

Enhancing Graduate Competitiveness through Reward and Recognition: A Case Study at Guangxi University of Foreign Languages

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the role of reward and recognition in talent management training at Guangxi University of Foreign Languages (GUFL) and their impact on enhancing graduate competitiveness, particularly in the field of language education. Reward and recognition are recognized as key drivers of individual motivation and performance in training environments. A descriptive qualitative approach was employed to gain in-depth insights into the implementation of reward systems in GUFL's training programs. Data were collected through interviews with 24 educators and 1 student, focusing on experiences with financial rewards, formal recognition, and their perceived effectiveness. Findings indicate that financial rewards significantly boost trainee motivation, while non-financial recognition, such as industry-recognized certifications, increases trainees' confidence and competitiveness in the global job market. The study also highlights the importance of aligning reward and recognition systems with industry needs and cultural values, particularly within the Southeast Asian context. The results suggest that a well-structured, culturally adaptive, and industry-relevant reward system plays a crucial role in enhancing the quality of talent training and in producing globally competitive graduates. Institutions in similar contexts are encouraged to adopt holistic reward strategies that integrate both motivational and professional development elements.

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1. INTRODUCTION

In the era of globalization, universities play an essential role in shaping competent graduates to meet the needs of the international job market. Talent training management is one of the strategies relied upon to improve the competitiveness of educational institutions (Chethana & Noronha, 2023). Reward and recognition, known as the main components of employee and trainee motivation, are very influential in talent training programs, especially in developing linguistic competence (Armstrong, 2010).

According to Herzberg's motivation theory (Herzberg, Mausner, & Snyderman, 1959), external rewards such as incentives and recognition can increase a person's intrinsic motivation, thereby encouraging optimal performance. In addition, the talent management concept presented by (Silzer & Dowell, 2010) emphasizes that rewards and recognition can support the retention and development of quality talent. It supports the research by (Alkandi, et al., 2023) that highlights the importance of awards and incentives in motivating employees. In the context of education, this not only increases learners' motivation but also contributes to the achievement of the university's strategic goals in delivering highly competitive graduates (Collings & Mellahi, 2009). A study by (Inandan, 2023) also presents similar findings, indicating that the implementation of a reward system prior to assessment enhances students' performance in particular subject. Furthermore, the reward system implemented before assessments positively influences learning outcomes and attitudes towards achieving better educational results. Educational sector management should establish and maintain a robust reward system that aligns with market trends and individual preferences. It is important to motivate skilled employees to engage in the ongoing enhancement of the overall reward system (Elrayah & Semlali, 2023).

This study uses a qualitative descriptive approach to identify the role of rewards and recognition in talent training management at Guangxi University of Foreign Languages (GUFL). With rewards and recognition tailored to the needs of the job market, the university can help trainees increase their confidence and competitiveness (Rosales, León, & León-Fuentes, 2022). This approach is expected to serve as a reference for other educational institutions in improving the competitiveness of their graduates through effective and adaptive talent training (Ryndak, Kozyar, & Shchetinin, 2022).

Rewards and recognition in talent training management play an essential role in creating a learning environment that supports individual growth (Kaliannan, Darmalinggam, Dorasamy, & Abraham, 2023). Various studies have shown that timely rewards can increase learners' sense of satisfaction and motivation, improving their performance (Kouzes & Posner, 2017). Rewards in the form of public recognition, certificates, or financial rewards provide appreciation for individual efforts and create a positive culture within the institution (Yang, Jiang, & Cheng, 2022). In the context of GUFL, this approach is considered crucial for attracting and retaining talent in linguistic training, which is indispensable in meeting industry demands in the Southeast Asian region.

As part of international initiatives such as OBOR, GUFL strategically supports China's ambitions to expand economic and cultural ties with neighboring countries. The ability to provide graduates who can communicate in Southeast Asian languages is a significant competitive advantage. GUFL emphasizes the importance of language and cultural understanding as vital components in fostering innovation and entrepreneurship among its students. By establishing the School of Innovation & Entrepreneurship, along with initiatives such as the China-ASEAN Students Innovation & Entrepreneurship Park and the China-ASEAN Free Trade Zone Double-track Education Base, GUFL provides practical experiences that enhance students' entrepreneurial skills (Guangxi University of Foreign Languages, 2022). These programs not only cultivate creativity and business acumen but also focus on equipping graduates with the linguistic and cultural competencies necessary to thrive in the ASEAN economic landscape. This approach aligns with regional economic goals, particularly in relation to initiatives like OBOR, which seeks to strengthen economic ties across borders. By integrating language acquisition and cultural awareness into its curriculum, GUFL prepares students to contribute effectively to local and international markets, thereby enhancing their employability and supporting economic development in the ASEAN region. Furthermore, reward and recognition systems play a crucial role in motivating students to excel in these areas, as they encourage the pursuit of higher competencies essential for success in a competitive global economy (Li & Liu, 2023). This aligns with motivation and achievement theory, which posits that individuals are driven to reach greater heights when their efforts are acknowledged and rewarded (McClelland, 1961)

In addition, the importance of developing adaptive reward and recognition at GUFL must be considered. The ever-changing work environment and job market require a flexible and relevant approach to industry needs (Dorantes & Allen, 2024). By focusing on developing a reward and

recognition system that adapts to changes in the market, GUFL can better prepare its graduates to face global challenges. This raises important research questions:

- R1. How does GUFL's reward and recognition system impact trainee motivation and engagement in talent training programs?
- R2. In what ways does GUFL's reward system influence lecturer motivation and job satisfaction?
- R3. How does the alignment of GUFL's reward system with industry needs enhance the competitiveness of its graduates in the Southeast Asian job market?

Rewards and recognition are directly linked to the attainment of industry-required skills, such as language and intercultural skills, which enable graduates to excel in the international job market and make them valuable assets to institutions and companies that require these skills (Fleming, Klopfer, Katz, & Knight, 2024)

2. METHODS

This research focuses on a qualitative approach to understanding the dynamics of language talent development relevant to the region's social and cultural context. Guangxi is the research site, which is geographically and culturally close to Southeast Asian countries. This study aims to explore the potential and strategies that can be implemented to promote the acquisition of Southeast Asian languages among students. The researcher used a descriptive method to describe the situation in depth. This method allows researchers to observe and analyze the ongoing process and practice of language talent development.

Data was collected through interviews, observations, and documentation studies. Interviews were conducted with 24 educators and 1 student to explore their views on language talent development. Observations were made in classrooms and other learning environments to see the interactions and teaching methods applied. Data sources in this study were obtained through purposive sampling. The researcher selected interviewees with an in-depth and relevant understanding of talent development in Southeast Asian languages. In addition, the research also focuses on students learning these languages so that the data collected can reflect the experiences and challenges they face in the learning process.

Data collection through interviews was conducted using a semi-structured approach, which gives the researcher the flexibility to explore topics in greater depth. This technique allows the researcher to capture nuances and detailed information that may not be revealed in closed questions. Semi-structured interviews are particularly suitable for this study because they allow for open-ended questions that can adapt to the unique experiences and insights of each participant. Given the complex and subjective nature of topics such as motivation, job satisfaction, and the perceived impact of reward systems, a semi-structured format enables participants to express their thoughts more freely, often revealing underlying motivations, attitudes, and perceptions that might otherwise go unnoticed. Furthermore, the semi-structured approach creates a more conversational atmosphere, which can help participants feel more comfortable discussing personal reflections and nuanced experiences. This environment is conducive to gathering rich, in-depth data that directly informs the study's goals of understanding how the reward and recognition system at GUFL affects both motivation and competitiveness. Observation was conducted to understand the learning context directly so that the researcher could record the interaction between teachers and students and the methods used in the learning process.

Documentation also played an essential role in this study. The researcher collected various documents, such as syllabi, teaching materials, and activity reports, relating to language talent development. This helped build a more comprehensive understanding of existing policies and practices in Guangxi. Data was analyzed by organizing and categorizing information from interviews, observations, and documentation. Researchers systematically reviewed the data to identify patterns and themes that relate to the development of Southeast Asian language talents and the effects of the reward and recognition system on motivation and competitiveness. This process involved grouping similar responses and observations to uncover trends in how different types of rewards, such as financial incentives, public

recognition, and certifications, impact trainee and faculty engagement. Insights from interviews highlighted key motivational factors tied to various reward types, while observations added depth by showing how these rewards influenced real-time interactions and engagement within the learning environment. Documentation, including syllabi, activity reports, and training materials, provided additional context, allowing researchers to compare stated policies and practices with actual experiences. By triangulating these sources, the analysis produced a comprehensive understanding of how GUFL's reward and recognition system supports language skill development, aligns with industry requirements, and meets the cultural expectations of its Southeast Asian context. To validate the data, several techniques were implemented to ensure reliability and relevance. First, triangulation was used by comparing insights from interviews, observations, and documentation. This cross-verification across data sources added rigor and confidence in the findings. Additionally, documentation served as corroborative evidence, allowing comparisons between stated policies and actual practices. By integrating multiple perspectives and verifying alignment between data sources, these methods enhanced the validity of the research outcomes. Overall, this study's methods were designed to provide in-depth insights into new opportunities in developing Southeast Asian language talents in Guangxi. With its qualitative approach and diverse data collection techniques, the research is expected to provide valuable information for developing language education policies and practices in the region.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The research results were obtained through various data collection methods, including interviews, observations, and documentation studies. The findings describe new perspectives on rewards and recognition in language development in Southeast Asia in Guaxi. The discussion will be conducted with a detailed analysis of the research results, in which the data generated will be presented comprehensively. The carefully analyzed research results are expected to provide a relevant basis for the conclusions drawn and recommendations for further future improvement and development.

There were three findings during the research related to reward and recognition in talent training management in improving competitiveness.

3.1. *The Importance of Reward and Recognition*

The research findings show that the reward and recognition system implemented at GUFL significantly impacts the motivation of trainees. Rewards include financial awards and formal recognition, such as certificates, which the interviewees recognized as a critical motivational factor. These rewards recognize individual efforts and foster a more productive and supportive environment.

Findings from research at Guangxi University of Foreign Languages (GUFL) show that reward and recognition systems are highly significant in increasing trainee motivation. This system includes financial rewards and formal recognition, such as certificates, which interviewees recognized as a significant factor in boosting morale and motivation to excel. This finding is also corroborated by interviewees who pointed out how direct rewards can foster a productive and conducive learning environment. A key aspect of the reward-learning framework in knowledge acquisition is the idea that rewards can be seen as positive internal experiences arising directly from the learning process or knowledge gain itself, referred to as intrinsic rewards. While extrinsic rewards (e.g., monetary incentives) differ from intrinsic rewards (e.g., enjoyment from learning), both rely on the same reward-learning mechanisms, which serve to reinforce and motivate learning behaviors (Murayama, FitzGibbon, & Sakaki, 2019); (Bardach & Murayama, 2024).

This is reinforced by the fact that motivation theory is an essential foundation in this research, including Vroom's Expectancy Theory (1964) and Adams' Equity Theory (1965). Vroom's Expectancy Theory states that a person's motivation is influenced by the expectation that their efforts will result in a valuable reward. Attribution theory, first proposed by Fritz Heider in the 1950s and further developed by Harold Kelley and others, suggests that individuals have an intrinsic need to understand the causes

of events. According to this theory, people rely on various cues to evaluate these causal relationships (Muschetto & Siegel, 2021). Additionally, it highlights that the conclusions drawn from these attributions can have a substantial impact on motivation, as they influence a person's perceptions of their abilities, sense of control, and overall self-worth (Bandhu, et al., 2024). In this context, implementing rewards at GUFL plays a significant role in building trainees' expectations regarding the results of their hard work. Meanwhile, Adams' Equity Theory emphasizes the importance of fairness in rewards. Participants and lecturers can lose motivation if rewards are perceived as unfair.

Other literature supporting this study involves research by Armstrong (2010), which emphasizes the critical role of rewards in talent training programs. According to Armstrong, external rewards such as financial incentives and certificates increase individual motivation and optimal performance. This research is also supported by Herzberg's (1959) motivation theory, which emphasizes that external rewards can increase intrinsic motivation and drive productivity.

The following is a quote from a resource person regarding the effectiveness of rewards in increasing motivation:

"The awards we receive are very helpful in increasing motivation. I feel that my efforts are appreciated with this award (Interviewee 4)."

The quote illustrates the importance of rewards in building motivation, especially for lecturers who feel that their efforts are appreciated. In addition, some interviewees also expressed the need for transparency in the awarding process which is more in line with expectations and needs. Another interviewee emphasized the importance of transparency by saying:

"Sometimes the awards given are not in line with expectations. We hope there is transparency and clarity in the awarding process." - Interviewee 5 (N5).

The following table summarizes the findings from the interviews related to rewards and recognition at GUFL:

Table 1. The summary of the findings from the interviews related to rewards and recognition at GUFL

No.	Aspects	Description
1	Increased Motivation	Awards have been found to be very effective in increasing trainee motivation, and helping them to feel valued.
2	Transparency of Awarding	Transparency in the award process is needed to meet trainees' expectations and improve fairness.

This finding shows that the reward and recognition system is not just a tool to increase motivation, but also needs to be designed by considering aspects of fairness and transparency to achieve optimal results in supporting GUFL competitiveness.

3.2. Impact on Lecturer Motivation and Satisfaction

Several interviewees emphasized that the rewards received through the reward and recognition program are instrumental in increasing work motivation. For example, one lecturer stated that his award increased his confidence and encouraged him to contribute more to the talent training program. However, it was noted that the awarding process should be transparent and in line with lecturers' expectations to avoid dissatisfaction.

This is supported by Herzberg's (1959) motivation theory, where external rewards such as incentives and recognition can increase a person's intrinsic motivation. This is reinforced by research

at Guangxi University of Foreign Languages (GUFL), which found that reward and recognition systems can increase the motivation and satisfaction of lecturers and trainees. Timely rewards, including monetary bonuses and formal recognition programs, are critical in enhancing employee motivation and productivity within the workplace. These incentives not only acknowledge individual contributions but also reinforce positive behaviors, leading to increased engagement and overall job satisfaction. For instance, implementing a structured recognition program that celebrates employee achievements on a monthly basis can significantly boost morale and encourage a culture of excellence. Additionally, providing immediate financial incentives for meeting performance targets can motivate employees to maintain high levels of productivity and commitment to their roles.

In addition, other studies have shown that transparency in the awarding process is critical to maintaining motivation and satisfaction. Several interviewees in the research at GUFL mentioned that vagueness or a mismatch between rewards and expectations can lead to dissatisfaction. Therefore, the rewards applied should be tailored to the needs of the individual and should go through a transparent and fair process. The findings also explain that students feel more motivated to engage in training and talent development programs when they feel valued for their contributions. Providing industry-relevant rewards, as implemented at GUFL, can help graduates and lecturers become more competitive in the global job market.

3.3. Implementation of Rewards Relevant to Industry Needs

To improve the competitiveness of its graduates, GUFL has developed a reward system that is adaptive to the needs of the job market in the Southeast Asian region. This is so that the awards given are academically relevant and have added value to the work. With rewards directly linked to the achievement of specific skills, graduates are expected to compete effectively in the global job market. The findings show that a reward system integrated with the university's strategic goals plays a vital role in creating graduates who are competitive and ready to compete at the international level.

Implementing industry-relevant rewards motivates lecturers and learners and ensures that graduates are ready to face the challenges of the global job market. In the context of the Guangxi University of Foreign Languages (GUFL), the reward system implemented has been designed to ensure relevance to industry needs in the Southeast Asian region. By focusing rewards on attaining practical skills needed in the world of work, graduates can prove themselves as competitive candidates, especially in the linguistic and intercultural fields that are the main focus. GUFL identifies necessary skills through a combination of curriculum development, academic assessments, and feedback from industry stakeholders. The university regularly reviews its academic programs to ensure they align with current job market demands and technological advancements. This aligns with GUFL's strategy in supporting international initiatives such as OBOR (One Belt One Road), where language proficiency and understanding of local culture are highly valued.

One of the steps taken by GUFL is to link awards to certifications of specific skills recognized by the industry. Research results show that awards in the form of internationally recognized certifications, such as GUFL prepare students for national professional qualifications in translation. Graduates often participate in the National Translation Professional Qualification Examination, which is critical for those seeking careers in translation services. The certifications have boosted the confidence of trainees and lecturers, and encouraged them to improve their competence in the languages spoken in Southeast Asia. These certifications not only serve as academic recognition but also as concrete evidence that graduates can use when applying for jobs in sectors requiring high language proficiency and cultural knowledge.

In addition, the adaptive reward system allows GUFL to adjust rewards to changing industry trends. Research has also indicated that rewards based on the achievement of specific industry-required skills, such as cross-cultural communication skills and understanding of regional economies, increase graduates' chances of being accepted by international companies. Thus, graduates are equipped not only with theoretical knowledge and practical skills that match the needs of today's industry. This

linkage between awards and industry needs ensures that GUFL graduates have a competitive advantage over graduates from other universities.

GUFL has also adopted a more flexible approach to awarding, where rewards are given to trainees who excel academically and those who successfully develop interdisciplinary skills. Rewards in the form of access to professional networks and internship opportunities in leading Southeast Asian companies have increased trainee engagement and motivation. By providing not only material rewards but also hands-on industry experience, GUFL ensures that trainees gain greater insight into the real needs of the global job market.

Overall, implementing industry-relevant rewards at GUFL not only increases the motivation and satisfaction of lecturers and trainees, but also plays a vital role in creating graduates who are ready to compete in the global market. A reward system oriented towards the skills needed by the industry guarantees that graduates have relevant competencies that can be directly implemented in the world of work. With this strategy, GUFL has successfully positioned itself as an institution capable of producing high-quality talent in Southeast Asia.

Discussion

The application of rewards and recognition in talent training management in academic settings, such as at Guangxi University of Foreign Languages (GUFL), is critical to improving the competitiveness of graduates. Reward and recognition play a crucial role in improving motivation, retention and performance quality, all of which contribute to achieving the university's strategic goal of delivering graduates who are competitive in the international job market.

Based on the research conducted, a reward system that is adaptive to the needs of the labor market has proven effective in encouraging trainees to improve the linguistic competencies required by the industry. This is in line with Herzberg's (1959) motivation theory, which emphasizes that external rewards such as financial incentives and formal recognition can increase a person's intrinsic motivation, thereby encouraging the achievement of optimal performance.

In the context of talent training management, rewards not only serve as a form of appreciation, but also as a tool to build a productive and competitive learning culture. Rewards in the form of industry-recognized certifications, such as those implemented at GUFL, have provided added value for graduates, preparing them to compete in the global job market. According to (Elnaga & Imran, 2013) training is an effective way to boost job satisfaction, as it often results in improved performance, which, in turn, garners recognition from top management, helping employees feel more connected to their roles. (Wilder, Collier, & Barnes, 2014) also found that employees who receive training are better prepared to meet customer needs. Similarly, (Siswanto, 2023) observed that employees who gain skills through training programs experience greater job satisfaction and demonstrate higher performance levels.

In line with changes in the world of work, GUFL has developed an adaptive and flexible reward system, where rewards are given based on the achievement of skills required by the industry. This ensures that the rewards received by trainees have direct relevance to the needs of the job market in Southeast Asia, particularly in sectors that require language skills and understanding of local culture.

Overall, this research shows that rewards and recognition are not only important to increase motivation, but also to create a learning environment that supports individual growth and institutional competitiveness. The development of an industry-relevant reward system is a key factor in preparing graduates who are ready to face challenges in the global job market. However, according to a research by (Tarigan, Cahya, Valentine, Hatane, & Jie, 2022) different generations of employees tend to have distinct preferences. Generation Z, for example, is less easily motivated solely by monetary incentives; their focus has shifted toward opportunities for personal growth and skill development rather than financial rewards alone.

In addition, cultural influences also play an important role in the application of rewards and recognition, especially in an international context such as that faced by GUFL. In the Southeast Asian

region, cultural values such as collectivism and appreciation of group work are highly emphasized. In collectivist societies, rewards tend to highlight collective benefits and shared success, promoting teamwork and cooperation. On the other hand, individualistic societies place greater value on personal accomplishments and individual recognition, resulting in reward systems that emphasize personal rewards and self-improvement (Shneor, Munim, Zhu, & Alon, 2021). Therefore, the reward system implemented at GUFL not only recognizes individual achievements, but also rewards collaboration and teamwork. Research by (Hofstede, 1980) and (Adamovic, 2023) show that in collectivist cultures, group-based rewards are more effective in increasing motivation and engagement compared to individual rewards. In this context, GUFL has successfully adapted its reward and recognition system by considering local cultural aspects, which increases the effectiveness of their talent training program.

Furthermore, a study by Kouzes and Posner (2017) supports this view by showing that publicly given rewards within social groups or professional communities tend to increase mutual respect and strengthen intrinsic motivation. In this regard, rewards given in academic environments such as GUFL, by involving public recognition of lecturers' and learners' contributions, create a more positive academic culture and encourage improved performance.

With an in-depth literature review, it can be concluded that effective reward and recognition must consider aspects of culture, relevance to the industry, and individual and group needs. The implementation of a reward system that adapts to local cultural factors and industry needs at GUFL has yielded positive results, not only in terms of increasing trainee motivation but also in preparing them to compete in the international job market. This confirms that a holistic approach to talent training management, which includes cultural and industry aspects, can be an effective strategy in creating competitive graduates.

The influence of technology and innovation in reward systems cannot be ignored in modern education. In the digital era, technology can be utilized to strengthen reward systems, such as through digital platforms that allow for real-time and more transparent recognition. At GUFL, systems such as gamification can be integrated into talent training management, where trainees and lecturers can earn points or rewards based on their performance. The study by (Bitrián, Buil, Catalán, & Hatfield, 2023) supports this statement, highlighting the impact of gamified elements in e-training systems on employee enjoyment and technology acceptance. The findings revealed that two key elements, which are challenges and narrative, significantly enhance employees' enjoyment during workplace training, suggesting their potential to improve engagement and motivation in training environments. This technology not only speeds up the assessment process, but also allows for a more flexible and industry-relevant application of rewards. In addition, technology can extend the reach of recognition beyond the traditional classroom, making rewards more visible and recognized by the wider academic community, as well as related industries.

Job satisfaction and faculty retention are also important aspects that are linked to the implementation of rewards and recognition. Research shows that rewards that are given on time and in line with academic achievements can increase lecturers' job satisfaction. Research by (Abraham, Nalawade, Sharma, Nair, & Salve, 2023) demonstrated a link between satisfied faculty members and lower turnover rates. This suggests that job satisfaction can encourage faculty members to remain longer in the organization and foster greater loyalty. At GUFL, faculty who feel valued tend to have a higher commitment to the institution and participate more actively in talent development programs. High faculty retention directly contributes to the stability and quality of talent training programs. In addition, the rewards that lecturers receive, both financial and non-financial, can strengthen their sense of engagement and lower turnover rates, which ultimately contribute to the sustainability of quality education programs.

If we compare GUFL's approach with other institutions in countries such as Singapore or Hong Kong, which also implement reward and recognition systems in talent training, we can see how benchmarking can be used to measure the effectiveness of existing systems. In these countries, rewards that are directly linked to academic achievement and industry-relevant skills have been shown to

improve the competitiveness of graduates. Using best practices from other international institutions can help GUFL improve and develop a reward system that is more relevant and responsive to changing industry needs. This is consistent with (Aalders, 2023) research, which found that flexible reward systems, guided by international best practices, improve adaptability to industry shifts, align with organizational goals, and support both immediate and long-term success.

In addition to financial incentives, non-financial recognition also plays an important role in increasing the motivation and engagement of lecturers and trainees. Public recognition, opportunities to be involved in strategic projects, or certificates of honor are forms of non-financial rewards that are particularly valuable in the context of collectivist cultures such as those in Southeast Asia. At GUFL, these non-financial recognitions can be applied to provide deeper appreciation to trainees and lecturers, as social rewards and group recognition are considered more meaningful than financial incentives alone. This kind of recognition also helps build a more cohesive academic community and supports stronger team collaboration.

Lastly, the reward system at GUFL should also pay attention to rewarding the development of soft skills, which are increasingly needed in the modern world of work. Soft skills such as the ability to communicate, work in teams, and adaptability are often the determining factors for graduates' success in the workforce. By providing rewards that also include achievements in soft skills development, GUFL can better prepare its graduates to face global challenges. Rewarding these skills will provide a balance between technical and non-technical skills, ultimately increasing the competitiveness of graduates in the international job market.

4. CONCLUSION

This study highlights the significant impact of reward and recognition systems in talent training management at Guangxi University of Foreign Languages (GUFL), particularly in enhancing graduates' motivation, performance, and competitiveness in the global job market. GUFL's approach—combining financial rewards, formal recognition, industry certifications, and opportunities for skill demonstration—has proven effective in fostering both academic excellence and practical, industry-relevant competencies, especially in areas such as language and cross-cultural understanding. Importantly, GUFL's culturally adaptive strategy—emphasizing group-based rewards aligned with Southeast Asia's collectivist values—further enhances student engagement and motivation, showing the value of culturally responsive design in educational reward systems.

In addition to financial incentives, non-financial rewards such as public recognition, involvement in strategic projects, and skill showcases have created a more cohesive and motivating academic environment. The study also underscores the potential of technology and innovation, such as digital platforms and gamification, to make reward systems more transparent, responsive, and aligned with industry expectations. These strategies collectively contribute to a more dynamic, inclusive, and future-ready learning environment.

However, a key limitation of this research is its reliance on data from a single student, which limits the generalizability of the findings. The insights gained, while valuable, reflect a singular perspective that may not represent the broader student population at GUFL. Future research should involve larger and more diverse samples, capturing varied student experiences to assess the broader impact of GUFL's reward system across different demographics.

Further studies could also explore comparative models in other cultural and institutional contexts, examining how adaptable GUFL's strategies are for universities worldwide aiming to improve student outcomes and employability.

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