiveness. The case study examined the importance of recognition in motivating student performance with a special focus on the student merit system of Local City College. This study used a qualitative approach specifically a Descriptive case study to explore the practices of the student merit system in Local City College. The primary objective of this research was to establish links between the subject matter and a theoretical framework. The absence of such a system in higher education and its potential impact on student motivation and academic excellence are discussed. The purpose of the study is to examine current practices by interviewing students, and to provide recommendations for implementing standards to identify successful students. With the help of a qualitative research plan under the descriptive case study, the research hopes to highlight the positive effects of recognition on the motivation and academic success of students, which effects promoting a culture of success and self-development in an educational institution. The results indicate with the theme of M.E.R.I.T: Motivation, Extra-curricular Recognition, Recognition, Institutionalization of Merit System and Tracking of Academic Progress that the introduction of the merit system can develop a culture of academic excellence that will ultimately improve the education and success of Local City College students. Giving Merit or recognition to high performing students was crucial to their academic growth as it was a source of encouragement to aim for excellence in their chosen field.

Keywords: Merit System, Case Study, Self-determination Theory, Incentive Theory of Motivation, Academic Excellence

Introduction:

Student merit system in higher education consists of a set of regulations and standards in assessing and recognizing students based on their abilities, and academic performance. Acknowledgment motivates student to become competent individual, awards make student feel appreciated, and it was an excellent way to motivate progression and good behavior. Recognizing the effort of the student uplift student's morale and stimulate a culture of self-improvement. Through appreciation of academic performance and efforts, students become highly motivated to excel

in their chosen field. As observed in most Universities, State Colleges, there was an existing student merit system to recognize high-performing students. However, in Local City College these cannot be observed. High-achieving students may become less motivated or even discouraged if they felt that traditional systems often fail to recognize their exceptional abilities and accomplishments. Failure to recognize student's achievement can submerge student's motivation and desire to pursue their education, and worst it could lead to depression, especially to those students who have done their best to be recognized. Hence, it was the goal of this case study to conduct interviews to explore the practices of student merit system in Local City College. It would be a great contribution to the institution specifically Local City College since the study would produce an output that composed of standards in recognizing high performing students.

Literature Review:

The study was anchored on the theory of Self-Determination Theory and Incentive theory of Motivation. The theory of Self-determination served as a guiding framework for understanding human behavior and motivation. SDT emphasized the significance of autonomy, relatedness, and competence. These needs were considered crucial for stimulating intrinsic motivation, and personal improvement. SDT maintains and has given empirical support for the hypothesis that all human beings have fundamental psychological needs to be competent (Bliven, A., & Jungbauer, M. 2021). It was a theoretical structure addressing human motivation and well-fare (Steward, B. A., & Bradshaw, E. L. 2022). Students who were governed by personal goals were determined to pursue their education, and were willing to take risks to achieve the said goal no matter how hard it was. The incentive theory of motivation suggested that one's conduct was induced by the anticipation of awards. This theory posits that students were inspired to act in ways that lead to enticing outcomes. Furthermore, it has been influential in understanding various aspects of human behavior, including learning, decision-making, and goal pursuit. Incentive Theory of Motivation was developed by American behaviorist Burrhus Frederic Skinner in 1904-1990. It emphasized the role of awards and motivation in inducing conduct. In learning, it denotes that giving incentives, such as awards or positive outcomes, could activate engagement and amplify the learning process (Bandhu et al, 2024). This theory proposed that human being were fundamentally driven by external awards or the preclusion of negative results. Skinner presented the abstraction of operant conditioning, which states that opted behaviors are learned and nourished through their consequences. Conduct or behavior that was rewarded could likely be repeated, and behavior that was punished would occur less frequently (McLeod, 2024). Skinner's work on operant conditioning has been influential in shaping students' merit system practices related to motivation and reward.

Research Method:

This study used a qualitative approach specifically a Descriptive case study to explore the practices of the student merit system in Local City College. The primary objective of this research was to establish links between the subject matter and a theoretical framework. This research was conducted in Local City College, located at Mandaue City Cultural and Sports Complex, Don Andres Soriano Ave., Centro, Mandaue City, Cebu, Philippines. Mandaue City. A group of twelve informants who were currently enrolled in Local City College from the school of education were identified to be the informants of the study. These were the chosen informants to be included in the study to necessitate and saturate the objective of the study. This study used a semi-structured researchers made questionnaire, considering conducting in-depth interviews with students. Use interviews to gather qualitative data on perceptions. Employ semi-structured researchers made to observe and analyze day-to-day practices that were being practiced in recognizing students.

Findings and Discussion:

By utilizing a method of analysis known as thematic analysis, the researchers were able to recognize the overarching themes as well as sub-themes that arose from the data gathered. The topics picked were discussed, and their validity was confirmed by statements from the informants taken from the transcripts. These central themes formed the word M.E.R.I.T which means Motivation, Extra-curricular Recognition, Recognition, Institutionalization of Merit System, and Tracking of Academic Progress.

Theme 1: Motivation

Motivation plays a crucial role in academic pursuits as it drives students to set goals, persist in the face of challenges, and strive for success. It influences students' engagement, effort, and overall academic performance.

“Maka motivate to strive for excellence pa gani since if naa man galeh recognition or merit ma motivate kay nay ma dawat.” (If there is recognition or merit it can motivate to strive for excellence) (Successful Student, Line 7)

Recognition plays an important role in academic pursuits, it's an extrinsic motivation that drives students to strive for excellence. Academic recognition specifically Dean's list was not being practiced in Local City College which has a huge impact on students because recognition served as motivation for student to strive for excellence. According to Bliven, A., & Jungbauer, M. (2021) Student recognition positively impacts student retention and academic success. Students become more motivated to do things when they were being recognized. Giving awards and recognition helped student pursue their academic endeavor, and it gave a sense of fulfillment and satisfaction. Recognition motivates high-performing students to aim for excellence. Recognition serves as a powerful motivator that inspires individual to strive for excellence. When students felt valued and appreciated for their hard work, they were more likely to be motivated to continue performing at a high level and pushing their boundaries to achieve even greater success. Behavior that is reinforced (rewarded) will likely to be repeated, and behavior that is punished will occur less frequently (McLeod, 2024). The theory of self-determination is a prominent theory of human motivation that developed from research on intrinsic and extrinsic motivations and enlarged to include research on education organizations and various aspects of life. thus, promoting high quality performance, and wellness (Deci, E. L., Olafsen, A. H., & Ryan, R. M. 2017).

“As I said ganina, because of a merit system or reward recognition it can inspire you to do better and be better as one way to motivate you to study more and study hard.” (As I said earlier, because of a merit system or reward recognition it can inspire to do better and study hard) (Honorable Student, Line 67)

Merit system influenced students to strive for progress and motivated them to study hard. Receiving recognition for academic achievements were a strong motivator to study hard. When students were acknowledged for their efforts it reinforced the importance of their studies and encouraged them to continue putting in the effort to excel academically. Recognition served as fuel to propel individuals aiming for excellence. When students received acknowledgment for their accomplishments, it validates their hard work and dedication, motivating them to set even higher goals and strive for excellence in their endeavors. Recognition not only boosts confidence but also instills a sense of pride and determination to continue pushing boundaries and achieving greater success.

Theme 2: Extra-Curricular Recognition

Extracurricular activities refer to the activities or programs that students want to perform inside the premises in order to receive a certificate which indicates that the effort of students was being seen or recognized in the institution. The student who enrolled in Local City College observed that there is a certification given from various programs and activities. When a student engages with extra-curricular activities, they will receive an award like a certificate, medal or token to ensure that they won in that certain activity.

“As far as I have observed, and as I have experienced am the rewarding system that I got is from certifications coming from other programs and activities as well” (As far as I have observed, and as I have experienced, the rewarding system that I got is certification coming from other programs and activities as well.)- Tenacious Student, Line 23

Certification has been rewarding for students and a valuable marker of their skills and achievement. Certification for the students when joining extra-curricular activities serves as their participation, and achievement outside of their academic activities. By receiving a certificate in any activities or programs plays a crucial role in helping students to enhance their skills, and experience and to be prepared for their future careers. Extracurricular activities are part of the school curriculum that has significant implications for adolescent development, improving academic achievement and character development. Extracurricular activities had several positive effects on high-performing students. These activities provided opportunities for them to develop leadership skills, time management abilities, and teamwork capabilities, which were essential for success in both academic and professional settings. Additionally, participating in extracurricular offered a well-rounded experience, allowing high-performing students to explore their interests

beyond the classroom and developed a more holistic understanding of themselves and the world around them. Furthermore, involvement in extracurricular activities enhanced student's commitment, passion, and ability to balance multiple responsibilities effectively (Rahayu, A., Dong, R., 2023).

Theme 3: Recognition

Recognition was "the appreciation or action for an achievement, service, or ability" (Kloos et al., 2023). It was the acknowledgment or the act of giving credit to those students who gave their best effort and excelled academically.

Sub Theme 1: Words of Appreciation or Feedback

"Kanang I am a type of person who kanang give really effort on my academic performance so my instructor somehow recognized my effort through words of appreciation."

(I am a type of person who give really effort on my academic performance so my instructor somehow recognized my effort through words of appreciation)- Courageous Student, Line 45

Positive rewards, such as praise or certificates reinforced desired behaviors and academic achievements, motivating students to continue their efforts. Rewards boost students' self-esteem and confidence, leading to increased engagement and a more positive attitude towards learning. Rewards helped create a supportive and encouraging learning environment, where students felt valued and recognized for their contributions (Ismail, 2023). It was an important strategy for teachers to use positive reinforcement in order to encourage student involvement in the classroom. Positive reinforcement from teachers was crucial for the students to aim higher. When a student was awarded something, they become more motivated to study hard as well as attain their personal goals in life. Simple gestures like verbal praise can create a positive atmosphere in the learning environment. They were more likely to do their best when they felt that their efforts were appreciated by some teachers. Positive reinforcement can be an essential tool that can be used in the classroom to encourage students to achieve their goals. productive learning environment (Al Maharma & Abusa'aleek, 2022).

"My effort and academic performance being recognized katong um which is unsa to siya uy, AH man guro to which is kanang appreciation of kato kang Miss April like kanang narecognize kato nagcarousel mi and then nakuan siya sa akong pag-explain like iya kong gi awardan ato niya mao rato siya, narecognize nato then sa ako sang pronunciation daw ato" (My effort and academic performance being recognized when Miss April gave me an award because of my explanation and pronunciation during the Carousel in the subject of Art Appreciation.) (Empowered Student, Line 70) Teacher feedback was associated with student-teacher relations that providing feedback to students support the improvement of positive relations with learners (Cook et al. 2018). Feed-backing help build positive relationships between teacher and student wherein they can be comfortable with each other when expressing their thoughts and emotions. Teachers encouraged positive relations through activities that convey hope, compassion, and love, in which teachers identify the independence and uniqueness of students (Gkonou et al, 2018).

Sub Theme 2: Grades or Points

"Ang pinaka the best nga na received kay ang grades kay daku man (high grades), nindot sa feelings nga gi recognize ang effort."

(The best thing that I received is the grades since I got high grades and it's overwhelming for me because they recognize my effort.)- Resilient Student, Line 11

Aside from the acknowledgement given by a teacher, the students at Local City College have been also recognized through grades.

Theme 4: Institutionalization of Merit System

The institutionalization of a merit system for students in Local City College has brought about significant academic recognition, particularly through the implementation of the Dean's List program. The merit system has provided a framework for acknowledging students who excel academically and meet specific criteria for academic

achievement. This recognition served as a powerful motivator for students, fostering a culture of excellence and encouraging them to strive for higher levels of performance.

"Dean's lister, it has a big advantage to the student particular sa atong skwelahan so kay naa naman dean's list daghan maningkamot nga studyante para makuha na nga award"

(Dean's lister, has a big advantage to the students particularly to our school because if there is a dean's list there are lots of students who will strive hard to get that award)- Ambitious Student, Line 19

Theme 5: Tracking academic progress

Tracking the recognition of students entails recording achievements, contributions, and behavior for which a student has been recognized. These may be academic achievements, participation in activities, and excellence in their performance. Schools can ensure that students were recognized for their efforts and achievements by monitoring these recognitions, as well as identify areas where additional support or encouragement may be required.

"As a student since elementary to high school, I really love recognizing my effort, it really made me give a lot of motivation to strive for more to strive for the better so kung nay inga-ana pareha nga recognition as a student jud nga with honor permi I really look up jud to study hard or to study better kay nay recognition in that sense ma appreciate nila akong effort as a student."

(As a student since elementary to high school, I really love recognizing my effort. It really made me give a lot of motivation to strive for more to strive for the better so if there is recognition as a student with honor always I really look up to studying hard or studying better because there is recognition that appreciates my effort as a student) – Energetic Student, Line 38

Conclusion:

Recognition served as student's motivation to aim for excellence and it played a crucial role in their studies, it served as fuel in pursuing academic excellence. In academic pursuits, students were motivated when they know that their efforts and hard work were being valued and recognized by the institution. Recognition reinforced positive behavior and fosters a sense of belonging and validation within the organization. Hence, it played an important role in cultivating a supportive and appreciative environment. Students should be rewarded for their exceptional academic performance as it served as their inspiration to strive hard, achieve their dreams, and become individuals who were functional and holistically developed.

Moreover, the introduction of a merit system and the establishment of a Dean's List were crucial steps towards cultivating a culture of academic excellence at Local City College. By encouraging and celebrating the achievements of its students, the college create a supportive and motivating environment that propels individuals toward academic greatness. It was highly recommended that Local City College consider implementing these initiatives to enhance the educational journey and success of its students.

Limitations and Further Research:

The study offered recommendations to address Student Merit System faced by the student of Local City College. This includes recognizing high-performing students, establishing dean's list, and giving of certificate to motivate academic excellence, pursue their studies, and produce graduates who are globally competitive. Further, the study advocates for future research using quantitative methods to determine the correlational relationship between two variables.

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