

# The Role of Incentives on Students' Long-Term and Short-Term Interest in Reading

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## ABSTRACT

This research study could be seen as beneficially contributing to the subject field as it has offered a potential approach for increasing students' intrinsic reading motivations which hopefully will increase their reading abilities. This study has clearly identified that employing reading motivations does have an impact on students' motivations to read more, as they felt like they were attaining something beneficial. However, when there were no motivations in place, students' motivation deteriorated. Even though this study was small-scale and took place over a three-month period, the findings stress the importance of approaching reading motivations through offering extrinsic motivations (such as a desirable reward), even if the outcome is only short-term. The results indicate that a small number of students were influenced to read with no extrinsic motivations in place, which highlights that there has been some impact on students' intrinsic motivations to continue reading. Nonetheless, this study has mainly emphasised the short-term effects more so than the long-term effects. However, to reach more conclusive results of long-term effects, a future study in this field would need to be conducted over a longer time period and to be able to assess more thoroughly the long-term effects once the extrinsic motivations have been withdrawn.

## KEYWORDS

*Education; Literacy; Practitioner research; Reading.*

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## 1. Introduction

Reading should be continually instructed to suit the curriculum, but it is also important that reading for pleasure should be valued too. According to Clark (2006, p.5) 'reading for pleasure refers to reading that we do of our own free will anticipating the satisfaction that we will get from the act of reading'. It can be quite arduous to teach students to read for pleasure, especially if they do not enjoy it or have never seen the need to. Most people can be forced to read, but once a student does not need to read just to pass an examination their reading motivation may substantially decrease. However, Nell (1988) suggests that reading for pleasure allows people to experience other worlds. Despite this source being quite outdated, it is important for people

to be subjected to other worlds as these worlds can be interpreted in a variety of ways. Exploring these other worlds are extremely beneficial to students as it can help shape their knowledge of worlds they have never come across before, learn new key words and potentially enhance their own creativity. Likewise, others have described reading for pleasure as an interpretive activity which is shaped by the reader's expectations and experiences (Clark, 2006). Some students will naturally enjoy reading, thus will be motivated to do so. Nevertheless, research has highlighted that teaching reading for pleasure can be motivated through the use of rewards. For instance, Clark (2006) implemented some 'reading-targeted rewards', such as books or book vouchers to try and encourage students to read more. Students enjoyed receiving the rewards but it was unclear whether it meant they enjoyed reading more. However, when the students were reading more, their reading attainment improved slightly.

Clarke (2006) states that there are benefits to reading for pleasure such as: text comprehension and grammar, positive reading attitudes, pleasure in reading in later life and increased general knowledge. Likewise, Clark and De Zoysa (2011) suggests that there is a link between children who read at or above the expected level for their age as they seem to hold more positive attitudes towards reading than children who do not.

## **2. Purpose and Research Aims**

This study focuses on a population of 70 Year Seven pupils within the school and centres predominantly on how extrinsic reading motivations impact on students' intrinsic motivations. There are three English teachers for Year Seven. The questionnaires were given to the 70 students to complete, whilst the three English teachers were all interviewed. It was anticipated that most of the students would agree to complete the questionnaire and that the three English teachers would consent to be interviewed.

### **2.1 Research Questions**

1. To what extent do the two extrinsic motivation strategies have an impact on intrinsic reading motivations?
2. How might teachers' influences impact on students' intrinsic reading motivations?
3. Did the extrinsic reading motivations have a long-term effect on students' intrinsic motivations to read?

### **2.2 The Research Study**

It is important to note here all participants were given a consent form to sign before this study to ensure that full consent is given to make sure that this study follows ethical guidelines (see Appendix 1, available in the online version of this article). This study was conducted across a three-month period with a different extrinsic motivation being implemented each month.

Before the three-month study, all Year Seven students were issued with a reading log which allowed both students and teachers to keep track of their reading progress. Students were informed of how to use the log booklets over the three-month period. These log booklets allowed students to complete a log each time they read, but also to complete book reviews after they had finished a book. Here it is important to mention that the reading logs were not used as data in the study. Even though they could have offered some qualitative data to measure against the other data collected to increase the reliability of results in terms of the impact on the number of books read during each month. However, as the reading logs had only recently been introduced prior to this study, it felt like students were not too familiar with their use, making it problematic for teachers to judge how honestly reflective these logs were. With this in mind, using the reading logs as a reliable data resource could have impacted negatively on the validity and reliability of the results.

In the first month, with the help from the library, one free book was offered to all Year Seven students, for which they could choose from a variety of genres. Students were reminded at this point to record their reading progress whilst reading their chosen book. Once they had finished reading their first book, they could then go and get a new book and so on. There was no limit to the number of free books students could get during the month. The extrinsic motivation during this month was the number of free books students would gain by the end of the motivation.

During the second month, the 'Reading Challenge' competition was introduced. The 'Reading Challenge' was introduced as a reading-related competition for students. During this month, students recorded their reading progress in these booklets and they gained five points per reading log and 25 points per book review in their log booklets. Students were rewarded with certificates when they achieved a certain number of points. Students were also informed that at the end of the month, there were prizes for the top 10 students in the year – these prizes were reading-related rewards. Each week, the top-ten readers were published on the 'Reading Challenge' board so that the Year Seven students could track their progress in relation to their peers. Prizes for first, second and third place were Amazon Kindle Fires and prizes for fourth to tenth places were Amazon vouchers.

During the third month, there were no extrinsic motivations present. However, students were still informed to complete their logs and book reviews and to continue to read.

This study focused on the relationship between using extrinsic rewards and the impact on students' intrinsic motivation to read for pleasure, but it is important to consider that extrinsic motivations may have short-term effects as it is questionable whether students would still continue reading for pleasure when these extrinsic rewards were removed.

Students' reading ages were not considered for this study. From previous experience, the reading ages of students are not exactly reflective as they may have been predicted incorrectly during the transition from primary to secondary or may be wrongly represented in reading tests. Therefore, this would have been another dependent variable to consider throughout the study as a before and after reading age measurement may not have been entirely reliable for the reasons previously stated. As this study was short-term over a three-month-period it did not seem fit to include this variable. This study focused predominantly on the age group of Year Seven students, however if a similar study was conducted in the future on a more long-term basis then reading ages could be taken into account.

### **3. Research Methods**

This research study has taken into account factors in and beyond the scope of a conducted literature review to determine an interesting research study to help encourage reading motivations during the transition from Primary to Secondary school. The chosen education establishment already encourages reading by making it high-profile but it will be interesting to implement some extrinsic strategies to study the impact on students' intrinsic reading motivations.

This study implemented some extrinsic motivations to give students a desired outcome to achieve a reading-related reward over a two-month period, followed by no rewards for one month and consider the impact these have on students' intrinsic motivations to read.

Additionally, the 'triangulation method' (Gray, 2004) was used to measure the independent and dependent variables. Both the qualitative and quantitative data were analysed alongside one another as Jick (1979) states that they should be perceived as complementary rather than rival. Therefore, using the triangulation method

was beneficial as it combines qualitative and quantitative methods to help “balance out any of the potential weaknesses in each data collection method” (Gray, 2004, p.24) to try and maintain high-levels of reliability and validity.

#### **4. Methods for Data Collection**

##### **4.1 Student Questionnaire**

The first method of data collection was a questionnaire. Questionnaires can be useful to elicit the impact of the extrinsic motivations on Year Seven students to gain an insight into how students perceive the impact of extrinsic motivations on their own motivation for reading with a balanced variety of open and closed questions. Questionnaires are reliable because they are ‘anonymous’ thus, students may feel more comfortable answering honestly, resulting in more reliable data. Questionnaires are also easy and quick to complete, provide direct responses and the information is quantifiable. On the other hand, it needs to be considered ‘whether respondents who complete questionnaires do so accurately, honestly and correctly’ (Cohen, 2007, p.157) as some are ‘often filled in hurriedly’ (ibid., p.158). Thus, the question of reliability can be raised as some students may rush filling it in or copy their peers to just finish it so not actually think about the questions being asked. The results of questionnaires can usually be quickly and easily quantified by the researcher and these results can be used to compare and contrast other research and to measure change.

Considering all aspects of using questionnaires, this study used questionnaires to allow students to express their opinions on the use of extrinsic motivations (see Appendix 2, available in the online version of this article). There was a balance of open- and closed-ended questions to allow for both qualitative and quantitative data to complement one another. The questionnaire consisted of 17 questions – 9 closed-ended questions and 8 open-ended questions. For instance, the closed-ended questions used the 5-point-likert-scale to establish some quantitative data to see how often students read and how often extrinsic motivations are used in their lessons or by their teachers. Along with questions to see when motivations are used in the classroom and how they are used. The 5-point scale was used as it normally provides sufficient discrimination among levels of agreement as they typically balance favourable and unfavourable statements (Goodwin, 2009, p.477). The range of questions should allow for a measure of how well integrated the extrinsic motivations are in the classroom. Open-ended questions were used to explore students’ opinions on: the benefits of extrinsic motivations; their favourite motivation; how their own motivation to read differs when these extrinsic motivations are in place as well as when they are absent, and the use of these motivations in and outside of the classroom. Questions have been carefully worded so as to avoid leading questions or judgemental language (Cohen & Manion, 1989). Furthermore, the questionnaires were anonymous and were issued to be completed in a room to ensure that they all get handed back in to not affect the reliability of results.

##### **4.2 Teacher Interview**

Teacher interviews were also used in this study on three Year Seven English teachers. To ensure that the interviews were reliable it was important to make sure that they were structured and the same questions were asked to each respondent (Cohen & Manion, 1989). However, interviews can be timeconsuming as the researcher has to think of the questions, conduct the interview and interpret the responses. Also, some interviewees may ‘feel compelled to present opinions they feel will be acceptable to the interviewer’ (Cohen & Manion 1989, p.319). There can be biases of the interviewer present as the questions could influence the interviewee to respond in a particular manner, along with the fact that the interviewer is also scribing the responses, which may affect reliability.

The purpose of the teacher interviews was to explore the relationship between teachers' perceptions of reading and their impact on increasing students' reading motivations, their perceptions on the extrinsic motivations, how they implemented them and their thoughts on the effect on students' intrinsic motivations.

This interview followed a semi-structured format with pre-determined open questions and subquestions (see Appendix 3, available in the online version of this article). This format allowed the interviewee the freedom to express their interpretations whilst still allowing for narrowing down the specific issues identified in advance. The interviewees did not have the questions in advance as the reliability of the study could have been affected if the teachers could have prepared their responses to say what they believe the interviewer wants to hear. The respondents, however, were informed that they will be interviewed on reading motivations so that they can reflect on this topic before the interview took place. The preliminary interview schedule in the appendix material (available online) highlights the form the interview took along with indicating the pre-determined topics. The teachers' views were measured with regard to which extrinsic motivations were successful and why they thought this. The interview also allowed scope for contemplation of the unsuccessful methods of extrinsic motivations and permitted the interviewee to explore why this may have been. To help ensure reliable results, it is important for the respondent to have reflected on these issues themselves before the interview.

With all of this in mind, there could be an issue of power in an interview situation. In this particular study, the interviewer and the interviewee were colleagues. Also, the discussion of English subject topics could be a charged area for the interviewees as they will be partially experts in the areas of questioning. Despite the possible bias, these factors cannot be changed; nevertheless, they need to be acknowledged and the results need to be interpreted with awareness of this. The interviews were transcribed by hand by the interviewer while the interview was taking place. At the end of the interview, the interviewee could read what was written to ensure that they agreed with it.

## **5. Data Analysis**

The students responding to the questionnaire were all from the same school and of the same age. The responses to the open-ended questions on the student questionnaire and teacher interviews were analysed using a thematic approach to gain qualitative data in relation to the research questions. The anticipated themes to identify will be:

- The relationship between the extrinsic motivation strategies on intrinsic motivations – both from students and teachers.
- How the teachers' perceptions on reading motivations affect students' intrinsic motivations.
- The long-term effect of these extrinsic motivations on students' intrinsic motivations to read.

The quantitative data from the student questionnaire and teacher interviews were gathered from the scaled-questions in order to be analysed for the relationship between the two extrinsic motivations and the effect they had on students' motivations to read.

Additionally, it is important to note that extrinsic motivations may only have a short-term effect as when they are no longer present students may choose not to read. Therefore, it is interesting to analyse if and how students' intrinsic motivation changed during the third month when there were no extrinsic motivations present.

Moreover, both the qualitative and quantitative data were measured on a complementary level (Jick, 1979) to present the correlation between the extrinsic motivations and students' intrinsic motivations to read along with the teacher motivations and impact on intrinsic motivations.

## 6. Findings, Analysis and Discussion

In terms of collecting data and documenting the findings, a range of techniques were used to gain the best possible picture of the effects of the intervention on the pupils. The quantitative results of the student questionnaire could be seen more as a self-reflection of how the students felt towards the extrinsic motivations they were introduced to. When looking at the results it is important to consider the bias they will naturally portray as it must be considered whether students and teachers have responded with what they believe to be the correct or desired answer (Cohen, 2007). The qualitative data from the questionnaire thematically correlates to the qualitative data from the teacher interviews. Yet, it is important to note that there were 70 students to complete the questionnaire, yet only three English teachers. Thus, considerations need to be sought for the reliability and validity of the interview results in comparison with the questionnaire results; so the triangulation method was used as a way of improving the authenticity of the research.

### 6.1 Findings in the Quantitative Data

**Table 1.** Results from the closed-ended questions in the questionnaire. The responses for each question are shown as percentages of the responses from 70 students.

Response	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q5	Q6	Q7	Q8
1 = not at all	21%	10%	0%	0%	10%	0%	0%	8%
2 = rarely	29%	10%	0%	6%	17%	0%	17%	19%
3 = occasionally	36%	47%	6%	9%	37%	14%	33%	33%
4 = mostly	0%	12%	56%	38%	19%	19%	37%	30%
5 = all of the time	14%	21%	38%	47%	17%	67%	13%	10%

Table 1 shows the distribution of responses regarding students' perceptions on the reading motivations in place over the three-month period (see questionnaire in Appendix 3, available in the online version of this article). The results clearly indicate that after the three-month period of extrinsic motivations, more responses were appearing at the 4-5 end of the scale in the questionnaire. This makes it clear that there was at least some impact on the students' reading motivations. To ensure the reliability of these results, it is important to examine the correlations between the teacher interviews and the questionnaire results. It is also important to note that there could be other factors contributing to this increase in motivation, such as teacher influence, the class the student was in as well as their own personal intrinsic motivation (which may differ between students). Whilst looking at the results for question one, which was questioning students on their incentives to read prior to the extrinsic motivations; it is clear that around 15% of students were motivated to read 'all of the time' beforehand. In spite of this, when looking at the results for question two, which was to explore how the free-book-swap motivation worked, the results increased by nearly half, as around 20% of students claimed that this made them read 'all of the time'. In comparison, after introducing the Reading Challenge, the percentage of students reading 'all of the time' increased to 40% which was an increase of 20 percentage points from prior to the implementation of these extrinsic motivations. This said, it is interesting to note that once the motivations had stopped (question eight), the percentage of students who were motivated to read 'all of the time' fell to only 10%, which was less than before the study. These quantitative results clearly indicate that the two extrinsic motivations may have had some impact on increasing students' intrinsic motivations to read, however it is important to triangulate this quantitative data with those results from the qualitative data.

### 6.2 Findings in the Qualitative Data

The qualitative data from both the student questionnaires and teacher interviews follows a thematic correlation which links to the research questions. The qualitative data expresses links between both students' opinions on the impact of these extrinsic motivations on their intrinsic reading motivations along with teachers' opinions too. Most of the opinions between the students and teachers were alike in their responses. These

responses further supported the literature previously reviewed. The qualitative data allows for a greater insight into the impact of the extrinsic motivations in place.

From triangulating the qualitative data alongside the quantitative data, there were three common themes established:

- The end outcomes of reading i.e. types of rewards
- Impact of teachers on students' intrinsic motivations
- Dearth of long-term effects

## 7. Analysis of the Data

The research findings relate to the research questions following a general assessment of the questionnaire and interview results highlighting some overarching themes. These conclusions were drawn when it was triangulated across more than one of the interviews and the questionnaires, along with being compared with current literature on the extrinsic motivations in order to attain a greater potential for reliability and validity.

### 7.1 The End Outcomes of Reading i.e. Types of Rewards

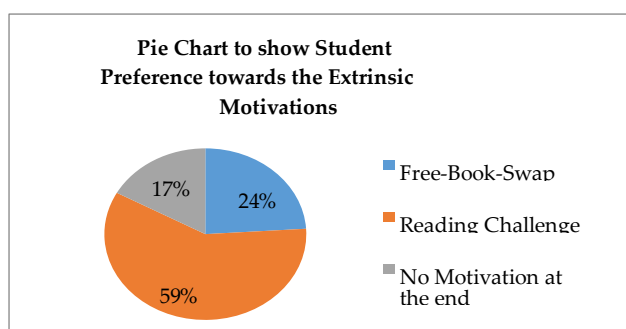
Firstly, it became quite clear that most of the students and teachers felt quite positive towards having reward in place to encourage students to read. The feelings of the teachers towards having extrinsic motivations in place to try and increase students' intrinsic motivations to read were quite optimistic:

"I think that students became much more motivated to read when there was a reward at the end of it. Not every student will appreciate a book case of free books, so I think the rewards were a more successful manner of increasing motivations" – Teacher 01.

This said, it would be open to debate whether this applies to all of the students in Year Seven as it would be difficult to determine whether this is the case for every student in the year group, considering that the quantitative data suggests that only 30% of students felt motivated to read 'mostly' or 'all of the time' when the free-book-swap was offered. Similarly, another teacher expressed:

"I have never seen some of the students this motivated to read books before, some of the students in my class were reading on a weekly basis – this is something which I have struggled to enthuse before" – Teacher 02.

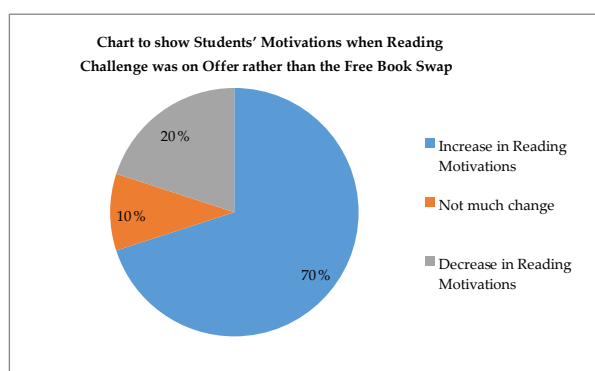
This is a point of view that is supported by Marinak (1997) who argued that the appropriate use of incentives lead learners to engage in reading. This opinion also supports Clark (2006) who implemented reading-related rewards to try and increase the intrinsic motivations of students to read more. Evidently, the student questionnaire responses correlate to that of the responses from the teachers. Quantitatively, it was evident that students' motivations to read increased due to at least one, if not both, of the motivations being put into place. Prior to these motivations, only 15% of the year felt motivated to read either 'most' or 'all of the time'. When the free-book-swap was introduced this figure amplified to 30% of the year feeling more motivated to read. Additionally, when the Reading Challenge was implemented this figure magnified to 95% of the year group feeling determined to read 'most' or 'all of the time'. Whether a little increase or a greater increase occurred it is clear that the motivations may have had some impact on students' intrinsic reading motivations.



**Figure 1.** Student preference towards the three extrinsic motivations in play.

Figure 1 identifies the number of student responses to question nine, which asks them to determine which of the extrinsic motivations increased their motivation to read more. It is clear that the majority of students preferred the Reading Challenge to the free-book-swap and no motivations at all. Nevertheless, it is interesting that 17% of students still felt motivated to read with the absence of the extrinsic motivations. This could be due to many reasons as these particular students could be naturally intrinsically keen and motivated readers, thus the extrinsic motivations might not have much impact on their motivation to read. Alternatively, it could be argued that of these 12 students, some of them may not have been naturally enthused readers, but after being motivated to read they have found a new value to reading. There could be many factors behind contributing to the students reading motivations, so it is hard to determine the true reason behind this result.

Similarly, through analysing the qualitative data the bar chart below portrays that there was a more significant increase in students' intrinsic motivations when the Reading Challenge was on offer rather than the free book swap:



**Figure 2.** Students' motivations when the Reading Challenge was on offer compared to the free-bookswap.

Figure 2 suggests that more than half of the students' motivations increased when the Reading Challenge was in play, rather than the free book swap. Likewise, it was evidently clear that most students felt that gaining a reward had more of an impact than just swapping free books:

"I never got a big reward like the Kindles that were on offer but I did win some bookmarks and book vouchers – which was great as I don't really like reading because I struggle with it sometimes so having lots of free books would have put me off reading more than doing more of it, so that's why I liked the reading rewards" – Student 43.

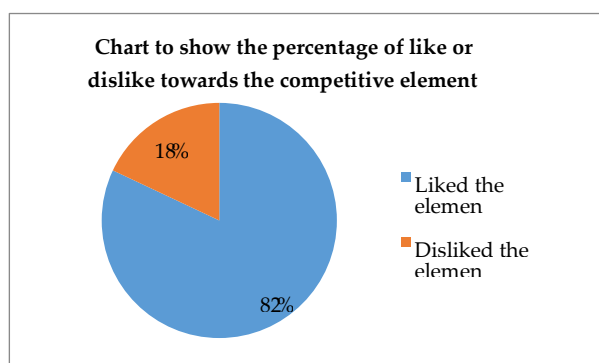
This further supports Strickland (2004) who argued that students can be strongly influenced by their previous performance.

## 7.2 Impact of Teachers on Students' Intrinsic Motivations

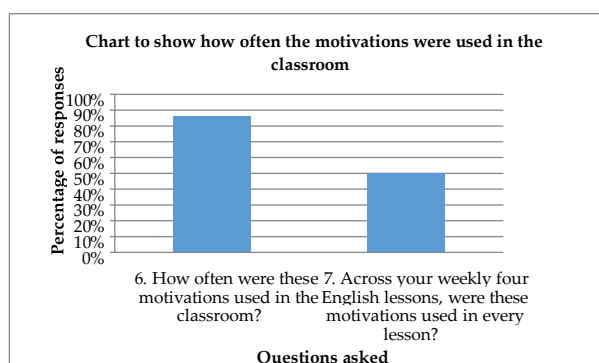
These three responses are thought-provoking as they all see reading in a different light. It could be interesting to note here that these varying perceptions of reading could impact their influence on students' motivations for reading. Thus, it could be argued that the teachers in this study may have used different strategies to motivate the students in their class to read during the free-book-swap or Reading Challenge. This needs to be taken into account when testing for reliability and validity in these results. During the interview the teachers were asked how they implemented the reading motivations during the monthly periods. Linking in to the different views on reading above, the teachers' responses were quite similar:



“I kept score of points in the Reading Challenge and free-book-swap and tallied them in front of the whole class. This way it had turned more into a competition between the students in my class to achieve the most points” – Teacher 02.



**Figure 3.** Students' like or dislike of the competitive element designed by teachers.



**Figure 4.** Graph to show how often the motivations were used in the classroom

Figure 4 conveys that 86% of students agreed that these motivations were referred to in the classroom either 'mostly' or 'all of the time'. Despite this, when students were asked if the motivations were used in every lesson they had each week, only 50% of students responded 'mostly' or 'all of the time' which could indicate that maybe they were referred to more in some lessons than others.

## 8. Limitations of This Research

The results presented have indicated that the use of extrinsic motivations to increase students' motivations for reading should not be disregarded; there is certainly scope to continue to use rewards even if they may only be effective in the short-term. There were limitations to this small-scale study which should be addressed to improve future studies in this field and to help enhance the improvement of literacy in this particular school. To provide a greater scope for analysis it would be beneficial to implement this study at a much larger scale to confirm whether the data presented in this study would be representative of that in a largescale study. In such a small-scale study it is difficult to determine the extent of how these rewards can be translated into improvement in reading motivation. A larger scale study could allow for more conclusive results as to the impact of extrinsic motivations on students' reading abilities and whether these motivations may help students to progress in this area.

Furthering on from this, the two motivations in this study offered similar outcomes of reading-related rewards. It would be interesting to see how other, more contrasting motivations may affect students' motivations differently to those in this study. This could offer scope to reach a more significant conclusion over which type

of motivations are more effective and possibly draw further conclusions as to why certain types are more successful than others.

On this note, it may have been useful to compare student motivations to their current reading ability level however, for this particular study it seemed appropriate to maintain student anonymity for ethical reasons. If the inclusion of the students' reading data was implemented then the questionnaire responses could be analysed against ability levels and their perceptions on the extrinsic motivations in place. This would have allowed for more numerical data to be correlated to the qualitative responses which could have offered more validity to the results of this study.

The research methods selected to use in the study were largely appropriate. Both interviews and questionnaires were deemed an effective method for data collection. Although, if this study was completed over a longer period, then it could be spread across other year groups and more teachers could have been interviewed to allow for more depth and breadth of teacher responses. This study could have benefitted from interviewing more teachers across the school to allow for a wider spectrum of results to then compare with the student questionnaire results.

With regards to the teacher interviews, it is important to note that teachers can be scrutinised in their careers. Therefore, knowing that the results would be published in a study the teachers may have articulated what they thought people would want to hear and it may not truly reflect their opinions. Nonetheless, this could be the case with any study and so the qualitative results could be questionable for reliability.

Similarly, it needs to be taken into account that the quantitative data obtained from the student questionnaire may not be reliable as students may have responded with what they believed to have been the desired response or may have copied their peers. Likewise, some of the qualitative responses in the questionnaires were not as detailed as hoped which, at times, could make it difficult to see links between answers. For that reason, it might be a consideration that there could have been too many open-ended questions for the age of the participants to answer effectively.

With both of these methods of data collection in mind, it is noteworthy that there were 70 student questionnaires being compared against three teacher interviews. When comparing this ratio of responses, reliability and validity are questionable as it would have been ideal to have more teachers to interview. However, when conducting research in a school it will mostly be more than likely that more students will participate than teachers. Therefore, if this study or a similar study was to be conducted again it might be an idea to expand the participant range to include more year groups, a variety of subjects or even a cross-over between other schools for comparison. This would hopefully provide a wider spectrum of data to compare and analyse; leading to more reliable results and conclusions.

## **9. Conclusions**

This research study could be seen as beneficially contributing to the subject field as it has offered a potential approach for increasing students' intrinsic reading motivations which hopefully will increase their reading abilities. This study has clearly identified that employing reading motivations does have an impact on students' motivations to read more, as they felt like they were attaining something beneficial. However, when there were no motivations in place, students' motivation deteriorated.

Even though this study was small-scale and took place over a three-month period, the findings stress the importance of approaching reading motivations through offering extrinsic motivations (such as a desirable reward), even if the outcome is only short-term. The results indicate that a small number of students were

influenced to read with no extrinsic motivations in place, which highlights that there has been some impact on students' intrinsic motivations to continue reading. Nonetheless, this study has mainly emphasised the short-term effects more so than the long-term effects. However, to reach more conclusive results of long-term effects, a future study in this field would need to be conducted over a longer time period and to be able to assess more thoroughly the long-term effects once the extrinsic motivations have been withdrawn.

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