Why Motivation Matters

Motivated teachers are vital for successful and effective classroom instruction. They show up consistently and inspire and engage their students. Enthusiastic teachers assess students’ abilities, give feedback, and collaborate with other teachers. They are passionate about the important role they play and enjoy what they do.

When Teacher Susan welcomes students into her grade 2 classroom, her primary role is to deliver instruction that helps her students learn. Thus, her role as a teacher is important to her students’ life outcomes. As students gain basic literacy skills and a love for education, they become better prepared for a life of continuous learning. For Susan to succeed in this important role and provide high-quality education to her learners and the potential leaders of tomorrow, she must be motivated.

Many factors affect a teacher’s motivation to work. These include money, professional development, progression and promotion opportunities, workplace environment, and sense of autonomy. Susan’s motivations to teach also come from her innate passion to help children and inspire the future leaders of her community; that is, her motivation comes from her innate drive to have a purpose. Naturally, acknowledgment and appreciation of her tireless efforts and continued professional achievements are also significant motivating factors for her.

The Liberian Context

Liberia is facing significant economic challenges and is still struggling to fully recover from civil wars and the Ebola Virus Disease outbreak in 2014. The country’s education system is additionally burdened in its mission to provide quality education to students by the COVID-19 pandemic and is lagging significantly behind most other African countries in education achievement statistics. Complicating these issues, the Liberian education budget is severely constrained, limiting the government’s ability to provide direct financial or other incentives to teachers.

A United States Agency for International Development (USAID)-funded Read Liberia Activity research study revealed that, despite being trained and certified, many teachers are not yet included on the government’s payroll, with only 54% of teachers receiving a monthly salary from the government. Supplementary teachers make up 21% of the Liberian teaching force, and community or volunteer teachers make up 26%. This study showed that in Lofa county, for example, 48% of teachers were volunteers, while only 28% were full employees. A teacher’s average monthly wage in Liberia is around $220, which is lower than the wages of other workers with similar education levels in the country.

Teachers working in this fragile education system must also cope with uncertain class sizes. Some teachers face classrooms of up to 80 learners, while student enrollment in other schools is falling. Many teachers also struggle with limited supplies of books and resources. All these factors can drive teachers to leave the profession.

USAID Read Liberia’s Unique Solution to Valuing Teachers’ Service

To mitigate these national challenges, Read Liberia combined efforts with the Liberian Ministry of Education (MOE) to build a unique non-monetary incentive program to recognize high-performing teachers. This program complements the MOE’s work to create sustainable community-based relationships to reward both schools and teachers for their outstanding commitment to teaching reading skills and to encourage more teachers to offer quality reading instruction.
How Does It Work?

This innovative approach recognizes teacher and school excellence by giving awards to up to two schools and four teachers per district annually. Each award is judged using a competitive process based on criteria approved by the MOE and other stakeholders. For example, to qualify for the Excellence in the Teaching of Reading award, a teacher must demonstrate mastery in teaching early grade reading (EGR) lessons, creativity and innovation in teaching reading, and a high degree of collaboration with colleagues in the school community to promote reading and reading development. Winners are publicly recognized for their achievements and receive non-monetary but meaningful awards from local companies. Table 1 presents the current award categories, as well as examples of non-monetary incentives.

Table 1. Award Categories and Examples of Non-Monetary Incentives

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<tr>
<th>TEACHER AWARD CATEGORIES</th>
<th>NON-MONETARY INCENTIVES</th>
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<tr>
<td>1. Excellence in the Teaching of Reading</td>
<td>• Recognition of a teacher during a public, MOE-driven ceremony. The teacher will receive a framed certificate or plaque.</td>
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<td>2. Outstanding New Reading Teacher</td>
<td>• Public recognition through radio or television interviews.</td>
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<td>3. Excellence in Addressing Special Needs in the Teaching of Reading</td>
<td>• Career advancement (e.g., selection as a Master Trainer).</td>
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<td>4. Outstanding Contribution to the Teaching of Reading</td>
<td>• Personal items (e.g., books, shirts, jackets, briefcases, book bags, planners, mugs, hats, rain gear, bicycles for traveling to school).</td>
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<td>• Phone and data packages.</td>
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<td>• Private partner-specific gifts, such as hotel stays.</td>
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<th>SCHOOL AWARD CATEGORIES</th>
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<td>1. Outstanding Leadership in Teaching and Learning</td>
<td>• Public recognition of the school’s excellent performance at a public ceremony.</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Excellence in the Teaching of Early Grade Reading</td>
<td>• Public recognition through radio or television interviews.</td>
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<td>• Donation of teaching and learning materials to the school.</td>
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<td>• Donation of other items, such as printers, whiteboards, and supplies needed by the school.</td>
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<td>• Framed certificates.</td>
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You are Appreciated! USAID Read Liberia and MOE Honor 15 Teachers

September 8, 2021, was a day to remember for Mr. Peter Bganawoi, a grade 2 teacher from New Toyoto Public School in Bong County. Following numerous nominations and a rigorous vetting process, Mr. Bganawoi was recognized with the Excellence in the Teaching of Reading award. At the award ceremony in Bong County, Mr. Bganawoi was welcomed on stage by local businessman Mr. Tornorlah Varpilah, Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of Passion Hotel, with whom the Read Liberia Activity had established a strong partnership. Mr. Bganawoi was one of four Bong County teachers recognized and was presented by Mr. Varpilah with an all-expenses-paid night at Passion Hotel. As the crowd applauded, Mr. Varpilah said this was his business’s way of appreciating teachers’ contributions to the education sector. He also called on other private sector institutions to support EGR as the foundation for learning.
While speaking at the event, Read Liberia Senior Reading Director Ms. Patience U. Suah thanked the authorities of Bong County for their support and collaboration in motivating teachers in the county. She encouraged the award winners to continue providing excellent instruction to their students despite unprecedented challenges. Speaking directly to the award winners, Ms. Suah said, “We hope the celebrations today show how much you are appreciated and that your hard work has not gone unnoticed nor unrecognized.”

Ms. Suah also thanked the private sector partners for their continued support of EGR and urged other private sector partners who have not yet supported EGR to ensure that all “hands are on deck.”

In Nimba County, teacher Karmie Baindan finished top against strong competition to represent that county. In the words of coaching supervisor Cassius Suah, “Madam Karmie has shown a high level of commitment and diligence towards her work and great passion for teaching her students. When I learned that Baindan won, I felt impressed and very excited that a teacher I am providing support to could emerge as a winner of excellence in the teaching of reading.” At the awards ceremony in Kakata City, Margibi County, Mayor Emmanual Goll Sr. praised Read Liberia for its intervention in schools and highlighted the uniqueness of the awards event. “It was the first event of its kind in Margibi,” he proclaimed.

At the Montserrado Non-Monetary Awards Ceremony, Ms. Heaneah Farwenee, Technical Director of the MOE Early Childhood Division, indicated that, “the non-monetary incentive program is an excellent opportunity to review teachers who are doing so much out there unnoticed.” Offering non-monetary incentives can be an effective way for governments to attract, retain, and motivate valued teachers. Reflecting on the awards, Assistant Minister for Basic and Secondary Education Felicia Sackey Doe-Sumah stated, “Passion yields good results.”

Teachers welcomed the respect and admiration they and their profession received. Reflecting on his award, Mr. Bganawoi shared, “I felt very happy and thrilled to win the award. It gives me more motivation to continue my work as a teacher. My family is very happy that I emerged a winner, and my community members are also very happy for my success.”

Mr. Bganawoi and his fellow winners subsequently advanced to the national-level awards ceremony held on October 28, 2021. Read Liberia organized this prestigious event in collaboration with the MOE, and four national winners were honored:

- Ms. Juliet Saah of Montserrado County was named National Teacher of the Year for Excellence in the Teaching of Reading.
- Mr. Peter Bganawoi of Bong County was named National Teacher of the Year for Outstanding Contribution to the Teaching of Reading.
- Ms. Victoria Qualee of Nimba County was named National Teacher of the Year for Excellence in Addressing Special Needs in the Teaching of Reading.
- Mr. Titus Wingbah of Nimba County was named National Teacher of the Year—Outstanding New Reading Teacher.

Speaking at the ceremony held at the Ministerial complex, the Deputy Minister for Instruction at the MOE, Hon. Alexander Duopu, indicated that the successful collaboration and coordination between the MOE and USAID continued to support motivating teachers who are committed to building students’ skills in reading fluency.
This non-monetary incentive program shows that even in the face of constrained education budgets, there are innovative and achievable actions that the education sector, communities, and the private sector can take when working in partnership to motivate teachers and schools to excel.

More Information:

The USAID Read Liberia Activity is a five-year (September 2017–September 2022) program that aims at improving EGR skills for Liberian learners in 640 public schools in grades 1 and 2. Read Liberia also pilot tested a program to develop emergent literacy skills for Liberian learners in 60 public kindergarten schools. The Activity is implemented in six targeted counties—Lofa, Bong, Grand Bassa, Nimba, Margibi, and Montserrado. Read Liberia is funded by USAID and implemented by RTI International with subcontractors Another Option, Brattle Publishing Group, and DEEP through direct partnership with the Liberian MOE.

USAID/Liberia Read Liberia Activity
Chief of Party: Trokon Wayne

This report is made possible by the generous support of the American people through the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) under the Read Liberia Activity. The contents are the responsibility of RTI International and do not necessarily reflect the views of USAID or the United States Government.

For more information about the Read Liberia program, use the main menu to search by Topic > Then "Featured Collection" > Read Liberia. Or click here.
For more information about teacher motivation, use keyword search “Motivation”. In particular, see Cultivating dynamic educators: Case studies in teacher behavior change in Africa and Asia | SharEd (rti.org), especially Chapter 8, which describes the use of a teacher motivation diagnostic tool in India. The Jordan Early Grade Reading and Mathematics Initiative (RAMP) project also tested incentives for teachers: Incentives to teach, incentives to read: A pilot of symbolic incentives for teachers and students in Jordan | SharEd (rti.org). And in Nepal, a study looked at how motivation affects teaching practice, including absenteeism: Nepal Early Grade Reading Assessment, education management efficiency study and teacher observation study | SharEd (rti.org).

1 Hot Pepper Newspaper. 8 Sep 2021
2 USAID. Where we work, Liberia https://www.usaid.gov/liberia/education (link is external)
3 Read Liberia Year 1 Operational research study. 2008. RTI
5 Education Weekly https://www.edweek.org/teaching-learning/opinion-what-motivates-teachers...(link is external)