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Teachers' Perspectives on the use of Reward Systems to support Classroom Management in Primary School Classrooms.

Ellen Sheehan

Dissertation submitted in partial fulfilment of the award of Professional Master of Education in Primary/Post-Primary

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Abstract

Effective classroom management is a crucial ability for primary school teachers to facilitate learning (Baumert and Kunter, 2013). Although researchers have studied the use of reward systems for classroom management since the 1960s (Grieger, 1970), there is no clear agreement on its effectiveness (Lungo, 2019). The aim of this study was to investigate teachers' perspectives on the use of reward systems to support classroom management. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with primary school teachers. The findings indicated that while teachers acknowledge the benefits of rewards systems in decreasing disruptive behaviours and enhancing motivation, they are concerned with potential challenges of rewards systems, e.g. fostering entitlement and disrupting social dynamics.

Table of Contents

Abstract *2*

Chapter 1 - Introduction *7*

1.1 Introduction **7**

1.2 Origin of the dissertation **7**

1.3 Background to the project **7**

1.4 Rationale **8**

1.5 Aim of the research **8**

1.6 Dissertation layout **8**

1.7 Conclusion **9**

Chapter 2 - Literature review *10*

2.1 Introduction **10**

2.2 Classroom management **10**

2.2.1 Defining classroom management 10

2.2.2 Approaches 10

2.2.3 Impacts of classroom management. 11

2.3 History of classroom management in Ireland **11**

2.4 Reward Systems **12**

2.5 Behavioural vs. internal control approach view on reward systems **14**

2.6 Teachers' perspectives **15**

2.7 Conclusion **16**

Chapter 3 - Methodology *18*

3.1 Introduction **18**

3.2 Methodology **18**

3.2.1 Qualitative method 18

3.1.2 Other methods considered 18

3.3 Research paradigm **19**

3.4 Approach **19**

3.5 Research methods **20**

3.5.1 Semi-structured interviews 20

3.5.2 Questions 20

3.6 Sampling and participants **21**

3.7 Data analysis **21**

3.8 Rigour **22**

3.8.1 Reflexivity 22

3.8.2 Enhancing credibility through pilot testing 22

3.8.4 Enhancing credibility through member checking 22

3.9 Limitations **23**

3.9.1 Sample size and setting 23

3.9.2 Bias 23

3.10 Ethical issues **23**

3.11 Conclusion **24**

Chapter 4 - Findings ***25***

4.1 Introduction **25**

4.1.1 Introduction 25

4.1.2 Participants 25

4.1.3 Themes emerged following thematic analysis 25

4.2 Implementation of reward systems **25**

4.3 Impact on pupil behaviour **26**

4.4 Influence on motivation **27**

4.5 Challenges associated with reward systems **28**

4.5.1 Social dynamics 28

4.5.2 Equity and fairness 29

4.5.3 Entitlement 29

4.6 Conclusion **30**

Chapter 5 - Discussion ***31***

5.1 Introduction **31**

5.2 Impact of reward Systems on pupil behaviour - behavioural vs. internal control approach **31**

5.3 Impact of reward systems on pupil motivation **32**

5.3.1 Impact of reward systems on pupil motivation 32

5.3.2 Entitlement and intrinsic motivation 33

5.4 Implementation of reward systems **34**

5.4.1 Implementation of reward systems 34

5.4.2 Social dynamics, fairness and equity 35

5.5 Research questions **35**

5.5.1 What are teachers' perspectives on the use of reward systems to support classroom management? 35

5.5.2 What are teachers' perspectives on the impact of reward systems on pupil behaviour in primary school classrooms? 36

5.5.3 What are teachers' perspectives on the impact of reward systems on pupil motivation in primary school classrooms? 36

5.5 Conclusion **36**

Chapter 6 - Conclusion ***38***

6.1 Introduction **38**

6.2 Summary of findings **38**

6.3 Limitations **38**

6.3.1 Limited sample size 38

6.3.2 Bias and subjectivity 39

6.3.3 Contextual limitations 39

6.4 Recommendations for further research **39**

6.4.1 Pupil perspectives 39

6.4.2 Alternative approaches 39

6.5 Recommendations to inform further teaching practice **39**

6.5.1 Balanced approach 40

6.5.2 Intrinsic motivation 40

6.5.3 Prioritise social and emotional growth 40

6.6 Concluding remarks 40

References 42

Appendices.....50

Appendix 1 – Research information sheet.....50

Appendix 2 – Consent form 51

Appendix 3 – Letter to principal 52

Appendix 4 – Principal consent form.....53

Appendix 5 – Interview schedule.....54

Appendix 6 - Page of interview transcript with thematic analysis 56

Appendix 7 - Excerpt from reflective journal 57

Chapter 1 - Introduction

1.1 Introduction

For the primary school classroom teacher, effective classroom management is a vital skill for the fostering of pupil engagement and learning (Baumert and Kunter, 2013). Despite research regarding the use of reward systems to support classroom management being conducted since the 1960s (Grieger, 1970), there is no clear consensus regarding its effectiveness (Lungo, 2019; O'Donnell et al. 2012). This project is an investigation into teachers' perspectives on the use of reward systems to support classroom management in mainstream primary school classrooms. This study analyses teachers' perspectives by gathering data on their views of reward systems and classroom management through a series of semi-structured interviews. This research will assess reward systems as support for classroom management, as informed by the teacher's own educational experiences and beliefs.

1.2 Origin of the dissertation

Throughout my experience as a substitute teacher, as well as during teaching practice, I have observed a wide range of strategies implemented to support classroom management. The use of reward systems to support classroom management has been extremely prevalent across all of the classrooms observed. However, I have also observed both positive and negative impacts of these reward systems, ranging from an increase in positive behaviours to a lack of motivation without the incentive of a reward. These observations helped to provoke an interest in the area of reward systems.

1.3 Background to the project

Effective classroom management has a positive impact on academic learning, social and emotional growth, academic productivity, and the reduction of negative behaviour (Kractochwill, DeRoos and Blair, 2009). As teaching in Ireland has become more focused on the promotion of positive attitudes and behaviour through education (Hyland, 2014), reward systems, including token economies (Zlomke and Zlomke, 2003) response costs (Conyers et al. 2004) and self-monitoring (Zlomke and Zlomke, 2003), are an example of a strategy being

used to support classroom management in primary school classrooms (Infantino and Little, 2005). While research conducted regarding the impact of reward systems on classroom management dates back to the 1970s (Grieger, 1970), a clear consensus on its effects has not been reached. Although some studies acknowledge that the use of reward systems can help pupils who struggle with motivation (O'Donnell et al. 2012), as well as promoting learning (Cameron, 2001), a number of studies also criticise reward systems, arguing that they can decrease internal motivation (Deci, Koestner and Ryan, 1999) and have a negative impact on pupils (Ryan and Deci, 2017).

1.4 Rationale

It has been noted in educational literature that there is a continued disagreement when it comes to rewards systems' effects on classroom management. Literature, theory, and research relevant to this debate will be discussed further in the literature review. However, this debate has rarely included the perspectives of teachers.

> The question of how or even if rewards should be used in educational settings has been a topic of debate…. yet it is ironic that this dialogue has rarely included the voices of classroom teachers. (Hoffmann et al., 2009, p.843)

Teachers' perspectives are a vital area for research into the use of reward systems to support classroom management, as research has identified a link between classroom management with individual teaching perspectives and styles (Deci et al. 1981).

1.5 Aim of the research

The aim of this research project is to establish if teachers perceive reward systems as having a positive or negative impact on classroom management in the mainstream primary classroom.

1.6 Dissertation layout

This dissertation is divided into six chapters. Chapter 1 introduces the topic, provides the motivation for the study and highlights the aims of the research. Chapter 2 reviews the relevant literature on the topic of the dissertation, leading to the research questions of the study. Chapter 3 outlines and justifies the methodology used to gather the data for the study.

Chapter 4 is a detailed, in-depth critical analysis of the findings from the data collected. The findings are discussed critically in relation to the research questions and literature review in chapter 5. Chapter 6 concludes the study, through drawing together the main conclusion reached from the findings in the previous chapters.

1.7 Conclusion

In conclusion, despite a wide range of research into the use of reward systems to support classroom management, there is a lack of clarity regarding the impact the use of reward systems has on classroom management, with little research investigating this area through the perspective of teachers. Literature, theory, and research relevant to this debate will be discussed further in the literature review.

Chapter 2 - Literature review

2.1 Introduction

This chapter provides a critical analysis on the use of reward systems to support classroom management. Beginning with an examination of the definition of classroom management, the review will discuss the different approaches to classroom management and their impacts along with the historical evolution of classroom management in Ireland. The review then discusses reward systems, exploring their role in promoting positive behaviour, their effectiveness in classroom management and the contrasting perspectives of the behavioural and internal control approaches regarding their use.

2.2 Classroom management

2.2.1 Defining classroom management

For the primary school teacher, effective classroom management is a vital skill for the fostering of pupil engagement and learning (Baumert and Kunter, 2013; Gage et al. 2018; Korpershoek et al. 2016; Wills et al. 2019). Children's classroom experiences have a great influence on their behaviour. Therefore, it is necessary for teachers to be not only effective educators, but also class managers (Sadık, 2016). Classroom management refers to any action taken by a teacher to create and maintain a positive learning environment, conducive to successful learning (Everston and Weinstein, 2013). Research on classroom management has been one of the most widely studied disciplines within education, but its findings are inconsistent, leaving researchers to look for possible answers (Veenman, 1984). The study of classroom management began around the turn of the 20th century, but beginning teachers still face the same challenges today (Evertson, 2001; Latz, 1992; Veenman, 1984).

2.2.2 Approaches

The literature suggests that a successful classroom management strategy serves two primary purposes. Firstly, order must be established in the classroom and disruptive behaviours must be prevented. The second purpose, of equal importance, is to foster pupils' development (Brophy, 2006; Doyle, 1986; Öztürk and Gangal, 2016; Wubbels, 2011). There are a wide range of approaches to classroom management. Within research, a greater focus has been paid to "behavioural" and "internal control" approaches (Wubbels, 2011). The behavioural approach aims to increase desirable behaviour or extinguish undesirable behaviour through

conditioning. The internal control approach aims to support pupils to internalise values (Elias and Schwab, 2006).

2.2.3 Impacts of classroom management.

Turan (2008), describes how classroom management can have a positive impact on the climate of learning in the classroom, through providing pupils the opportunity to express themselves freely and reveal their potential. Effective classroom management can facilitate meaningful academic learning and social and emotional growth, reduces negative behaviour and increases academic productivity (Kractochwill, DeRoos and Blair, 2009). Research has highlighted that pupil achievement is highly correlated with components of effective classroom management, such as routines, clear expectations, and efficient time management (Cook et al. 2017; Stronge, Ward and Grant, 2011). The results of a meta-analysis by Korpershoek et al. (2016) clearly indicated a positive correlation between classroom management and student achievement.

Çayak and Ergin (2015) states that situations defined as undesired behaviours in pupils can have an adverse impact on the teaching-learning process, leading to a prevention of the learning of other pupils. Poor classroom management can have a negative impact on pupil engagement, academic instruction and learning outcomes (Gage et al. 2018; Oliver, Wehby and Reschly, 2011). Unfortunately, teachers face a number of challenges regarding classroom management (Pigge and Marso, 1997; Lewis, Romi, Katz and Qui, 2008). The most common issue teachers encounter in classrooms is students' problematic behaviour, according to a study by Dağlı and Han (2017). The challenges teachers face in classroom management can lead to stress (Frieberg, Oviatt and Naveira, 2020) and burnout (Brouwers and Tomic, 2000; Friedman and Farber, 1992). The study of classroom management has grown significantly in recent years. A study by Bozkus (2021), which examined classroom management studies conducted from 1980 to 2019, found that 38% of these studies were conducted since 2004.

2.3 History of classroom management in Ireland

During the early 20th century, Ireland underwent a series of significant developments in child education. Children's role in society had shifted from one that prioritized economics to one that values education (Hyland, 2014). Education in Ireland was now centred on fostering religious and moral character in children, with discipline playing a key role (Wallace,

Franklin and Keegan, 2010). This change of perspective was articulated by Locke (1963), stating that a child is neither naturally a good child nor a bad child, but their behaviour can be shaped and manipulated by an educator, as a developing individual. Locke (1963) suggested the most effective way to manipulate behaviour was to build esteem by praising and rewarding positive behaviours and punishing negative behaviours by disgrace. In Irish schools, teachers typically punished pupils who did not adhere to the desired behaviour (Hyland, 2014).

In 1971, Ireland developed a national curriculum based on child-centred ideals. A child-friendly, positive classroom environment was encouraged within this curriculum to foster positive pupil-teacher relationships (Walshe, 2004). The Irish education system abolished corporal punishment in 1982 as a result of these developments. According to Kellaghan et al. (1981), Irish attitudes were not necessarily supportive of this development at the time, with a reported 58% public support before its implementation. In the study, 994 participants were surveyed, and 27% described it as a ‘change for the worst'. With this significant change in the sanctioned behavioural management strategies in the Irish education system, the role of the teacher also changed. As a result, there was a move away from the authoritative, disciplinarian figure in favour of promoting positive attitudes and behaviour through education (Hyland, 2014). The teacher was expected to play an increasingly important role in a child's overall development (O'Connor, 2008). This point is supported by the Teaching Council of Ireland (2016), who state that the work of a teacher is ‘motivated by the best interest of the pupils entrusted to their care…. Through positive influence, professional judgement and empathy’ (pp.5). The role of the teacher, society’s view of childhood, and the way the behaviour of children is perceived and managed, have all greatly evolved, and will continue to do so in the future.

2.4 Reward Systems

Teachers have been reported as using reward systems to support classroom management since the 1960s, with research into use of rewards during the 1970s, finding it an effective strategy (McMillan, 1973; Grieger, 1970). A number of studies indicate that teachers typically prefer to use preventative strategies with a goal of lessening the probability of disruptions to classroom management. One example of such preventative strategies is the use of a reward system (Infantino and Little, 2005). Within the context of the classroom, rewards can be offered in response to a positive behaviour (Noels, Clement and Pelletier, 2001).

According to Witzel and Mercer (2003), rewards are reinforcement tools used by teachers to motivate pupils and elicit certain behaviours. Rewards and motivation are usually classified into two categories: intrinsic and extrinsic (O'Donnell, Reeve and Smith, 2012). Extrinsic rewards as tangible rewards given to reward good behaviour or performance. As opposed to extrinsic motivation, intrinsic motivation occurs when a student's own internal drive motivates them to engage in the task and conduct themselves appropriately without having to be reinforced by an external source (Bilouk, 2015).

Token economies are a common form of reward systems to support classroom management. Zlomke and Zlomke (2003) define token economies as interventions that include 'contingencies in which tokens or points are given, following the emission of targeted behaviours,' (pp.177). Studies have suggested token economies as a method of reducing disruptive behaviour at low cost and with high impact (Wheatley et al. 2009; Boniecki and Moore, 2003). Research has also viewed token economies as an effective method of motivation for pupils, through positive reinforcement (Boniecki and Moore, 2003; Cameron et al. 2005; Reitman et al. 2004; Zlomke and Zlomke, 2003). In a study conducted by Zlomke and Zlomke (2003), negative behaviour was reduced when pupils earned points for exhibiting positive behaviour, and then exchanged these points for rewards. In another study, positive and negative behaviours were separated into levels, and pupils were placed up or down along a scale based on their behaviour, and, at the end of the day, pupils within a specific range would choose from a selection of rewards (Reitmann et al 2004). Response costs are a variation of token economies. With a response cost system, children start with a number of tokens and lose them if they misbehave (Conyers et al. 2004). As pupils are losing something based on negative behaviour, response costs systems are categorised as punishment. Punishment procedures are often the subject of criticism, as 'punishment may evoke emotional behaviour or have other side effects,' (Conyers et al. 2004, pp.414).

Another aspect of a reward system, often used alongside a token economy is self-monitoring. Within the reward system, pupils set academic or behavioural aims. Following a study on the combination of token economy systems with self-monitoring, Zlomke and Zlomke (2003) found that self-monitoring can have a positive impact on behaviour within the classroom, especially in pupils that struggle emotionally or behaviourally. Self-Brown and Mathews (2003), reported similar findings, examining a structure where pupils created and monitored their own aims using a contract.

2.5 Behavioural vs. internal control approach view on reward systems

The behavioural and internal control approaches have very contrasting views of the use of reward systems to support classroom management. Reward systems are encouraged by the behavioural approach, but are viewed as controlling mechanisms by the internal control approach. In the behavioural approach, students are taught the desired behaviour, and then rewarded when they exhibit it (Horner and Sugai, 2015). The internal control-focused approach contends that while rewards have the potential to be beneficial, their effects are frequently short-lived or non-existent (Han and Altunhan, 2022; Yaman and Güven, 2014).

A wide range of research has differed on their views of the advantages of reward systems, with a number of studies criticising the concept of rewards as positive reinforcers (Kohn, 1999; Lungu, 2019). Kohn (1999) considers reward systems as "ways of manipulating behaviour that destroy the potential for real learning" (pp.1). The "Self-Determination Theory", which supports the internal control approach (Ryan and Deci, 2017), considers reward systems are viewed as control systems based on extrinsic motivation, instead of intrinsic motivation (Kowalski and Froiland, 2020). Ryan and Deci (2017) argue that reward systems have a negative impact on pupils, rather than being effective. According to their meta-analysis (Deci, Koestner and Ryan, 1999), reward systems can lead to a decrease in intrisic motivation, as the students view them as the reason for desired behaviour. Students can also fail to internalise their behaviour (Ryan and Deci, 2017), which leads to a decrease in intrinsic motivation (Brophy, 2006). Despite the fact that reward systems may accomplish the first aim of classroom management, i.e. discipline, they may not accomplish the second goal, i.e. development (Bolat, 2023). These criticisms are echoed by Lungo (2019), who argues that overreliance on reward systems can have a negative impact on a pupil's natural inclination to learn, as well as Bilouk (2015), who believes that reward systems "diminish risk-taking, creativity, and intrinsic interest in the activity". Bilouk (2015), describes how a pupil's engagement with a task can be moved to simply chasing a reward. An analysis conducted by Maggin et al. (2011) found no evidence to support the effectiveness of reward systems, and attribute previous studies' findings on the effectiveness of reward systems to a lack of robust statistical methods.

Several researchers, however, have argued that reward systems can be effective in the classroom. Kazdin (2017) argues that a reward system is effective strategy to support classroom management. O' Donnell et al. (2012) argue that the use of a reward system can

have a positive impact on outcomes for pupils who struggle with motivation. Yamoah (2013) argued that reward systems can be effective as long as they are considering of equity and fairness. In contrast to the meta-analysis by Deci et al (1999), Cameron (2001) suggests that teachers should not refrain from using reward systems to promote learning and appropriate behaviour in class, arguing that the use of reward systems did not have a negative impact on the pupils of her study. Cameron and Pierce (1994) and Cameron (2001) contest that reward systems can promote learning within the classroom, in contrast to the view that reward systems are damaging to pupil motivation. In a study of the impact of a reward system in an Irish classroom conducted by Agyekum (2021), following the implementation of a reward system pupils 'remained engaged and were more willing to participate,' (pp.6).

2.6 Teachers' perspectives

Teachers' perspectives of reward systems are perhaps the most important factors in their use. Teacher's perspectives are defined by Pratt (1998) as what teachers "do as teachers and why we think such actions are worthy and justified" (pp.10). The issue of classroom management has been identified as a central concern for teachers, especially beginning teachers, who cite poorer climates in the classroom than experienced teachers (Jensen et al. 2012). Practices that support classroom management, i.e. reward systems are closely linked to teachers' perspectives regarding pupil motivation (Nolen and Nicholls, 1994; Turner, 2010). When teachers believe in the importance of fostering intrinsic motivation, they are more likely to support students' independence, and refrain from the use of reward systems to support classroom management (Reeve, 2009). A study by Reitmann et al. (2004) found that a number of teachers are less inclined to use reward systems to support classroom management because of the time consumed by implementation, the cost of rewards and the constant monitoring of behaviours.

In spite of the continued disagreement in education research about the impact of reward systems on classroom management, little research has addressed reward systems in the classroom from a teacher's perspective. This is a vital area for research as teachers' approaches to classroom management has been shown to have an impact on pupil motivation (Deci and Ryan, 1987), academic competence (Deci et al. 1981) and academic achievement (Flink et al. 1992). Studies have also identified a link between classroom management with individual teaching styles (Deci et al. 1981; Eccles and Midgley, 1989; Reeve, Bolt and Cai,

1999), further emphasising the importance of teacher perspectives when addressing the use of reward systems to support classroom management.

In a study conducted by Hoffman, Huff and Nietfeld (2009), the use of rewards was examined from the perspectives of elementary teachers in the US. Teachers were largely in favour of utilising rewards to support classroom management, when asked about their usage of reward systems. Verbal or written praise and prizes were the most often used rewards by teachers who employed behaviour management techniques. Reward systems were also frequently used to recognise academic accomplishment. Additional forms of rewards included extra credit, homework passes, class privileges, and vocal or written compliments to parents (Hoffman, Huff and Nietfeld, 2009). Further study is required to understand how reward systems are implemented and how teachers feel about using rewards to change behaviour and improve academic performance (Akin-Little and Little, 2004; Cameron et al. 2005; Davis et al. 2006; Hoffman, Huff and Nietfeld, 2009). Following their study, Hoffman, Huff and Nietfeld (2009) state that "there is a critical need for more studies to explore teacher perceptions of reward use in schools and the potential effects of rewards" (pp.847).

2.7 Conclusion

Classroom management is one of the most important aspects of the fostering of pupil engagement and learning (Baumert and Kunter, 2013; Gage et al. 2018; Korpershoek et al. 2016; Wills et al. 2019). The use of reward systems by classroom teachers to support classroom management has been reported since the 1960s (Grieger, 1970). However, there is a lack of clarity regarding the impact the use of reward systems has on classroom management, with research ranging from in favour (Kazdin, 2017) to against (Han and Altunhan, 2022). In spite of this continuous debate, this dialogue has rarely included the perspectives of classroom teachers (Hoffman et al. 2009), with no research including the perspective of Irish teachers of mainstream primary classroom. This initial research process led to the following research question:

- What are teachers' perspectives on the use of reward systems to support classroom management?
- What are teachers' perspectives on the impact of reward systems on student behaviour in primary school classrooms?

- What are teachers' perspectives on the impact of reward systems on student motivation in primary school classrooms?

Chapter 3 - Methodology

3.1 Introduction

Using the critical analysis of the current literature on reward systems, classroom management and teachers' perspectives in the preceding chapter as a foundation for defining the research design, this chapter is an examination into how the suggested research questions might be best explored and realised. The best research methods to support the aims of the study will be discussed, along with the ethical parameters and limitations associated with this study.

3.2 Methodology

3.2.1 Qualitative method

As this study is an investigation into teachers' perspectives of the use of reward systems to support classroom management, the methodology of qualitative research was used. The aim of qualitative research is to understand the thoughts and perceptions of participants and gives insight into the practices of the participants (Bell, 2010). Maxwell (2013) advocates that qualitative research is concerned with meanings, motives, beliefs, perceptions, values and attitudes. The use of qualitative research can produce more in-depth and illustrative information, when compared to quantitative research (Queirós, Faria, Almeda, 2017). The aim of this study will benefit from the ability to investigate the beliefs and attitudes of teachers towards reward systems, and the ability to produce in-depth and illustrative findings through qualitative research.

3.1.2 Other methods considered

The employment of a quantitative method through questionnaires and surveys (Cohen and Manion, 1994) was considered for this study, as this method yields concise, objective and easily measurable data (Queirós, Faria, Almeda, 2017). However, a qualitative study through semi-structured interviews enables the ability to be 'alert for subtle, yet meaningful cues in participants' expressions, pauses and occasional sidetracks' (Leedy and Ormrod, 2013, p.145), which would be impossible to achieve through a quantitative methodology. Similarly,

because there was a small number of teacher participants, quantitative approaches may struggle to demonstrate validity.

Integrating qualitative and quantitative research through a mixed-methodologies approach was also considered, as it could offer two contrasting dimensions on the data and enable to potential of triangulation to take place (Hesse-Biber, 2010). However, as discussed above, a quantitative approach may not align with the overall aims of the study. In order to ensure validity, research methods should take into account an overall fitness for purpose, as stated by Cohen, Manion, and Morrison (2007), and the mixed methodology approach should only be employed if it genuinely contributes to the research goals (Creswell et al., 2006).

3.3 Research paradigm

An interpretive research paradigm was used in this study. The aim of interpretive research is to understand social phenomena 'through the eyes of the participants rather than the researcher' (Cohen et al. 2007, p.21), which helped present clearer findings about the perspectives of teachers. The interpretive research paradigm requires that social phenomena be understood within their context (Rehman and Alharthi, 2016).

Interpretive research is concerned mainly with the collection of qualitative data, through methods such as structured and semi-structured open ended interviews (Rehman and Alharthi, 2016) which aligns with the chosen methodology. Positivist research, while appropriate for studying natural phenomena (Rehman and Alharthi, 2016), has been viewed as ineffective when used in research regarding individuals, perceptions and social phenomena (Gage, 2007; Grix, 2004; Richards, 2003), as it is 'not designed to explore the complexities and conundrums of the immensely complicated social world that we inhabit' (Richards, 2003, p.6).

3.4 Approach

In this study, qualitative data from participants was collected through semi-structured interviews, engaging an interpretive research paradigm. An inductive approach was used to study the data collected from the semi-structured interviews. When using an inductive approach, patterns are discovered within the collected data, which are then categorised into

themes to understand the results and generate theory. This approach aligned with the interpretive research paradigm as interpretivists tend 'to see theory as deriving from data collection and not as the driving force of research' (Grix, 2004, p.108). The inductive approach can also produce a better insight into perceptions by analysing, discovering patterns and categorising themes in the data collected (Thomas, 2006).

3.5 Research methods

3.5.1 Semi-structured interviews

The research method used in this study was semi-structured interviews. Semi-structured interviews provide opportunities to 'probe' participants about answers, which can add 'significance and depth' (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2007, p.315) to collected data. The research method aligned with the interpretive research paradigm as the data was verbal instead of statistical and was audio recorded to "preserve the events in a fairly authentic manner for subsequent data analysis" (Gall et al., 2003, p. 21). The semi-structured interviews were conducted using the interview schedule (Appendix 5), which served as a guide to collect pertinent data. This aided the investigation of the topic of reward systems while emphasising the teacher's perspective.

3.5.2 Questions

The majority of questions used were open-ended, allowing for more flexibility and the ability to fix possible misinterpretations (Cohen and Manion, 1994). The open-ended questions also allowed for opportunity to delve deeper into any points that arose (Wengraf, 2001), and enable the extraction of views and perceptions from the participants (Creswell, 2009). The participants were asked about their opinions and experience using a reward system in their classrooms, what sort of challenges/benefits they encounter through using a reward system, and the impact of a reward system on classroom management, student behaviour and motivation. The participants were also asked about any alternative approaches to classroom management that they have tried, and their thoughts on the future use of reward systems in primary school classrooms. Every question asked related to the literature examined in Chapter 2 of this study, with an aim ascertain whether the literature reviewed aligned or diverged from the findings of this study.

3.6 Sampling and participants

The participants of this study were chosen through the use of criterion sampling, defined as the process of deliberately selecting participants who meet specific predetermined criteria of significance (Patton 2015). To align with the objective of the study, mainstream class teachers who use, or who have used in the past, reward systems every day in their classrooms were selected. Excluding criteria included teachers who do not and have never used reward systems in their classrooms.

Participants were recruited from three primary schools in Cork. As the primary access point to the research field, initial contact with school principals was established through a letter, followed by a telephone call. The letter (Appendix 3) provided a clear explanation of the study's objective, the criteria for participant selection, and the process by which participants would be involved. The purpose of the follow-up telephone call was to determine whether the study could be implemented in the school, given the approval of the principal, the fulfilment of the sampling criteria, and the acquisition of a teacher's consent to meet with me and discuss their potential participation in the study. Those who expressed interest in participating were contacted for a meeting where the objectives of the study, the process for participant involvement, and any inquiries or concerns pertaining to participation were discussed face-to-face. Potential participants were provided with a period to contemplate their involvement and were subsequently contacted to obtain their decision.

3.7 Data analysis

The data collected from the interviews was analysed and interpreted through thematic analysis. Thematic analysis (TA) is 'a method for identifying, analysing and interpreting patterns of meaning ('themes') within qualitative data' (Clarke and Braun, 2017, p.1), with the themes developed presenting significant information from the data, linked to the research questions (Braun and Clarke, 2006). As the themes were discovered through an inductive approach, they were not theory-driven but rather had a close relationship to the actual data (Dawson, 2002).

A multiple phase process was used for TA. The process began with familiarisation with the data, with an aim of identifying meanings and patterns (Howitt and Cramer, 2008). After

searching for patterns within the data, initial codes were identified, which would form the foundation of patterns within the data (Namey et al., 2008). Once this was achieved, the codes were sorted into themes, and each coded data extract was collated with their relevant theme (Howitt and Cramer, 2008). Each theme was then reviewed, refined (Dempster, 2011), defined and named (Howitt and Cramer, 2008). Finally, a clear, logical and well-supported account of the data was provided, including extracts of the data to support the themes and analytical claims made (Braun and Clarke, 2006).

3.8 Rigour

3.8.1 Reflexivity

Reflexivity is considered crucial in qualitative research because the researcher serves as the main tool for gathering and analysing data (Russell and Kelly, 2002). Objectivity was maintained during the interviews and data interpretation by diligently documenting handwritten notes and observations in a journal. This journal served as a tool for self-reflection throughout the research process. The perspectives of impartial colleagues were also sought, i.e. fellow student teachers, at different points in the research process to mitigate the influence of researcher bias (Bell, 2010).

3.8.2 Enhancing credibility through pilot testing

The primary objective of pilot testing is to identify and rectify any potential weaknesses, inadequacies, ambiguities, and issues that may arise throughout the entirety of the research prior to the commencement of actual data collection (Saratakos, 1996). Leedy and Ormrod (2013) and Walford (1994) recommend the careful piloting of interview schedules to support the feasibility and credibility of research. Therefore, in order to prepare for the study, a pilot study was conducted with two student teachers, to evaluate the interview schedule before the actual study began.

3.8.4 Enhancing credibility through member checking

In addition, a technique called 'member checking', sometimes known as 'respondent validation', was conducted (Polit et al., 2001). Lincoln and Guba (1985) assert that the

practice of 'member checking' is crucial for establishing the legitimacy of data. Following the completion of the interviews, each interview was transcribed and sent to the participants via email. Participants were able to verify, affirm, and reinterpret their information. This procedure ensured that the findings collected were accurately and faithfully portrayed (Cohen et al., 2005).

3.9 Limitations

3.9.1 Sample size and setting

This study was conducted on a small scale, with a considerably limited time frame and a small sample size of five participants. Additionally, the study focused on three primary schools in County Cork, all in rural settings. As a result, the findings from this study cannot be applied to an entire population, but they may offer some insight into teachers' perspectives on the use of rewards systems, as a basis for further research.

3.9.2 Bias

Research studies are often hindered by the presence of bias and subjectivity on the part of the researcher (Bryman, 2004; Cohen et al., 2005; Reynolds, 1979). According to Sarantakos (2005), researchers are solely responsible for interpreting data as there are no specific guidelines or regulations in place for this task. Researcher bias can particularly be a limitation when conducting interviews, which can occur through the interviewer accidently or subconsciously emphasising a response (Cohen and Manion, 1994). In light of this, subjectivity and bias became more apparent. However, the procedures used to increase the research's credibility helped to overcome the limitations of subjectivity and bias.

3.10 Ethical issues

Ethical approval was obtained and granted by the Hibernia College Ethics Committee prior to the commencement of this study. The study was conducted in accordance with the Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research (BERA, 2018), ensuring the highest ethical standards were followed. Participants were required to give their informed and voluntary consent in order to take part in this study. Potential participants were met to explain the purpose of the research, and address any concerns or questions about participating. Potential participants

were informed about their entitlement to confidentiality and anonymity, their right to withdraw from the research at any stage, and the protocol for handling the data they provided. Each prospective participant was given an information sheet (Appendix 1), informing them about the nature and objective of the study. The individuals who agreed to take part in the study completed and signed the Consent Form.

The confidentiality and anonymity of participants were ensured through various measures. The study did not include the names of participating schools and participants, and the information they provided was solely used for research purposes in accordance with the Data Protection Act (2018). The findings were presented in summary form, and every quote used in the study was kept anonymous. Recordings and transcripts of interviews are stored in password protected files.

3.11 Conclusion

This chapter provided an overview of the research design, methodology, and ethical considerations employed in this study. The qualitative methodology of the study was informed by the interpretive research paradigm. Semi-structured interviews were employed to obtain the perceptions of five teachers on the impact of reward systems on classroom management. The inductive thematic analysis approach was then used to uncover themes that emerged directly from the data, which will be discussed in the next chapter.

Chapter 4 - Findings

4.1 Introduction

4.1.1 Introduction

The main objective of this study was to investigate teachers' perspectives of the use of reward systems to support classroom management in the primary school classroom. Five semi-structured interviews were conducted to discover teachers' perspectives, all taking place in the natural surroundings of each teachers' workplace, i.e. the classroom. This chapter presents the findings which emerged from these semi-structured interviews.

4.1.2 Participants

Participants are kept anonymous, and are referred to as Participant 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5. Participant 1 has been teaching for over 30 years, and has taught in both rural and urban settings in Ireland. Participant 2 has been teaching for 3 years, and has taught in only rural settings in Ireland. Participant 3 has been teaching for 2 years, and has taught in both rural and urban settings in Ireland. Participant 4 has been teaching for 15 years, and has taught in both rural and urban settings in Ireland. Participant 5 has been teaching for ten years, and has taught in both rural and urban settings in Ireland, as well as abroad.

4.1.3 Themes emerged following thematic analysis

Four major themes emerged from a thematic analysis of the interview transcripts: Implementation of reward systems; Impact on pupil behaviour; Influence on motivation and Challenges associated with reward systems.

4.2 Implementation of reward systems

Mindful implementation of reward systems to support classroom management was mentioned by every participant. Participant 1 does not use reward systems in all of her classes, and they are never her *'main form of classroom management'*, instead relying on *'an expectation of good behaviour.'* When considering whether or not to use a reward system to support classroom management, participant 1 recommends *'looking and talking to'*, the class's past teachers, and making sure that *'anything you were planning on implementing would be*

suitable for those children'. Participant 1 stressed the importance of a reward system that does not involve a lot of *'extra work in tallying points and ranking children',* and instead base a reward system on *'positive reinforcement, restorative and supportive practice, as opposed to punishment'.*

Similarly, participant 5 found that ClassDojo, a digital points-based reward system was taking up a lot of teaching time *'by logging into it, adding all the points, it was taking a good bit out of class time'*, thus having a negative impact on learning. Participant 5 instead prefers visual reward systems as when a visual representation of the system *'is in front of them'*, and they can see that they have *'only two more stars to get'* until they get a reward, *'they try really hard'.*

Participant 5 also does not use a reward system for classroom management in every class, believing that their effectiveness *'depends on the class group.'* She will instead *'assess'* if the class *'need a reward system or not,*' based on *'particular behavioural problems and things like that'.* Participant 3 also believes that reward systems are not necessary for the management of every classroom, and believes that *'younger classes buy into it more'.* Participant 4 stressed that the successful implementation of a reward system depends on *'the class you have… (and) how consistent you are with the reward system as implemented'.*

In contrast to these views, participant 2 has used a points-based reward system in finds that a points-based reward system in *'every class (she's) taught',* and finds them *'really effective'* at supporting classroom management, as long as the teacher is *'clear'* on '*expectations at the beginning of the year'.*

Participant 4 implements a daily reward system in every class he teaches, as he finds them a *'more effective',* support for classroom management than weekly reward systems, as he likes that through daily reward systems, if a pupil or a class *'has a bad day'* it's *'wiped and you move on to the next day,'* rather than letting poor behaviour have an influence on the entire week, as *'it's a long stretch to Friday'.* Participant 4 explained that, in his experience, a class's behaviour *'might be great at the start of the week, and it might not be as good at the end of the week',* and, in order to focus on positive reinforcement, he finds it *'easier'* and *'more efficient to deal with daily'* reward systems.

4.3 Impact on pupil behaviour

Participant 2 feels that the reward system in her class has a *'really effective'* impact on pupil behaviour, and the class would have *'a lot more issues with people kind of bickering with each other or people blaming others and things like that.'*

Participant 2 shared an experience she has had where the behaviour of one pupil in particular improved significantly, which she credits to the reward system. The child used to *'behave irrationally'*, and would *'push another student or something like that, just because.'* Recently when this pupil pushed someone *'he really apologised',* and Participant 2 described how she could see that he was *'really apologetic'* and wanted to '*work up to get the points',* and refers to this incident as an example of *'the positive impact,'* of reward systems.

Participant 5 also believes that reward systems have a positive impact on behaviour, which is why she only uses reward systems when a class is *'quite challenging behaviour wise',* as she feels like a reward system *'would have quite a positive impact'* on the behaviour of challenging classes. Participant 5 spoke about a child she taught before who *'had really benefitted,'* from the use of a reward system, because it something that the child was *'achieving',* leading to *'a positive impact on their behaviour'.* However, participant 3 had a contrasting perspective, questioning the need for a reward system to manage behaviour, and believes that there should be *'an expectation of good behaviour.'*

4.4 Influence on motivation

Every participant believed that reward systems have an influence on pupil motivation, whether that influence is positive or negative. Participant 1 had both a positive and negative perspective. While she had observed pupils feel motivated by reward systems as they enable them to see *'what they put in, they'll get something back for it,'* she also felt that reward systems can have a negative impact on the motivation of particular pupils who do not feel that they will reach a behavioural requirement to win a reward, and will instead:

> *deliberately engineer that they won't be in the running for any rewards, because they feel that there was no way that they were ever going to get one in the first place.*

This negative impact on particular pupils was echoed by Participant 2, who found that some pupils *'just don't engage with (reward systems), don't care about them.'* Participant 2, also felt that digital reward systems, such as ClassDojo, are a great way of motivating pupils, as

'the children love looking at the screen', so *'if they see it on a screen, they're going to enjoy it, and it will motivate them'.* Participant 3, also felt that the impact on motivation depended on the pupil, as she has taught *'some children who earned only six points over six months, and it just didn't bother them, whether they had points or not,'* as well as pupils who *'love the praise and love seeing their points going up.'* This participant believes that overall the *'majority of children respond well to it…. They want to do good and they want to feel like they're being rewarded.'*

Participant 4 uses reward systems 'as a motivator' and thinks they are a good opportunity *'for children to see a reward for the hard work they put in every day.'* This participant stated that the positive impact on motivation is the main benefit he perceives to support classroom management, *'if used effectively'.* Participant 4's view that reward systems have a positive impact on motivation when used effectively is echoed by participant 5, who feels that visual reward systems can be very motivating as:

> *it's something that they're excited about, and they're looking forward to it and they're trying really hard to get there by the end of the week.*

4.5 Challenges associated with reward systems

Every participant acknowledged that, while there are positive aspects of reward systems, there are also notable challenges. The challenges associated with reward systems theme will be presented under three subthemes: Social Dynamics, Equity and Entitlement.

4.5.1 Social dynamics

Participant 1 expressed her concern that *'an awful lot of teachers out there are implementing'* reward systems 'that may be what looks superficially effective', but can have '*long lasting repercussions for your relationship with the class and their relationships with each other in the classroom.'* Participant 1 described how rewarding children for good behaviour can lead to *'a child who has significant challenges with behaviour'* becoming *'more of a pariah in their classroom'*. She described this as none of the other children wanting to *'sit at the group with the child who's going to lose them the points,'* and likened this challenge to '*public shaming,'* referring to how the child will have to *'sit through their whole day, knowing that they've been singled out and marked out as being a bold kid.'* Participant 2 also spoke about the social challenge that can arise from some pupils not achieving as much in the reward

system as their peers, and spoke about how it can be a *'challenge when they blame other students for losing points'.* Participant 3 experienced a similar issue, with a child who struggled with behaviour, and the rest of the pupils at her table, who *'would always lose'* the table of the week reward system *'because of her,*' and the other children would '*all be aware of'* how they were not benefitting from the reward system because on one pupil in particular.

4.5.2 Equity and fairness

Participant 3 discussed how this issue with that particular child acting out led to a challenge concerning the equity of the rewards system, where *'the children were depending on everyone else at their table to be good'*, and the pupils at the table with the pupil displaying behavioural challenges were *'definitely at a disadvantage'*. Participant 3 described feeling *'bad for everyone else at the table, because they would just never get a reward',* and felt that this was a significant challenge, as it had a negative impact on *'five or six children at a table, instead of just one child, because they're all at her table'.*

Participant 5 also expressed concern about equity and fairness, as she feels that *'some children who are really good all the time,'* are *'losing out, because some people in the class were acting out.'* Participant 5 commented on how this is 'not fair on the children who were so good all week,' and how because of this she thinks *'whole class rewards can be both positive and negative'* because children who behave well in class *'could potentially lose out due to other children's negative behaviour which is discouraging for them, as it'd be unfair'.*

Participant 1 believes that fairness and equity can become an issue when there are certain children in the class who have never received any positive reinforcement from the reward system and a pupil gets a reward *'because they haven't for the whole year. It devalues the nature of the reward.'* This sentiment was also brought up by participant 4, who identified this as the reason he believes *'a whole class reward system works better, in terms of fairness',* because with individual reward systems, *'you have to try and make sure everyone wins'.*

4.5.3 Entitlement

Participants 3 and 5 expressed concern over a feeling of entitlement that they perceive children can adapt from a reward system. Participant 5 stressed how he does not think children *'should be receiving a sweet or whatever for every little bit of good work that they do'.* Participant 3 commented on the attitudes of *'children these days',* and how *'they feel like they need a reward for everything,'* leading to teachers feeling that they *'have to use' a reward system for successful classroom management.'*

4.6 Conclusion

Through five semi-structured interviews, four major themes emerged: Implementation of reward systems, influence on motivation, impact on pupil behaviour and challenges associated with reward systems. The participants noted that while reward systems can positively support classroom management by influencing pupil motivation and behaviour, there are also challenges such as social dynamics, equity concerns and potential feelings of entitlement among students.

Chapter 5 - Discussion

5.1 Introduction

The aim of this study was to investigate the perspectives of Irish primary school teachers on the use of reward systems to support classroom management. The research questions for this study were:

- What are teachers' perspectives on the use of reward systems to support classroom management?
- What are teachers' perspectives on the impact of reward systems on pupil behaviour in primary school classrooms?
- What are teachers' perspectives on the impact of reward systems on pupil motivation in primary school classrooms?

The study employed a qualitative research design and collected data through semi-structured interviews. This facilitated the researcher in uncovering significant aspects in the interviewees' perspectives on the use of reward systems to support classroom management. The participants observed that reward systems have the ability to effectively enhance classroom management by influencing student motivation and behaviour. However, they also acknowledged the existence of problems such as social dynamics, equity issues, and the potential feelings of entitlement among pupils. This chapter presents a discussion on the findings reported in Chapter Four. This chapter provides an analysis of the study's findings, explains their connection to existing literature, draws overall conclusions, and examines the implications of the research study.

5.2 Impact of reward Systems on pupil behaviour - behavioural vs. internal control approach

Although the participants did not explicitly refer to the behavioural and internal control approaches to classroom management (Wubbels, 2011), their perspectives provide valuable insights into efficacy of reward systems, and their impacts on behaviour. Participants 2, 4 and 5 both discussed how the use of a reward system led to improved behaviour from the children they have taught over their career, with participant 2 saying they were effective for managing

and improving behaviour in the class. Participants 2 and 5's accounts of specific incidences where the reward systems in place had a positive impact on the behaviour of particular pupils resonates with O'Donnell et al. (2012)'s belief that reward systems can have a positive impact on struggling pupils. These findings align with the behavioural approach to classroom management, rooted in conditioning mechanisms, such as earning points or tokens (Elias and Schwab, 2006) to influence behaviour.

Participant 3, however, questioned the need for a reward system, and instead believes that children should learn and follow the expected behaviour of a classroom. Participant 1 also stressed the importance of setting expectations of behaviour, attributing this belief with her strategy to never let the reward system become the main form of classroom management. These stances align with the internal control approach, as it supports the internalisation of values appropriate for a classroom (Elias and Schwab, 2006). Participants 1, 2 and 3 also acknowledged the limitations of reward systems in terms of influencing behaviour, noting that certain pupils remain unaffected by them. This acknowledgement echoes the internal-control approach view of reward systems, in that the effects of reward systems can be non-existent (Yaman and Güven, 2014). These findings underscore the complexity of the use of reward systems to support classroom management, highlighting the need for a deep understanding of both behavioural and internal control approaches to classroom management, and their implications for pupil behaviour.

5.3 Impact of reward systems on pupil motivation

5.3.1 Impact of reward systems on pupil motivation

The participating teachers had varying perspectives on the impact of reward systems on pupil motivation, revealing both positive and negative viewpoints. Participant 1 discussed her concern that while pupils can be motivated by a reward system, the reward system can lead to some pupils deliberately engineering that they won't gain any points or tokens in a reward system, as they feel they were never going to be able to gain enough to win a reward. This observation suggests that reward systems can have a negative impact on intrinsic motivation, where pupils perceive their actions solely through the lens of extrinsic rewards, an issue that has been discussed by Deci, Koestner and Ryan (1999) and Brophy (2006).

Contrasting this perspective, participants 2, 3, 4 and 5 all spoke about their view of the positive impacts rewards can have on pupil motivation. Their perspectives echo the arguments by Kazdin (2017) and O'Donnell et al. (2012), who suggest that reward systems serve as effective tools for managing behaviour in the classroom, particularly benefitting pupils who struggle with motivation. The utilisation of token economy systems by particpants 2, 3 and 5 aligns with the existing research that views token economies as an effective method of motivation (Boniecki and Moore, 2003; Cameron et al. 2005; Reitman et al., 2004; Zlomke and Zlomke, 2003).

While these participants raised optimistic perspectives surrounding the positive effects of reward systems on pupil motivation, the findings also raise critical questions about the nature of motivation and the role of extrinsic incentives. While some research argues for the practical benefits of using rewards to reinforce desired behaviours (Bilouk, 2015), the reliance on external motivators may overshadow the fostering of genuine, internally driven motivation in the classroom, i.e. intrinsic motivation (Ryan and Deci, 2017; Brophy, 2006).

5.3.2 Entitlement and intrinsic motivation

Participants 3 and 4 expressed concern over a feeling of entitlement that they think can be adapted by children when a reward system is implemented. They both spoke about how children should not expect or need a reward for everything they do in class. This can be linked to the decrease in intrinsic motivation (Brophy, 2006) as children who feel entitled to rewards can fail to internalise their behaviour (Ryan and Deci, 2017), and view rewards as the reason for positive behaviour (Deci, Koestner and Ryan, 1999).

This insight prompts reflection on the unintended motivational consequence of the use of reward systems in classrooms. An over-reliance on rewards for tasks that could be motivated through curiosity or a desire to learn, there could be a risk of stunting pupils' capacities to develop intrinsic motivation (Brophy, 2006). This risk could be caused by the failure of pupils to internalise behaviours (Ryan and Deci, 2017), and instead attribute their behaviours solely to the anticipation of external rewards (Deci, Koestner and Ryan, 1999). The implication of this concern regarding the prioritisation of extrinsic rewards over intrinsic motivation could lead to pupils measuring success solely in terms of external validation, rather than personal growth and fulfilment.

5.4 Implementation of reward systems

5.4.1 Implementation of reward systems

Participant 2 discussed the merits of a points based system, i.e. a token economy (Zlomke and Zlomke, 2003). This participant has used a points based system in every class she has taught, and spoke about the effectiveness of a points based system with clear expectations set by the teacher. This aligns with the studies that note token economies as an effective method of reducing disruptive behaviour and motivating pupils (Wheatley et al. 2009; Boniecki and Moore, 2003; Cameron et al. 2005; Reitman et al. 2004; Zlomke and Zlomke, 2003). However, participant 4 and 5 both refrain from points-based reward systems due to the time consuming nature of counting up points and implementing the distribution of points. These perspectives align with Reitmann et al. (2004)'s study, which found time consumed by reward systems is a negative aspect that teachers have mentioned previously. The concern surrounding the implantation of reward systems and time-management is also significant due to the research that highlights the correlation between efficient time management and pupil achievement (Cook et al. 2017; Stronge, Ward and Grant, 2011).

Participant 1's focus on positive reinforcement when implementing a reward system, as opposed to using a points-based reward system to take away points aligns with the criticism of punishment procedures within reward systems, that 'punishment may evoke emotional behaviour or have other side effects,' (Conyers et al. 2004, pp.414). Participant 3 stated that she will only use a reward system in the classroom after assessing the behaviours of the children, and if she thinks they would benefit from one. This aligns with the belief of O'Donnell et. al (2012), that reward systems can have a positive impact on particular pupils. Participant 1 stressed that she never relies on reward systems as her main form of classroom management and instead relies on an expectation of behaviour. This is a perspective that aligns with the internal control approach to classroom management, which emphasises the internalisation of expectations (Elias and Schwab, 2006), and the fostering of intrinsic motivation, as the student's own internal drive motivates them to conduct themselves (Bilouk, 2015). Participant 4's belief that daily reward systems are more effective than weekly reward systems could also be associated with the internal control approach's view that while reward systems have potential to be beneficial, their effects are frequently short-lived (Han and Altunhan, 2022; Yaman and Güven, 2014).

The implication of these findings is that while there are benefits to the use of points-based token economies, their practicality and long-term effectiveness need to be considered when implementing a reward system, while being mindful of individual pupil needs.

5.4.2 Social dynamics, fairness and equity

Participants 1, 2 and 3 all spoke about the negative impact reward systems can have on social dynamics, with each of them recalling incidences where children were singled out and blamed by their peers for being the reason their group wasn't succeeding within a reward system. This is a significant challenge, as it negates a key aspect of effective classroom management: the facilitation of meaningful social and emotional growth (Kractochwill, DeRoos and Blair, 2009). This disruption to social dynamics suggests that reward systems may fail to align with the complexities of interpersonal relationships and dynamics in a classroom.

Participants 1, 3 4 and 5 all spoke about the challenge of fairness and equity that reward systems can provoke, leading to This aligns with Yamoah (2013)'s view that in order to develop an effective class environment, reward systems need to be fair. These concerns imply a possible flaw within reward systems, where the emphasis on individual achievement can undermine collective progress as a class.

5.5 Research questions

5.5.1 What are teachers' perspectives on the use of reward systems to support classroom management?

The semi-structured interviews conducted in this study reveal that teachers hold diverse perspectives on the use or reward systems to support classroom management. The teachers generally agreed that reward systems can be used effectively to enhance classroom management by positively influencing pupil motivation and behaviour. In terms of implementation, while some teachers favoured points-based systems, consistent with research supporting token economies (Wheatley et al. 2009; Boniecki and Moore, 2003), others were hesitant due to time constraints, aligning with concerns about the time-consuming nature of reward systems (Reitmann et al. 2004). Teachers also emphasised positive reinforcement when implementing reward systems to support classroom management over punishment

procedures (Conyers et al. 2004). Some teachers used reward systems for every class, while other used reward systems selectively based on pupil behaviour. Some teachers also spoke about the negative impact reward systems can have on the social dynamics of a classroom, emphasising the importance of fairness in the implementation of reward systems (Yamoah, 2013).

5.5.2 What are teachers' perspectives on the impact of reward systems on pupil behaviour in primary school classrooms?

The teachers emphasised the positive impact of reward systems in preventing disruptive behaviours, aligning with the established goals of effective classroom management (Brophy, 2006; Doyle, 1986; Öztürk and Gangal, 2016; Wubbels, 2011), and the behavioural approach to classroom management (Elias and Schwab, 2006). However, two teachers interviewed questioned the necessity of reward systems, advocating for internalised classroom values instead, reflecting the internal control approach (Elias and Schwab, 2006).

5.5.3 What are teachers' perspectives on the impact of reward systems on pupil motivation in primary school classrooms?

The teachers held nuanced perspectives on the impact of reward systems on pupil motivation in primary school classrooms. While some teachers highlighted potential negative impacts of reward systems on motivation, emphasising the decrease in intrinsic motivation (Brophy, 2006), others noted positive effects on motivation, especially for struggling pupils, thus promoting the fostering of extrinsic motivation (Bilouk, 2015). However, two teachers expressed concerns about fostering a sense of entitlement among pupils, which could undermine intrinsic motivation (Deci, Koestner and Ryan, 1999; Ryan and Deci, 2017).

5.5 Conclusion

In conclusion, the findings from this study provide insight into the complex dynamics surrounding the use of reward systems to support classroom management in Irish primary schools. The teachers' perspectives revealed a variety of beliefs regarding the efficacy and impact of reward systems on pupil behaviour and motivation. While all of the teachers interviewed acknowledged the positive impact of reward systems on the prevention of disruptive behaviours and the enhancement of motivation, concerns were raised about

potential drawbacks, such as fostering entitlement and disrupting social dynamics within classrooms. This discussion included varying perspectives, ranging from advocating for the consistent implementation of a points-based token economy to reservations due to time constrains and issues surrounding fairness and equity. The contrasting perspectives of promoting extrinsic motivation through rewards, and emphasising internalised expectations of behaviour highlight the complex nature of strategies to support classroom management. This chapter emphasised the importance of considering various perspectives, and being mindful of implementing classroom management strategies to create a supportive and equitable learning environment for all pupils.

Chapter 6 - Conclusion

6.1 Introduction

This study investigated teachers' perspectives of the use of a reward system to support classroom management. To gain insight into these perspectives, semi-structured interviews were conducted examining teacher opinions and experiences of reward systems, as well as their impact on pupil behaviour and motivation. In this chapter, the findings will be summarised, and the limitations and recommendations for further research and teaching practice will be presented.

6.2 Summary of findings

A variety of views regarding the efficacy and impact of reward systems on pupil behaviour and motivation were presented. All participants interviewed recognised the positive impact of reward systems on the prevention of disruptive behaviours and the enhancement of motivation, which aligned with the first objective of classroom management (Öztürk and Gangal, 2016; Wubbels, 2011). Some of the participants raised concerns regarding potential challenges (such as fostering entitlement) which could undermine intrinsic motivation (Ryan and Deci, 2017). Another drawback identified was a disruption of social dynamics, posing a risk for a key aspect of effective classroom management: the facilitation of meaningful social and emotional growth (Kractochwill, DeRoos and Blair, 2009). Two participants spoke of the merits of a points-based token economy, aligning with the findings of Wheatley et al. (2009), while two other participants had reservations about these forms of reward systems due to time constraints and issues regarding fairness and equity.

6.3 Limitations

6.3.1 Limited sample size

One limitation to consider is the sample size of this study. This was a small-scale study, with only five participants. Increasing the sample size, both in terms of quantity and diversity, could have resulted in more comprehensive and definitive conclusions.

6.3.2 Bias and subjectivity

Subjectivity can also be seen as a limitation, as opinions or suggestions made during the interviewing process, thematic analysis or while discussing the findings may be perceived as biased or influenced by preconceived ideas. Responses to the interview questions may also be influenced by individual biases of the interviewed teachers, which may have led to potential bias in the findings.

6.3.3 Contextual limitations

Every participant interviewed in this study is currently teaching within the same county. Focusing solely on the perspectives of teachers within one county might not accurately capture the broader perspectives of teachers in Ireland on the use of reward systems to support classroom management.

6.4 Recommendations for further research

6.4.1 Pupil perspectives

Pupil perspectives could be incorporated into research regarding the use of reward systems to support classroom management, to gain an understanding of how reward systems are perceived and experienced by the pupils who participate in them. This could involve surveys of primary school classes with a reward system in place to explore their perspectives related to the reward system.

6.4.2 Alternative approaches

Alternative approaches to classroom management - complimenting or replacing reward systems - could be investigated. These could include strategies based on intrinsic motivation (Bilouk, 2015) and the internal control approach (Elias and Schwab, 2006)

6.5 Recommendations to inform further teaching practice

I have gained valuable insights from this research that will help me improve my future approaches to classroom management. These insights will contribute to creating a positive learning environment that supports both academic and social-emotional growth.

6.5.1 Balanced approach

The positive impact of reward systems in presenting disruptive behaviours and the enhancement of motivation should be acknowledged, while also considering potential challenges such as a sense of entitlement among pupils and a disruption of social dynamics. A balanced approach to reward systems should be emphasised, utilising rewards effectively while being mindful and aware of potential negative consequences.

6.5.2 Intrinsic motivation

The importance of fostering intrinsic motivation should be considered, as a decrease in intrinsic motivation has been noted as a potential challenge associated with the use of reward systems.

6.5.3 Prioritise social and emotional growth

Teachers should prioritise the facilitation of social and emotional growth in the classroom, as this is a key aspect of successful classroom management (Kractochwill, DeRoos and Blair, 2009), which emerged as a significant challenge experienced while implementing a reward system.

6.6 Concluding remarks

In conclusion, this study offers valuable insights into teachers' perspectives on the use of reward systems to support classroom management in Irish primary schools. While acknowledging the benefits of rewards systems in decreasing disruptive behaviours and enhancing motivation, the study also highlights potential challenges, such as fostering entitlement and disrupting social dynamics. A balanced approach to classroom management is recommended, one that involves the positive aspects of reward systems while prioritising

intrinsic motivation and social-emotional growth, to create supportive learning environments that foster positive behaviour and pupil development.

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Appendices

Appendix 1 – Research information sheet

Researcher:	
Organisation:	Hibernia College
Title of study:	Teachers' perspectives on the use of reward systems to support classroom management in primary school classrooms.

Outline of research study:

For the primary school classroom teacher, effective classroom management is a vital skill for the fostering of pupil engagement and learning (Baumert and Kunter, 2013). A wide range of research has differed on their views of the advantages of reward systems. Despite the continued disagreement in education research about the impact of reward systems on classroom management, little research has addressed reward systems in the classroom from a teacher's perspective. This is a vital area for research as teachers' approaches to classroom management has been shown to have an impact on pupil motivation (Deci and Ryan, 1987), academic competence (Deci et al. 1981) and academic achievement (Flink et al. 1992). This research will contribute to our understanding of the effectiveness of reward systems on classroom management.

Objectives of the project:

The objectives of my project are to identify whether reward systems are an effective support for classroom management from teachers' perspectives and to explore the challenges and benefits of implementing reward systems in mainstream primary classrooms.

What would I need you to do?

Your participation in this research project is greatly appreciated. This research project has received ethical approval from Hibernia College Dublin. If you agree to participate, you will participate in a short semi-structured interview with the researcher. Any information you provide about your own identity or that of the school will be anonymous and confidential. Quotes from the interview may be used and may also be published in the research however your name and the name of the school will not published. The interview will be audio recorded and transcribed, and a copy of the transcript will be made available to you on request. This research will be used in a publication of a thesis for Hibernia College Dublin. It may also be used in conference proceedings or used in academic articles. You are free to withdraw from the study at any time.

What is the purpose of this research?

The purpose of the research is to complete small-scale study which forms part of the final year of the Professional Masters of Education (Primary) with Hibernia College Dublin.

Appendix 2 – Consent form

Researcher:	
Organisation:	Hibernia College
Title of study:	Teachers' perspectives on the use of reward systems to support classroom management in primary school classrooms.

Consent (to be completed by the participant)

Have you been fully informed/read the information sheet about this study? Yes/No
Have you had an opportunity to ask questions and discuss this study? Yes/No
Have you received satisfactory answers to all your questions? Yes/No
Do you understand that you are free to withdraw from this study at any time without giving a reason for withdrawing and without your withdrawal having an adverse effect for you? Yes/No
Do you agree to take part in this study, the results of which are likely to be published or presented at a conference? Yes/No
Have you been informed that a copy of this consent form will be kept by the researcher? Yes/No
Are you satisfied that any information you give to the researcher will be kept confidential? Your name and the name of the school will not appear in the research report. Yes/No
Participant's name (printed)

(signature) **Date**

Researcher's signature **Date**

Appendix 3 – Letter to principal

Dear _____

I am writing to you in relation to a research study I will be undertaking in fulfilment of my Professional Masters in Education degree. I would like to provide you with information about my study and seek your consent to conduct the research with members of your teaching staff. For the primary school classroom teacher, effective classroom management is a vital skill for the fostering of pupil engagement and learning (Baumert and Kunter, 2013). A wide range of research has differed on their views of the advantages of reward systems. Despite the continued disagreement in education research about the impact of reward systems on classroom management, little research has addressed reward systems in the classroom from a teacher's perspective. This is a vital area for research as teachers' approaches to classroom management has been shown to have an impact on pupil motivation (Deci and Ryan, 1987), academic competence (Deci et al. 1981) and academic achievement (Flink et al. 1992). My proposed research will contribute to the understanding of the effectiveness of reward systems to support classroom management in mainstream primary classrooms.

The objective of my research is to investigate teachers' perspectives on the use of reward systems to support classroom management. To address these areas, I propose to conduct five short (15 to 20 minute) semi-structured interviews with primary school teachers working in mainstream classrooms. My project has received ethical approval from the Hibernia College Ethics Committee.

Interviews would be held at the convenience of the school and the teachers concerned on school premises. With their written consent, interviews will be recorded for transcription and dissemination purposes. Participation in the study is voluntary. Interviewees may refuse to answer any questions or withdraw from the study at any time. No school, teacher or student will be identified specifically in any publication of the work.

I am writing to you to gain your informed consent that I may request an interview with three members of your teaching staff and that I may hold the interview in your school in February at a time convenient for the school and the teachers concerned. Confirmation of your consent can be sent either to me directly via email XXXX or by signature of the attached consent form posted to: XXXX

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me by phone XXXX or at the abovementioned email address.

I look forward to hearing from you and thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

XXXX
Researcher

Appendix 4 – Principal consent form

I, _____ have read and understood the Letter of Information provided to me by XXXX. I agree that in order to conduct research about reward systems in my school, she may request an interview with three teachers and upon receipt of their consent may conduct interviews on school premises at times convenient for the teachers and the school. I understand that participation is voluntary and that there are no physical or psychological risks associated with the study. I know that all answers provided during the interview will be used for the purposes of the study only and that all responses will identify no individual or the school itself.

Signed: _____
Date: _____

Appendix 5 – Interview schedule

Topic area	Examples of questions and probes
Opener	Can you tell me about your experience as a primary school teacher? How long have you been teaching? Do you/Have you ever used a reward system in your classroom? Can you describe the types of reward systems you've implemented?
Benefits and Challenges	What do you perceive as the primary benefits of using reward systems in classroom management? In your experience, what are some of the potential drawbacks or challenges associated with using the reward systems?
Behaviour	How effective do you think reward systems are in promoting positive behaviour among students? Can you share any examples or anecdotes illustrating the effectiveness of reward systems in promoting positive behaviour?
Motivation	Do you believe that reward systems have an impact on student engagement and motivation? Have you observed any changes in student behavior or motivation as a result of implementing reward systems?
Equity and Fairness	How do you ensure that reward systems are fair and equitable for all students? Have you encountered any issues related to fairness or equity when using reward systems? If so, how did you address them?
Alternative Approaches	Are there any alternative approaches to classroom management that you prefer over using reward systems? How do you decide whether to use a reward system or an alternative approach in your classroom?

Future Considerations	Looking back, is there anything you would do differently in terms of using reward systems for classroom management? What are your thoughts on the future use of reward systems in primary school classrooms?

Appendix 6 - Page of interview transcript with thematic analysis

Have you used reward systems in your classroom?

I have in the past, I find it depends on the class group. So I kind of when I go into September to that group, I kind of assess if they need a reward system or not, (Code: Dependent on class, Theme: Implementation of Rewards Systems) I find like works really well with some classes if you know, for particular behavioural problems and things like that. But then some classes, I feel that there's no need to use one because the children are, you know, they're very good. (Code: Positive Impact, Theme: Impact on Behaviour)

Can you describe the types of reward systems you've implemented?

I've used the Class Dojo for a while in the past. And I found that it was kind of taking up a lot of time by logging into it, adding all the points, it was taking a good bit out of class time. So I changed from that. I found that having a visual one worked, like a star of jars they'd fill up for the weekend. At the end, then they'd get you know, on a Friday, extra golden time, and that worked well. (Code: Forms of Reward Systems, Theme: Implementation of Rewards System) So something visual that they can see.

In another class I had like, a container and we put plastic balls or marbles in it, and fill it up. And it was for like, the end of the week, then. And they'd be kind of looking forward to filling up and seeing if they would get golden time. (Code: Positive Influence, Theme: Influence on Motivation).

I've used student of the week with a cert and homework pass in the past and felt that worked well. It's important that the rules and regulations are set on day 1 (Code: Forms of Reward Systems, Theme: Implementation of Rewards System) and good behaviour can still be rewarded with golden time etc without having a system in place, but it also depends on the class and what suits their needs. (Code: Dependent on class, Theme: Implementation of Rewards Systems)

What do you perceive as the primary benefits of using reward systems to support classroom management?

I think it's very dependent on the class and the school, some schools might implement reward systems across the whole school, the same procedures for every class. Depending on the class, they can be quite beneficial, because it's the children see it's something that they can work towards to achieve, and I suppose be proud of themselves, and they work as a team, and they kind of don't want to let their table down if it's table prizes. (Code: Positive Influence, Theme: Influence on Motivation).I do think it works well, if there's behavioural problems, because you know, that it's something that they aim towards. (Code: Positive Impact, Theme: Impact on Behaviour)

In your experience, what are some of the potential drawbacks or challenges associated with using the reward systems?

I suppose sometimes there would be challenges, depending on the class. Like, if you have a reward system, and then you know, if some children who have are really good all the time, then are maybe losing out, because some people in the class, you know, were acting out and say, maybe the class didn't succeed by filling the jar of stars that week, and then it's not fair on the children who were so good all week, (Code: Equity and Fairness, Theme: Challenges Associated with Reward Systems)

Appendix 7 - Excerpt from reflective journal

Reflective Journal

08/04/2024

Embarking on this research project to investigate teachers' perspectives on the use of reward systems to support classroom management has been both enlightening and challenging. The semi-structured interviews conducted across 3 school environments provided valuable insights into the wide range of approaches and beliefs surrounding reward systems.

Each interview was conducted within the participants' classrooms, which provided a contextual background to their responses.

As the interviewer, my own biases and preconceptions inevitably influenced the interview process. While I endeavoured to maintain objectivity, I recognise the need for continual reflexivity to reduce the impact of my subjectivity on data interpretation. Interviewing teachers with a wide range of ~~eep~~ teaching experiences challenged my own assumptions, prompting a re-evaluation of my own beliefs surrounding the use of reward systems to support classroom management.

The semi-structured nature of the interviews facilitated natural conversations which allowed for unexpected insights to emerge, such as two participants sharing anecdotes about particular pupils who responded well to reward systems, highlighting the positive impacts reward systems can have on pupil behaviour.

As I transcribe and analyse the data collected from these interviews, I am very aware of the nuanced perspectives regarding the topic at hand.