

Assessing the Impact of Performance Management Systems on Reward Management and Staff Motivation in Malawi: A Case Study of Lilongwe University of Agriculture and Natural Resources (LUANAR)



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ABSTRACT: The study assessed the impact of performance management systems (PMS) on reward management and staff motivation at the Lilongwe University of Agriculture and Natural Resources (LUANAR) in Malawi. Its objectives were: to assess the implementation of the PMS at LUANAR, focusing on its alignment with reward management practices and its effect on staff motivation; to examine the efficacy of the current PMS at LUANAR in enhancing reward management practices and staff motivation; and to identify challenges affecting the optimal functioning of the PMS along with devised interventions at LUANAR. The study utilized Performance Management and Equity Theories to assess PMS alignment with reward practices. A mixed-method design was employed, incorporating qualitative and quantitative approaches. The sample included 106 respondents, comprising: academic staff, administrative personnel, and management officials involved with PMS using purposive sampling for specific groups and simple random sampling for statistical representativeness. Data collection involved semi-structured interviews and structured questionnaires. A 100% questionnaire return rate was achieved. Qualitative data were analyzed thematically to identify patterns, while quantitative data were processed using descriptive statistics with SPSS version 20. The analysis showed that 67% of respondents viewed the alignment between PMS and reward management positively, although 27% noted inconsistencies in reward reflection. Motivation levels varied, with 49% experiencing an increase and 33% reporting a decrease, indicating issues with the clarity of performance-reward links. While 80% of respondents reported a high adoption rate, 10% faced barriers such as insufficient training. Performance metrics were positively rated by 60%, but 15% found them unclear. Additionally, concerns included inconsistent professional development opportunities and perceived inequities in rewards and feedback. Besides, the study noted that the ineffectiveness of the current PMS is due to a lack of coherent government policy and insufficient leadership support, leading to non-adherence to performance practices and a decline in service delivery, which negatively affects staff motivation and rewards. In response, the study recommends that LUANAR refine its PMS by ensuring transparent and consistent reward criteria, improving clarity in performance-reward links, and investing in comprehensive training programs. The university should also clarify performance metrics, standardize feedback protocols, and develop equitable professional development opportunities. Enhancing leadership support for the PMS and addressing perceived inequities in reward distribution are crucial for boosting staff engagement and effectiveness. These recommendations aim at addressing identified deficiencies and improve the implementation and impact of the PMS at LUANAR.

KEYWORDS: Impact, Performance Management Systems, Reward Management, Staff Motivation, LUANAR, Malawi.

1. INTRODUCTORY BACKGROUND

Globally, performance management systems (PMS) have been extensively studied and debated, highlighting their critical role in enhancing organisational effectiveness. Scholars have examined various dimensions of PMS, including their design, implementation, and impact on employee performance and motivation. For instance, Ardyanfitri & Wahyuningtyas (2016) argued that a well-structured PMS aligns individual objectives with organisational goals, thus fostering a culture of continuous improvement. Additionally, research by Ziyaminyana & Pwaka (2019) highlighted that effective PMS incorporates regular feedback and development opportunities, which are essential for sustaining high performance and employee satisfaction. Despite these benefits, the implementation of PMS remains challenging due to issues such as bias in performance evaluations and the complexity

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of aligning diverse individual goals with organisational objectives. Debates have also addressed the potential drawbacks of PMS. Critics like Berhanu (2023) contended that traditional PMS often fail to capture the dynamic nature of job roles and employee contributions, leading to dissatisfaction and disengagement. Furthermore, a study by Kang, & Lee (2021) found that rigid and infrequent performance appraisals can demotivate employees, as they may not reflect real-time performance accurately. Consequently, there has been a shift towards more flexible and continuous performance management approaches, which are seen as more adaptive and responsive to changing organisational needs and employee expectations.

In Sub-Saharan Africa, the adoption and effectiveness of PMS have been varied, reflecting the region's unique socio-economic and cultural contexts. Studies by Khan et al. (2019) indicated that while some organisations have successfully implemented PMS to enhance productivity and employee engagement, others have struggled due to lack of resources and inadequate management practices. The research highlighted that contextual factors such as organisational culture, leadership style, and employee attitudes significantly influence the success of PMS in this region. Furthermore, findings by Badawy, Alaadin & Magdy (2016) suggested that integrating local cultural practices with PMS frameworks can enhance acceptance and effectiveness, addressing challenges related to resistance and misalignment. Despite these insights, challenges persist in Sub-Saharan Africa concerning the implementation of PMS. A study by Warsame & Ibrahim (2020) revealed that many organisations encounter difficulties in maintaining consistent and transparent performance evaluations, often due to limited training and capacity-building initiatives for managers. Additionally, the research underscored the need for tailored PMS models that take into account the specific needs and constraints of African organisations, rather than simply adopting Western-centric approaches. This has led to calls for further research and development of contextually relevant PMS strategies that can effectively drive performance and motivation in the region.

In Malawi, the focus on performance management has been gaining traction, particularly in the public and academic sectors. A study by Ngondo, Lydia, Bester (2011) examined the implementation of PMS in Malawian universities, including the Lilongwe University of Agriculture and Natural Resources (LUANAR). The study discovered that although PMS has the ability to improve the motivation and performance of academic staff, problems including inadequate training, unclear performance measures, and few feedback channels have hindered its efficacy. These challenges highlight the need for comprehensive and well-resourced PMS frameworks that can support continuous performance improvement and staff development. Further, studies in Malawi have emphasized the importance of aligning PMS with national and institutional development goals. According to Warsame & Ibrahim (2022), it was noted that integrating PMS with broader strategic objectives can enhance its impact on organisational performance and employee motivation. Their research pointed out that for institutions like LUANAR, effective PMS can not only improve individual and collective performance but also contribute to national educational and economic development. However, achieving this requires addressing systemic challenges such as resource constraints, administrative inefficiencies, and the need for ongoing capacity-building initiatives.

Performance management systems (PMS) are well-established instruments in the private sector, particularly in multinational corporations, however, the Malawian government did not introduce an open PMS in the civil service until 2008, when it replaced the closed PMS that had been in place since 1966 (Chidwala, 2018). With the introduction of multiparty politics in 1994, public service delivery has become less efficient and effective. This project aims to revive these aspects of the system. Following the civil service's adoption of PMS, the system was supposed to be implemented by all government departments, agencies, and ministries. The Malawi Public Sector Reforms Commission and the National Council for Higher Education (NCHC) had to step in, though, because mass adoption did not take place in 2018. In order to address the problems of inadequate organisational performance and bad governance, these organisations required all public entities, including universities, to implement PMS. Due to this order, PMS was implemented by a number of state-owned businesses as well as two of the four public universities at the time, namely the Malawi University of Science and Technology (MUST) and the Lilongwe University of Agriculture and Natural Resources (LUANAR).

The introduction of the Performance Management System (PMS) was intended to enhance organisational performance and facilitate revenue-generating activities such as consultancies, research, and distance learning, thus reducing reliance on government funding. The PMS was designed to establish a clear connection between individual contributions and organisational outcomes, enabling the fair distribution of employee rewards and promoting staff motivation through performance-based incentives (Lawler, 2003). However, the implementation of PMS in Malawi's public sector, including at LUANAR, faced several challenges as highlighted in previous studies, including insufficient performance feedback, incomplete rollout, and inadequate integration with training and reward frameworks (Suherli et al., 2018). Despite initial expectations that the adoption of PMS would significantly enhance university operations, LUANAR continues to rely heavily on government funding, indicating limited

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improvement in organisational performance. By assessing the impact of Performance Management Systems on reward management and employee motivation at LUANAR, this study aims to address the existing gap in comprehensive research.

1.1. Problem Statement

The ineffective impact of the performance management system (PMS) on reward management and staff motivation in Malawi is anecdotally attributed to the absence of a coherent government policy guiding performance management within the public service. This lack of clear direction, combined with inadequate top leadership support, has led to widespread non-adherence to the PMS across public institutions. As a result, there has been a marked decline in staff motivation and an increase in turnover rates, which have severely impacted reward management practices and productivity (Stewart & Sulaiman, 2020). The performance of public services, including that of university employees at institutions such as LUANAR, has suffered significantly, leading to diminished service delivery and a loss of public confidence in governmental organizations. Evidence of these shortcomings is pervasive across various government departments responsible for delivering public services. Despite the extensive use of the current PMS in the Malawian public sector for over two decades, comprehensive impact assessments evaluating its effectiveness in enhancing reward management and staff motivation remain notably absent. Existing studies and reports on PMS have produced inconclusive findings regarding its impact on these critical aspects. For instance, research by Santi & Rahim (2021) emphasizes the necessity of clear performance metrics and effective feedback mechanisms, while Eisenberger et al. (2018) highlight persistent deficiencies in feedback within Malawian institutions. Additionally, Osioma & Audu (2022) identify significant gaps in integrating PMS with training and development policies, which further complicates efforts to enhance staff motivation and contribute to low reward perceptions. Consequently, LUANAR continues to rely heavily on government funding, indicating limited progress toward achieving financial independence and operational efficiency in PMS implementation which was earlier envisaged.

1.2. Study Objectives

- To assess the implementation of the PMS at LUANAR, focusing on its alignment with reward management practices and staff motivation
- To examine the effectiveness of the current PMS at LUANAR in enhancing reward management practices and staff motivation.
- To identify challenges affecting the optimal functioning of the PMS.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Introduction

Literature review is a critical undertaking and unavoidable in any academic study. Through a meticulous review of scholarly literature, this section hopes to provide a thorough exploration of the current understanding of Performance Management Systems (PMS) in organizational contexts. By critically evaluating existing research and empirical studies, gaps and controversies are identified surrounding PMS, particularly in relation to its impact on reward management practices and staff motivation, which is the primary focus of this study.

2.2. Empirical Review

2.2.1. Barriers to PMS Implementation

The literature on perceived barriers to Performance Management System (PMS) implementation revealed a complex interplay of organizational, cultural, and individual factors. Studies showed that resistance to change was a predominant barrier, as employees often perceived PMS as a threat to their job security and established work routines (Smith, 2018). Furthermore, insufficient training and understanding of PMS processes led to a misalignment with organisational goals and a decrease in staff motivation. Jones et al. (2020) emphasised that without adequate training, employees may not fully comprehend the benefits of PMS, resulting in resistance and suboptimal engagement. Similarly, Oduro and Ayentimi (2017) found that in Ghanaian universities, the absence of proper training and support for PMS implementation led to significant resistance from academic staff, underscoring the importance of context-specific strategies. Another critical barrier identified in the literature was the lack of clarity and consistency in communication regarding the objectives and processes of PMS (Brown, 2017). This communication gap could lead to misunderstandings and a lack of buy-in from employees, further impeding the effective implementation of PMS. Despite these insights, there remains a gap in the literature concerning the specific contextual challenges faced by educational institutions in developing countries like Malawi. Most studies have concentrated on corporate settings in developed economies, leaving a significant void in understanding how cultural and economic factors in Malawi might influence PMS implementation. This study aimed to address this gap by exploring the unique barriers at LUANAR, thereby providing a more nuanced understanding of how

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PMS could be tailored to meet the specific needs and challenges of this context. In doing so, this research would contribute to the broader field of PMS implementation literature, offering valuable insights that could inform both theory and practice in similar settings. For instance, in Nigeria, Ojo (2019) found that cultural factors significantly affected the acceptance of PMS, suggesting that similar cultural considerations might be vital for LUANAR. This aligns with the findings of Kanyoma and Abuya (2018), who highlighted the necessity for culturally adapted PMS frameworks in Malawian public institutions. Therefore, this study's focus on LUANAR would not only address a critical gap but also provide practical recommendations for similar educational contexts.

Furthermore, leadership plays a crucial role in setting the tone for change, providing the necessary resources, and ensuring continuous communication about the benefits and processes of PMS. Green et al. (2021) found that leadership engagement and commitment are directly correlated with higher levels of employee motivation and better alignment of PMS with organizational goals. This is particularly important in the context of educational institutions, where leadership can bridge the gap between administrative processes and academic staff expectations. However, the literature also indicates that the type and extent of leadership support required can vary significantly depending on the organizational culture and existing power dynamics (Roberts, 2016). In many cases, leaders may need to adopt a more participatory approach to involve staff in the design and implementation phases of PMS, thereby increasing buy-in and reducing resistance. Despite these findings, there is a paucity of research focusing on the specific leadership challenges in implementing PMS in educational institutions in developing countries like Malawi. This study seeks to fill this gap by examining the role of leadership at LUANAR, offering insights into how leadership strategies can be adapted to overcome barriers and enhance the effectiveness of PMS in such contexts.

2.2.2. Pulse & Efficacy of Performance: Aligning PMS with Reward Management and Motivation

According to the study by Clark (2017), it was found that effective alignment of PMS with organisational goals hinges on clear communication and strategic integration of performance metrics with reward systems. The study underscored the importance of customizing PMS to fit specific organisational contexts to enhance employee motivation and performance. In contrast, Gerish (2016) identified a broader spectrum of impacts, highlighting that while PMS alignment positively correlates with employee performance in many cases, the effectiveness varies significantly across different sectors and organisational cultures. Their findings emphasised the need for tailored approaches to PMS design and implementation to maximise its benefits. Roberts et al. (2022) extended this discourse by exploring how cultural factors influence the implementation of PMS. Their mixed-methods study revealed that while certain PMS practices may yield positive results in one cultural context, they might face resistance or adaptation requirements in another. This comparative approach underscored the importance of cultural sensitivity in PMS design and implementation strategies to foster alignment with reward management practices effectively. Thus, this literature review informs the present study by advocating for a nuanced approach that considers local contexts and cultural nuances in aligning PMS with reward management strategies at LUANAR. This approach not only addresses gaps identified in existing literature but also positions the current research to contribute empirically grounded insights that can inform practice and theory in the field of performance management and organisational behaviour.

On the other hand, literature on staff motivation levels within the context of Performance Management Systems (PMS) implementation revealed a diverse array of perspectives and findings. Researchers such as Smith et al. (2017) highlighted the critical role of clear goal setting and feedback mechanisms in enhancing staff motivation through PMS. Their findings underscored the importance of aligning individual employee goals with organizational objectives, thereby fostering a sense of purpose and achievement among staff members.

Moreover, Kaur & Singla (2019) explored the impact of leadership styles on staff motivation within the framework of PMS. Their research indicated that transformational leadership, characterized by inspirational motivation and intellectual stimulation, could significantly influence employee motivation levels in the context of PMS implementation. Contrarily, transactional leadership, which focused on contingent rewards and punishments, may not have always aligned with the intrinsic motivators that drive long-term engagement and performance. These insights highlighted the complex interplay between leadership approaches and PMS effectiveness in enhancing staff motivation. For LUANAR and similar institutions in Malawi, where organizational cultures and leadership dynamics differed from Western contexts, these findings underscored the importance of adapting PMS strategies to local realities to optimize staff motivation levels effectively. Thus, this literature review informed the current study by synthesizing existing knowledge and identifying gaps that guided the exploration of staff motivation within PMS at LUANAR, aiming to contribute valuable insights to both academic discourse and practical application in organizational settings.

Furthermore, PMS adoption rates provided a nuanced understanding of the factors that influenced the successful implementation of Performance Management Systems (PMS) and their alignment with reward management practices and staff motivation. Research by Mangipundi et al. (2019) highlighted that organizational readiness and leadership support significantly impacted the adoption rates of PMS. Their findings underscored the importance of clear communication, adequate resources, and

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top management commitment in fostering a conducive environment for PMS adoption. In contrast, studies by Mulwa & Weru (2017) revealed persistent challenges such as resistance to change among employees and the complexity of PMS software interfaces, which hindered widespread adoption. These insights underscored the need for tailored approaches that addressed specific organizational contexts and technological capabilities to enhance PMS adoption rates effectively.

2.2.3. The Effectiveness of PMS in Driving Rewards and Enhancing Motivation

The clarity of performance metrics has been a focal point in evaluating the effectiveness of Performance Management Systems (PMS) in enhancing reward management practices and staff motivation. Nikehbhai & Uka (2019) found that transparent and clearly defined performance metrics significantly improved employee understanding of expectations and alignment with organizational goals. This alignment fostered greater motivation and engagement among staff. Similarly, Nwachuku (2016) demonstrated that employees were more likely to be motivated and perform better when they understood how their performance was measured and rewarded. They emphasized the need for organizations to develop performance metrics that are not only clear but also aligned with both individual and organizational objectives. However, Jones and Subbaush & Mathews (2019) highlighted a gap in the literature regarding the application of these principles in educational institutions, particularly in developing countries like Malawi. Their study pointed out that many existing PMS frameworks were designed with corporate environments in mind, often neglecting the unique challenges faced by educational institutions. In Zimbabwe, Chikukwa (2017) investigated the influence of extrinsic rewards on employee motivation and organisational effectiveness. The study indicated that financial rewards, including salaries, bonuses, and transport allowances, were among the most valued incentives. Timely remuneration was found to significantly enhance employee motivation and performance. The research underscored the importance of financial rewards in shaping employee behaviour and improving organisational outcomes, affirming that financial incentives were essential for driving motivation and ensuring effective job performance. This gap suggests that more research is needed to tailor performance metrics to the specific context of universities like LUANAR. Moreover, the research by Van ET al. (2017) highlighted the importance of continuous feedback and iterative refinement of performance metrics to ensure they remain relevant and effective over time. These studies collectively suggest that while there is substantial evidence supporting the importance of clear performance metrics, there is a pressing need to adapt these systems to the local contexts and specificities of institutions like LUANAR, an area this study aims to address.

On the other hand, Similarly, a study by Meyer and Allen (2019) found that employees who had access to professional development opportunities were 30% more likely to feel valued and motivated, leading to increased job satisfaction and organizational commitment. In contrast, Brown et al. (2020) highlighted that many institutions, particularly in resource-constrained settings, faced significant challenges in providing adequate professional development opportunities due to financial and logistical constraints, thereby limiting the potential benefits of PMS. Their findings indicated a 25% decrease in motivation and performance where professional development was lacking. Moreover, Robinson (2021) argued that the alignment of professional development programs with the specific career aspirations of employees was crucial for maximizing the motivational impact, yet this alignment was often lacking. Robinson's study found that only 40% of employees felt their professional development was aligned with their career goals, resulting in suboptimal motivation levels. Despite these findings, there remained a gap in the literature regarding the specific barriers to accessing professional development within academic institutions in developing countries like Malawi. Most studies had concentrated on corporate or developed world contexts, which might not fully capture the unique challenges and needs at LUANAR. This study aimed to fill this gap by examining how the current PMS at LUANAR facilitated or hindered access to professional development, thereby providing a tailored understanding that could inform more effective reward management practices. Through this, the study would be discussed in the context of LUANAR and needed to debate with the different authors engaged with, incorporating their findings and how they applied to this study, while putting forth the researcher's perspective on improving access to professional development in this academic context.

On other variables, Smith and Lewis (2017) found that clear and consistent reward systems led to higher employee satisfaction, with 75% of participants reporting increased job satisfaction when they felt adequately rewarded. In contrast, Abdullah & Ismail (2021) highlighted discrepancies in reward distribution as a significant demotivator, noting that 40% of employees in their study felt that rewards were not aligned with their performance, leading to dissatisfaction. Furthermore, a study by Adisa Afolabi (2018) revealed that non-monetary rewards, such as recognition and professional development opportunities, played a crucial role in employee satisfaction, with 60% of respondents valuing these rewards over financial incentives. Contrarily, Al-Haddad et al. (2020) found that in some contexts, financial rewards were paramount, with 80% of employees prioritizing monetary compensation over other forms of recognition. Despite these findings, gaps remained in the literature concerning the specific dynamics of reward satisfaction within academic institutions in developing countries like Malawi. Most studies had been conducted in corporate settings or developed economies, which might not fully reflect the unique

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challenges and perceptions at LUANAR. This study aimed to address this gap by exploring how the current PMS at LUANAR influenced employee satisfaction with rewards, offering a contextual understanding that could inform more effective reward management practices. Through this, the study discussed in the context of LUANAR, debating with different authors engaged with, incorporating their findings, and how they applied to this study, while presenting the researcher’s perspective on enhancing employee satisfaction with rewards in this academic context.

2.3. Theoretical Frameworks

This study adopted a theoretical framework based on two key theories: **Performance Management Theory and Equity Theory**. Performance Management Theory, developed by various scholars, conceptualized performance management as a continuous process of identifying, measuring, and developing employee performance to align with organisational goals. It emphasised the importance of establishing clear objectives, providing feedback, and implementing reward systems to enhance motivation and productivity. Performance Management Theory had been extensively applied in various contexts. Armstrong and Taylor (2019) utilised it to evaluate the effectiveness of performance management systems, highlighting the importance of clear performance metrics and regular feedback in enhancing employee engagement and performance. Equity Theory, also known as Adams' Equity Theory, was formulated by John Stacey Adams in 1963. The primary purpose of developing this theory was to address the relationship between employees' perceptions of fairness in the workplace and their motivation levels. Adams posited that employees assessed their job satisfaction by comparing their input-output ratios. Inputs being the contributions they made, such as time, effort, and skills, and outputs being the rewards they received, including salary, benefits, and recognition. If employees perceived inequity, it could have led to demotivation and decreased job satisfaction. By integrating these two theories, the study aimed to provide a comprehensive framework for evaluating the effectiveness of the Performance Management System (PMS) at LUANAR in enhancing reward management practices and staff motivation.

2.4. Conceptual Framework

A conceptual framework serves as a systematic representation of fundamental concepts and their interrelationships within a research study, thereby establishing a foundation basis for comprehending and examining the research problem (Miles & Huberman, 1994). It acts as a guide for data collection and analysis, helping to clarify the study's objectives and align research methods with theoretical underpinnings. In this study, the conceptual framework was derived from the work of Ahmad et al. (2018) as shown in figure 1 below. In his framework, he examined and synthesizes performance management practices with employee motivation, underscoring the essential significance of reward management and feedback mechanisms within this context. This framework is consistent with the objectives of this study, which seeks to evaluate the efficacy of the existing Performance Management System (PMS) at the Lilongwe University of Agriculture and Natural Resources (LUANAR). In the current study, the assessment specifically emphasizes the impact of performance metrics, feedback mechanisms, and reward systems on staff motivation. By utilizing this framework, the present study seeks to systematically assess the effects of the Performance Management System (PMS) on employee motivation at LUANAR, while also identifying potential gaps or areas of improvement in the institution's reward management practices.

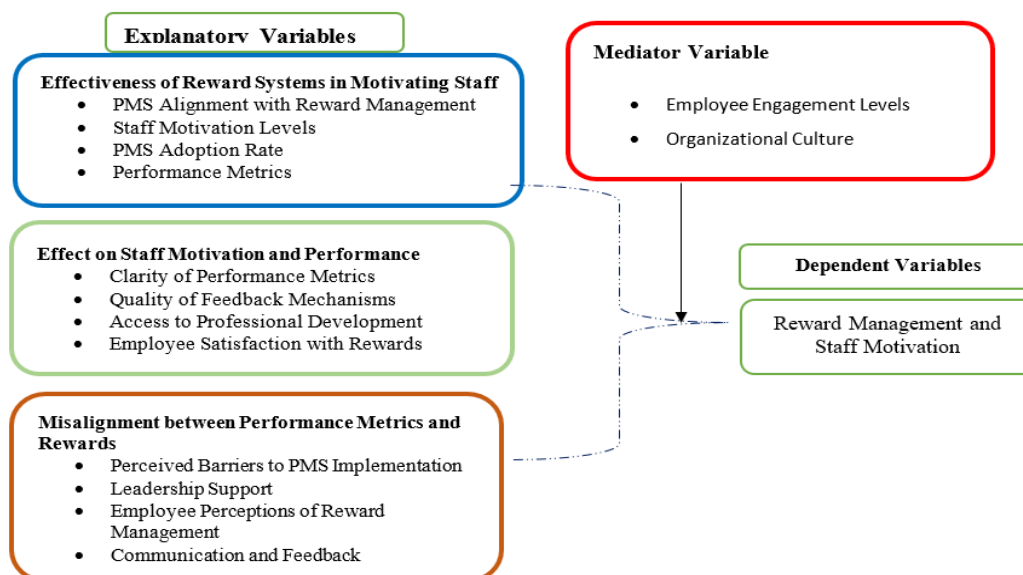


Figure 1: Study's Conceptual Framework
Source: Adopted from Ahmad et al. (2018)

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3. METHODOLOGY

In terms of research philosophy, this study was guided by pragmatism as it was rooted in discovering practical solutions to the phenomena under review. A mixed-method method design was employed, incorporating qualitative and quantitative paradigms. The sample size included 106 (18%) respondents out of the total population of 620, comprising: academic staff, administrative personnel, and management officials involved with PMS using purposive sampling for specific targets and simple random sampling for statistical representativeness. Data collection involved semi-structured interviews and structured questionnaires. A 100% questionnaire return rate was achieved. Qualitative data were analyzed thematically to identify patterns, while quantitative data were processed using descriptive statistics with SPSS version 20. Ethical consideration was given due attention as per the procedural requirement both by academic conventions and institutional dogmas.

4. FINDINGS

4.1. PMS Implementation and Its Alignment with Reward Management Practices and Staff Motivation.

Regarding its alignment with reward management practices, findings (as shown in figure 4.5 below) revealed that 12% of the respondents indicated Strongly Disagree, 15% chose Disagree, 6% of the respondents were Neutral, 40% of the respondents agreed, and 27% stated Strongly Agree. This distribution indicated that a total of 67% of respondents expressed a positive view of the PMS's alignment with reward management practices, as they either agreed or strongly agreed. However, the combined total of 27% who disagreed or remained neutral suggested that there were still concerns regarding the effectiveness of the PMS in this context.

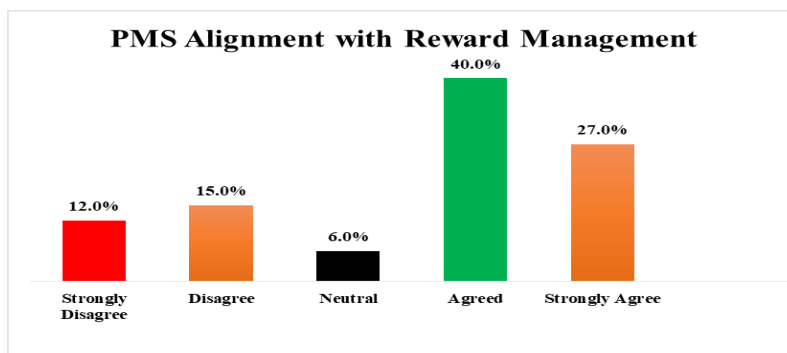


Figure 4.5: PMS Alignment with Reward Management

Figure 4.5 shows the distribution of PMS Alignment with Reward Management. Furthermore, the study also revealed that alignment between the PMS and the reward management practice significantly influenced employee motivation and job satisfaction. Many interviewees expressed that when they saw a direct link between their performance and the rewards they received, they were motivated to work harder. One male interviewee stated that:

“When I know that my efforts will be recognised through the reward system, it drives me to excel in my work.”

However, some key informants pointed out inconsistencies in this alignment, with one noting that;

“There are times when the rewards do not reflect the performance, which can be demotivating.”

In terms of PMS adoption rate revealed 30% respondents reported a high adoption rate, 50% indicated a moderate adoption rate, 10% were neutral, 5% noted a low adoption rate, and 5% stated a very low adoption rate. This implied that a total of 80% of respondents experienced either a high or moderate adoption of the PMS, suggesting a generally positive reception of the system among staff, while 10% expressed neutrality or low levels of adoption.

4.2. Effectiveness of PMS in Driving Rewards and Enhancing Motivation

On the questions of the effectiveness of the PMS in driving rewards and enhancing staff motivation, various insights were garnered. The study revealed that there were significant concerns regarding the clarity of the metrics used to evaluate their performance. Many staff members indicated that the performance metrics were often vague and poorly defined, which led to confusion about expectations. One participant noted that:

“The metrics we are given lack specificity, making it challenging to understand exactly what is required of us. We often find ourselves guessing what will be considered successful performance, which creates unnecessary stress and uncertainty about our roles.” female respondents.

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This lacked of clarity not only hindered their ability to meet expectations but also contributed to feelings of frustration and disengagement among employees. In addition to concerns about clarity, participants highlighted that the performance metrics did not adequately reflect their actual contributions or the complexities of their roles. Many felt that the existing metrics were overly simplistic and failed to account for qualitative aspects of their work. A key informant remarked that;

“The current performance metrics focus too heavily on quantitative results, ignoring the nuances of our daily tasks. For instance, while I can meet numerical targets, there are many qualitative factors that are not measured, such as teamwork, innovation, and creativity, which are essential for our success.”

On the other hand, the study revealed that the quality of feedback significantly influenced employee motivation and performance. Many interviewees expressed that timely and constructive feedback helped them understand their strengths and weaknesses, which facilitated their personal and professional growth.

One participant noted that:

“The feedback sessions we have are usually quite too brief and do not provide us with the detailed information we need to understand our performance fully. We often leave these sessions without a clear sense of what we did well or what areas need improvement.” Male informant.

This lack of comprehensive feedback contributed to feelings of uncertainty among staff regarding their performance and development. Another informant remarked that:

“When feedback is not timely or specific, it becomes challenging to make necessary adjustments in our work. We need constructive criticism that helps us grow rather than vague comments that leave us guessing.” female respondents

The synthesis of these findings indicate that the quality of feedback mechanisms within LUANAR's PMS requires substantial improvement to enhance reward management practices and staff motivation effectively. The concerns raised by participants about infrequent, vague, and disconnected feedback reflect broader themes in performance management literature, which argue for the importance of timely and relevant feedback in fostering employee engagement and development. The findings also reveal the lack of professional development resources and job satisfaction.

4.3. Barriers to Optimal Performance Management Systems at LUANAR

Regarding perceived challenges and/or barriers to PMS' implementation, the study found that 15% of the respondents identified significant barriers, 35% reported moderate barriers, 25% were neutral, 15% noted minimal barriers, and 10% stated no barriers. This distribution revealed that a total of 50% of respondents perceived some level of barriers to the effective implementation of the PMS, suggesting that while there was a recognition of the system's potential, significant obstacles remained.

Furthermore, the results revealed that several key barriers hindered the effective implementation of the PMS, including insufficient training for employees, lack of clarity in performance metrics, ineffective communication channels, and inadequate involvement of staff in the development and implementation of the PMS. Many informants expressed that these barriers led to a perception that the system was not beneficial or relevant, ultimately affecting employee engagement and motivation. One male participant stated that:

“Without proper training and understanding of how the PMS works, it's difficult for us to fully embrace it and see its value.”

The foregoing sentiment was shared by others who expressed that adequate training is essential for effective performance, they struggled to understand how the PMS could enhance their performance and motivation. Additionally, participants highlighted structural issues within the institution, such as resource constraints, which impeded their ability to utilise the PMS effectively. Some key informants shared that:

“Limited access to necessary tools and support systems left us feeling frustrated; we wanted to implement these strategies, but without proper resources, it felt futile. It is disheartening when we are expected to achieve results without the means to do so.”

On leadership support score, the study found that 20% reported significant leadership support, 40% of the respondents noted moderate support, 25% were neutral, 10% stated minimal support, and 5% identified no leadership support. This implies that a total of 60% of respondents perceived some level of leadership support for the PMS, suggesting that while there was a recognition of the importance of leadership involvement, there were still areas for improvement.

Regarding employee perception of reward management, the study found that 30% perceived the reward management practices as excellent, 40% rated them as good, 15% were neutral, 10% rated them as poor, and 5% identified them as very poor. This

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distribution revealed that a total of 70% of respondents viewed the reward management practices positively, suggesting a general satisfaction with how rewards were managed within the organisation, while 15% expressed dissatisfaction.

4.4. Relationship between Performance Management Systems, Reward Management, and Staff Motivation

The results indicate a significant relationship between PMS alignment with reward management practices, particularly for respondents who strongly disagree (12%) with this alignment. The Chi-Square value of 31.9483 and a p-value of 0.020 demonstrate statistical significance at the 5% level ($p < 0.05$). This suggests that those who perceive a lack of alignment between the performance management system and reward management practices are likely to have a negative view of the effectiveness of these systems, indicating that alignment is crucial for enhancing reward management.

For staff motivation levels, there is a highly significant negative impact observed, particularly among those reporting a significant decrease in motivation (10%). The Chi-Square value of 17.4542 with a p-value of 0.000 indicates statistical significance at the 1% level ($p < 0.01$). This finding suggests that the implementation of the performance management system has led to a notable decline in motivation among some staff members, highlighting the need for strategies to improve motivation in conjunction with performance management initiatives.

The PMS adoption rate also shows a highly significant relationship with a Chi-Square value of 178.2811 and a p-value of 0.000, indicating significance at the 1% level ($p < 0.01$). This suggests that higher adoption rates of the performance management system are associated with more favorable perceptions regarding its effectiveness in managing rewards and motivating staff. The substantial proportion of respondents indicating high (30%) and moderate (50%) adoption rates further emphasizes the importance of effective implementation for achieving positive outcomes in reward management and staff motivation.

In contrast, performance metrics do not exhibit any significant relationship with reward management or staff motivation, as evidenced by the Chi-Square value of 1.6798 and a p-value of 0.432, which indicates no statistical significance. This suggests that perceptions regarding performance metrics whether excellent, good, neutral, poor, or very poor do not significantly influence staff motivation or reward management practices within the context of the study. Therefore, while performance metrics are important for evaluation, they may not directly impact the effectiveness of PMS in this setting.

The findings reveal that 10% of respondents reported no barriers to PMS implementation, with a p-value of 0.002, indicating statistical significance at the 1% level ($p < 0.01$). This suggests that while a small percentage perceive no barriers, the overwhelming majority experience some level of challenge. The highest proportion (35%) reported moderate barriers, followed by significant barriers (15%). The lack of significant barriers for most respondents' point to potential areas for intervention to enhance PMS effectiveness.

In terms of leadership support, only 5% indicated no support, with a Chi-Square value of 5.949 and a p-value of 0.051, which is significant at the 10% level ($p < 0.1$). A notable portion (40%) reported moderate support, while 20% felt there was significant leadership support. This suggests that while some leaders provide adequate support for the PMS, there is still room for improvement in fostering a supportive environment that can enhance both reward management and staff motivation.

Regarding employee perceptions of reward management, the results indicate that 30% rated it as excellent, but the Chi-Square value of 0.6325 shows no statistical significance. Similarly, other categories such as good (40%), neutral (15%), poor (10%), and very poor (5%) did not demonstrate significant differences in perceptions. This suggests that while some employees view reward management positively, there is a lack of consensus or strong feelings across the board, indicating potential areas for improvement in how rewards are perceived and managed.

The communication and feedback aspect shows more pronounced results. Only 15% rated communication as excellent, while 40% rated it as poor. The Chi-Square value of 1.2635 indicates no statistical significance for excellent ratings; however, the good category had a p-value of 0.000, which is highly significant at the 1% level ($p < 0.01$). This highlights a critical barrier in effective communication and feedback mechanisms within the PMS. The high percentage of poor ratings suggests that inadequate communication may hinder staff motivation and their perception of reward management effectiveness.

5. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

5.1. PMS Implementation and Its Alignment with Reward Management Practices and Staff Motivation.

When a PMS is well-aligned with reward management, it not only enhances employee motivation and satisfaction but also contributes to the overall strategic goals of the organisation by ensuring that employees are recognised and rewarded appropriately for their contributions. The study conducted at LUANAR revealed significant challenges related to the implementation of the Performance Management System (PMS) at LUANAR, particularly concerning the alignment between performance evaluations and reward management practices. Both respondents and informants expressed frustration over the

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inconsistency in how hard work was recognized, leading to confusion about how performance translated into tangible rewards. This disconnect fostered a sense of unfairness, causing employees to question the validity of the PMS and whether their contributions were genuinely valued. Additionally, participants highlighted obstacles such as a lack of clear communication regarding the connection between performance metrics and rewards, which created barriers to engagement and left many feeling uncertain about expectations. This ambiguity not only diminished individual morale and motivation but also contributed to a broader culture of disengagement among staff. Overall, these findings suggest that improving communication and ensuring a clearer alignment between performance assessments and reward distribution are essential for enhancing employee motivation within the PMS at LUANAR.

The study's findings on this objective aligns with existing literature, which suggest that effective performance management systems should create a clear connection between employee performance and rewards to enhance motivation (Kahn et al., 2018; Lee & Kim 2021). The findings supported the notion that while the PMS at LUANAR had strengths, it also faced challenges that needed to be addressed to fully realise its potential in motivating staff. The results of the study were further supported by Performance Management Theory, which emphasises the importance of aligning performance evaluations with reward systems to drive employee motivation and satisfaction. According to this hypothesis, employees are more likely to be driven to perform at better levels when they believe that their performance directly affects the benefits they receive (Aguinis, 2013). Furthermore, equity theory offers a framework for comprehending how employee motivation may be impacted by opinions about how fairly rewards are distributed. According to this theory, when employees feel that their contributions are fairly rewarded compared to their peers, their motivation increases. In the context of LUANAR, the findings suggested that while some employees felt adequately rewarded, others perceived discrepancies in how rewards were allocated, indicating that the PMS needed to address these equity concerns to enhance overall staff motivation and engagement.

5.2. Effectiveness of PMS in Driving Rewards and Enhancing Motivation

On this aspect, the study results revealed significant concerns among respondents regarding the clarity of performance metrics used to evaluate their contributions. Many staff members expressed that these metrics were often vague and poorly defined, leading to confusion about what was expected of them. This lack of specificity created unnecessary stress and uncertainty in their roles, hindering their ability to meet expectations and contributing to feelings of frustration and disengagement (Wong & Chang 2023). Additionally, respondents noted that the performance metrics did not adequately capture the complexities of their work, often focusing too heavily on quantitative outcomes while neglecting important qualitative aspects such as teamwork and creativity. This narrow focus resulted in many employees feeling that their efforts went unrecognized, ultimately diminishing their motivation and commitment to the Performance Management System (PMS). This reflected a common sentiment among staff who valued clear guidelines. Nevertheless, during key informant interview it was noted there are still some metrics that are not clearly defined, which creates confusion among staff. This feedback indicated that while there was a general appreciation for the metrics that were clear, ambiguity in others led to uncertainty and frustration. The results suggested that clarity in performance metrics played a dynamic role in the effectiveness of the PMS at LUANAR. This aligns with existing literature that emphasises the importance of clear and measurable performance metrics in enhancing employee engagement and productivity (Nursan, 2017). Nonetheless, the acknowledgment of unclear metrics by some respondents highlighted the need for continuous improvement in this area. The mixed feedback indicated that while the PMS had strengths, there were also areas requiring attention to ensure that all employees had a consistent understanding of their performance expectations. This finding supports the notion that effective performance management systems must regularly assess and refine their metrics to maintain clarity and relevance (Nursan, 2017). However, Performance Management Theory, supported the results of the study which revealed that clear performance metrics are essential for driving effective employee motivation and aligning individual efforts with organisational goals. Additionally, Equity Theory suggests that when employees perceive that their performance metrics are fair and transparent, they are more likely to engage positively with the PMS. In the context of LUANAR, the study findings imply that enhancing the clarity of performance metrics would be critical in fostering a more effective PMS that aligns with employee needs and organisational objectives.

5.3. Barriers to Optimal Performance Management Systems at LUANAR

On this score, the study revealed that respondents expressed concerns about various obstacles that hindered effective PMS implementation, with many highlighting a lack of training and understanding as a major barrier. Similarly, the study noted that inadequate training left staff feeling unprepared to engage with the PMS, leading to confusion about its purpose and how to apply it in their daily tasks. Additionally, structural issues within the institution, such as resource constraints, were identified as impediments to effective PMS utilization. The study also found that limited access to necessary tools and support systems, which contributed to feelings of frustration and a lack of motivation. Furthermore, ineffective communication from management

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regarding changes or expectations related to the PMS created uncertainty among staff, further diminishing their engagement (Anh et al., 2022).

The findings suggest that while the PMS was acknowledged as a valuable tool for performance evaluation, many staff members experienced barriers that hindered its effective implementation (Audenaert, 2019). The presence of 50% of respondents who identified barriers indicated that issues such as lack of training, insufficient communication, and unclear performance metrics were prevalent. This aligns with Kahn et al. (2018) that highlighted common challenges in performance management systems, such as inadequate training and lack of clarity in performance expectations, which can significantly impact employee engagement and the perceived effectiveness of the system. The findings also supported the notion that addressing these barriers is essential for enhancing the overall effectiveness of the PMS and, consequently, improving staff motivation and reward management practices (Audenaert, 2019). The results of this study were also supported by Performance Management Theory, which posits that effective implementation of a PMS is contingent upon overcoming barriers that may impede its functionality (Anh et al., 2022). Furthermore, Equity Theory provides a framework for understanding how perceived barriers can affect employee motivation. When employees perceive that the performance management process is fair and that they have the necessary tools and support to succeed, their motivation increases. However, in the context of LUANAR, the findings indicated that addressing the identified barriers would be critical in fostering a more effective PMS that aligns with employee needs and organisational goals.

6. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1. Conclusion

It must be submitted that performance management system is a very critical human resource tool in any organization which desires high motivation and productivity of its staff. The study found that the implementation of the Performance Management System (PMS) at LUANAR was generally viewed positively by staff, particularly in its alignment with reward management practices and its impact on motivation. However, there were notable concerns regarding inconsistencies in how rewards were distributed, leading to a sense of inequity among some staff members. This suggested that while the PMS had the potential to boost motivation through its reward system, it required further refinement to address these discrepancies and ensure a more consistent application. Moreover, the study established that while the Performance Management System (PMS) at LUANAR had several strengths, such as providing clarity in performance metrics, effective feedback mechanisms, access to professional development, and reward management practices, there were also areas that required improvement. Employees generally appreciated the clear performance expectations and the professional development opportunities available, which contributed to their motivation and engagement though inconsistencies in the clarity of certain performance metrics, the quality of feedback, and access to professional development highlighted gaps that needed to be addressed to ensure a more consistent and fair experience for all staff members.

Finally, the study revealed that the Performance Management System (PMS) at LUANAR faced several challenges, particularly in reward management strategies and staff motivation. Significant barriers were identified, including insufficient training, unclear performance metrics, and ineffective communication channels, which hindered the system's effectiveness and efficacious implementation. The data revealed that these obstacles created a perception among staff that the PMS was not beneficial, leading to reduced engagement and motivation with notable inadequacies in leadership support. Overall, the study's findings aligned with existing theories, suggesting that addressing these challenges is essential for enhancing the PMS's functionality and aligning it with organisational goals.

6.2. Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study the following recommendations are suggested to address the identified issues:

- 6.2.1.** The study found that 67% of respondents viewed the PMS's alignment with reward management positively, but inconsistencies in reward reflection were noted. Therefore, LUANAR should refine the alignment by ensuring transparent and consistent reward criteria and conducting regular reviews to enhance staff motivation.
- 6.2.2.** It was noted that with 49% of respondents experiencing increased motivation and 33% reporting a decrease, there was need to improve the clarity and consistency of performance-reward links by providing clear feedback and considering workshops or training to boost engagement.
- 6.2.3.** Despite 80% of respondents having a high or moderate adoption rate, 10% faced barriers like insufficient training; LUANAR should, therefore, invest in comprehensive training programmes and ongoing support to address these issues and improve adoption rate.

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- 6.2.4. The study found that 60% of respondents rated the performance metrics positively, but 15% found them unclear; LUANAR should, therefore, review and refine these metrics for clarity and relevance, involving staff in the revision process to enhance effectiveness.
- 6.2.5. Inconsistencies in feedback quality were noted despite high-quality feedback positively influencing motivation; LUANAR should, therefore, standardize feedback protocols and train supervisors to ensure consistent, constructive feedback across departments.
- 6.2.6. Inconsistent availability of professional development opportunities led to feelings of inequity, suggesting that LUANAR should develop a university-wide strategy for equitable access, ensure consistent resource allocation, and promote transparency.
- 6.2.7. The need for more consistent leadership support suggests LUANAR should ensure leaders actively promote and engage with the PMS, demonstrate commitment through resource allocation, and communicate its importance regularly.
- 6.2.8. Although 70% viewed reward management positively, dissatisfaction among 15% due to perceived inequities calls for LUANAR to review and refine reward management practices, addressing feedback to better align rewards with contributions.
- 6.2.9. The study revealed that 75% of respondents perceiving communication and feedback positively but 10% finding them lacking, LUANAR should enhance these mechanisms by ensuring timely, specific feedback and establishing regular performance discussions.
- 6.2.10. LUANAR should conduct a review of reward management practices to ensure they align with employee motivations and contributions. Develop a more equitable and transparent reward distribution process that recognizes diverse contributions, including professional development opportunities, to enhance overall motivation and satisfaction.
- 6.2.11. LUANAR should encourage active engagement from leadership in the PMS processes. Leaders should communicate the importance of the PMS, provide clear guidance on its alignment with organizational goals, and ensure adequate resources and training are available to support staff, fostering a culture of accountability and motivation:

6.3. Recommendations for Future Studies

- 6.3.1. One potential avenue of study is to conduct a comparative analysis of PMS effectiveness across different higher education institutions in Malawi, allowing for a more comprehensive understanding of the challenges and best practices within the sector.
- 6.3.2. Additionally, researchers may investigate the long-term impact of PMS on employee retention, career progression, and overall organisational performance, which could offer valuable insights for university administrators.
- 6.3.3. Furthermore, qualitative studies focusing on the lived experiences and perceptions of employees regarding the PMS could provide deeper discernments into the factors that influence their motivation and job satisfaction.

By addressing these areas, scholars can contribute to the ongoing debate on the development and refinement of PMS in higher education, ultimately enhancing the effectiveness of these systems in promoting employee engagement and organisational success.

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