

Player Incentives as Determinants of Team Performance of Elite Male Football Clubs in Malawi

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Abstract

This study examined the extent to which player incentives determine team performance in elite male football clubs in Malawi, with particular emphasis on monetary and non-monetary incentives. A quantitative descriptive survey design was employed, drawing data from 177 respondents comprising 104 players and 73 officials (coaches and administrators) selected from ten Super League clubs. Data were collected using structured questionnaires and analysed using descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation, and multiple regression analysis. The results indicate that both monetary and non-monetary incentives are significantly associated with team performance. Correlation analysis revealed a strong positive relationship between monetary incentives and team performance ($r > 0.60, p < 0.05$) and a moderate positive relationship between non-monetary incentives and team performance ($r > 0.50, p < 0.05$). Regression results further showed that incentive variables jointly explained a substantial proportion of variance in team performance ($R^2 > 0.50, p < 0.05$). Notably, non-monetary incentives demonstrated a stronger standardized effect than monetary incentives, indicating their greater explanatory power in predicting performance outcomes. Non-monetary incentives such as access to training facilities, medical care, and recognition emerged as particularly influential, especially within a financially constrained football environment. The findings suggest that while monetary incentives remain important for motivating players, non-monetary incentives provide a more stable and sustainable basis for enhancing team performance.

Keywords: Monetary Incentives, Non-monetary Incentive, Elite Football Clubs, Team Performance, Super League of Malawi.

Introduction

Football is the most popular and commercially significant sport in Malawi, functioning not only as a form of recreation and national identity but also as an emerging economic sector that sustains livelihoods for players, coaches, administrators, and ancillary service providers. Elite football clubs competing in the Super League of Malawi operate as semi-professional institutions whose performance outcomes are closely linked to governance quality, financial management, and human resource practices. In many African countries, football clubs have increasingly been conceptualised as sport organisations that require structured management systems comparable to those in other labour-intensive industries (De Coning & Keim, 2014; Darby, Akindes, & Kirwin, 2007). However, despite the centrality

of football in Malawi's social and sporting landscape, elite clubs continue to operate under conditions of financial fragility, weak institutional capacity, and limited professionalization, all of which constrain consistent high-level performance (Chirwa, 2021).

A critical but under-examined dimension of these structural challenges is the design and implementation of player incentive systems. Incentives are a core mechanism through which sport organisations motivate athletes, align individual effort with team objectives, and sustain competitive performance across a season (Vroom, 1964; Ryan & Deci, 2000). In professional football contexts, incentives typically take two broad forms: monetary incentives, such as salaries, match bonuses, win bonuses, and allowances; and non-monetary incentives, including access to quality training facilities, medical and psychological support, recognition, career development opportunities, and job security. Empirical studies conducted in both developed and developing football systems demonstrate that well-structured incentive regimes are associated with improved player motivation, enhanced team cohesion, and superior performance outcomes (Maqableh et al., 2022; Tadesse, Asgedom, & Taddese, 2023).

In Malawi, however, incentive systems within elite football clubs are often characterised by delayed salary payments, inconsistent bonus distribution, limited non-monetary support, and weak linkage between performance outputs and rewards. Media reports, federation statements, and empirical studies highlight persistent problems related to financial instability, sponsorship volatility, and administrative inefficiencies, which undermine clubs' ability to deliver incentives predictably (Kambuwe, 2024; Chirwa, 2021). From a player perspective, football frequently represents the primary source of income, making incentive reliability a matter of economic survival rather than supplementary motivation. Consequently, when promised incentives are delayed or inconsistently administered, player morale deteriorates, trust in club management erodes, and performance levels become unstable across competitions (Tadesse et al., 2023).

Beyond financial rewards, non-monetary incentives remain underdeveloped in the Malawian football system. The limited availability of modern training facilities, structured medical care, educational support, and career transition programmes restricts players' long-term development and undermines sustainable performance. According to Self-Determination Theory, sustained motivation depends on the satisfaction of autonomy, competence, and relatedness needs, which are often reinforced through non-monetary organisational support rather than direct financial compensation alone (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Ryan & Deci, 2000). Where clubs fail to provide such support structures, motivation becomes overly dependent on short-term financial rewards, exposing teams to performance volatility whenever financial flows are disrupted.

Although the relationship between incentives and performance has been widely studied in sport management literature, existing evidence is disproportionately drawn from European, North American, and selected Asian contexts. Within sub-Saharan Africa, available studies have primarily focused on descriptive accounts of financial challenges, governance deficits, or player migration, with limited quantitative examination of how

specific incentive types influence team performance outcomes (Darby et al., 2007; De Coning & Keim, 2014). In Malawi specifically, there is a clear absence of empirical studies that quantify the relative and combined effects of monetary and non-monetary incentives on elite football team performance. This lack of context-specific evidence constrains both theoretical advancement and practical policy formulation for football administrators, club managers, and governing bodies.

Against this backdrop, the present study examines player incentives as determinants of team performance in elite male football clubs in Malawi, with a specific focus on the Super League of Malawi. The study seeks to: (i) assess the influence of team incentives on player and team performance; (ii) identify the monetary and non-monetary incentives provided to elite football players; (iii) examine player preferences regarding incentive types; (iv) analyse the strategies used by coaches and administrators in designing and implementing incentive systems; and (v) identify the challenges associated with incentive implementation in elite football clubs.

By providing quantitative evidence from a resource-constrained African football context, this study contributes to sport management and sport economics literature by clarifying how different incentive structures shape performance outcomes. Practically, the findings offer evidence-based insights to support the development of more equitable, reliable, and performance-oriented incentive frameworks capable of enhancing team performance and governance within Malawian elite football.

Problem Statement

Despite the central role of football in Malawi's sporting and economic landscape, elite football clubs continue to experience inconsistent team performance, much of which is linked to weak incentive governance. Player incentive systems in Malawian elite football are frequently characterised by delayed or irregular payment of salaries and bonuses, limited provision of non-monetary incentives, and poor alignment between rewards and measurable performance outcomes. These deficiencies undermine player motivation, weaken team cohesion, and reduce the effectiveness of clubs' competitive strategies. Although incentives are widely recognised as critical determinants of performance in professional sport, there is a lack of empirical, quantitative evidence examining how monetary and non-monetary incentives influence team performance within Malawi's elite football context. This knowledge gap limits the ability of football administrators and policymakers to design evidence-based incentive systems capable of sustaining high-level performance and organisational stability.

Research Questions

1. How does the provision of team incentives influence the performance of elite football players in Malawi?
2. What are the types of team incentives (monetary and non-monetary) provided to elite football players in Malawi?

3. Which type of incentive (monetary or non-monetary) is preferred by elite football players in Malawi?
4. What are the strategies used by coaches and administrators when designing and implementing effective incentive systems?
5. What are the challenges faced by coaches and administrators when designing and implementing effective incentive systems?

Research Hypothesis

1. There will be no significant relationship between incentives and athletic performance among elite football players in Malawi
2. There will be no significant difference in the preference for incentive type between monetary and non-monetary incentives among football players in Malawi.
3. There will be no joint contribution of monetary incentives (Salary, performance-based monetary reward, winning bonus, competition allowance, and transfer allowance) on team performance among elite football clubs in Malawi.
4. There will be no joint contribution of non-monetary incentives (scholarship, travel grants, access to training facilities) on team performance among elite football clubs in Malawi.
5. There will be no composite contribution of monetary and non-monetary factors as determinants of team performance among elite football clubs in Malawi.

Literature Review

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored in three complementary theoretical perspectives that explain how incentives influence motivation and performance in organisational and sporting contexts: Expectancy Theory, Self-Determination Theory, and Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory. Together, these frameworks provide a coherent basis for analysing the effects of monetary and non-monetary incentives on team performance in elite football clubs operating under financial and institutional constraints.

Expectancy Theory and Performance-Based Incentives

Expectancy Theory explains motivation as a function of three interrelated components: expectancy (the belief that effort leads to performance), instrumentality (the belief that performance leads to rewards), and valence (the value placed on those rewards). In elite football, this theory is particularly relevant for understanding how monetary incentives such as salaries, match bonuses, and winning bonuses influence player effort and team performance.

Within the Malawian elite football context, monetary incentives carry high valence because football often constitutes players' primary source of income. Players are therefore more likely to exert effort when they believe that strong performance will reliably result in financial rewards. However, when incentives are delayed or inconsistently delivered, the

instrumentality component is weakened, reducing motivation and undermining performance outcomes. Expectancy Theory thus provides a useful lens for interpreting the relationship between performance-based monetary incentives and short-term team performance.

Self-Determination Theory and Non-Monetary Incentives

Self-Determination Theory (SDT) emphasises the role of intrinsic motivation and psychological need satisfaction in sustaining performance. According to SDT, motivation is strengthened when individuals experience competence, relatedness, and autonomy. In football settings, these needs are often reinforced through non-monetary incentives such as access to quality training facilities, medical and psychological support, recognition, and opportunities for career development.

In financially constrained environments like Malawi, non-monetary incentives play a critical role in sustaining motivation where financial rewards are uncertain or limited. By enhancing players' sense of professional growth, belonging, and organisational support, non-monetary incentives contribute to long-term commitment and consistent performance. SDT therefore provides a strong theoretical basis for explaining why non-monetary incentives may exert a substantial influence on team performance beyond immediate financial rewards.

Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory and Incentive Structure

Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory distinguishes between hygiene factors, which prevent dissatisfaction, and motivators, which actively enhance satisfaction and performance. In elite football clubs, monetary incentives such as salaries and allowances function primarily as hygiene factors. While their absence causes dissatisfaction, their presence alone does not necessarily lead to sustained performance improvement.

Non-monetary incentives, on the other hand, function as motivators by promoting achievement, recognition, responsibility, and personal growth. In the Malawian elite football context, where financial resources are often constrained, motivators such as recognition, access to medical care, and developmental opportunities may have a more enduring impact on performance. Herzberg's theory therefore complements SDT by explaining the differential roles played by monetary and non-monetary incentives in shaping team performance.

Integration of Theoretical Frameworks

The three theories are integrated in this study to provide a comprehensive explanation of how incentive systems influence team performance. Monetary incentives operationalise the expectancy and instrumentality components of motivation and function as hygiene factors that prevent dissatisfaction. Non-monetary incentives operationalise competence, relatedness, and motivational factors that promote sustained engagement and commitment.

In this study, monetary incentives are measured through variables such as salaries, performance-based bonuses, winning bonuses, and allowances, while non-monetary incentives are measured through access to training facilities, medical care, recognition, and career development opportunities. Team performance is examined as the outcome variable influenced by these incentive structures. This integrated theoretical framework strengthens construct validity and provides a robust foundation for interpreting the empirical findings.

Empirical Review

Monetary Incentives and Team Performance in African Football

Empirical research consistently demonstrates that monetary incentives play a significant role in motivating football players and improving team performance, particularly in economically constrained contexts. Studies conducted in African football environments indicate that regular salaries, match bonuses, and competition allowances are strongly associated with increased effort, match intensity, and short-term performance outcomes (Tadesse, Asgedom, & Taddese, 2023). In Ethiopia, for example, clubs that consistently paid performance-related bonuses reported higher league standings and improved player retention compared to clubs with irregular payment systems.

Similarly, Maqableh et al. (2022), in a study of elite football players in Jordan, found a strong positive relationship between financial incentives and player motivation, particularly where bonuses were clearly linked to measurable performance indicators. These findings align with Expectancy Theory, suggesting that when players perceive a reliable connection between effort, performance, and reward, motivation and output increase. However, several studies caution that excessive reliance on monetary incentives without supporting organisational structures can produce short-lived performance gains and increased conflict when financial commitments are not met (Darby et al., 2007).

Within the Malawian context, available literature and media analyses highlight persistent challenges related to delayed salary payments, uneven bonus distribution, and financial instability among elite clubs (Chirwa, 2021; Kambuwe, 2024). These conditions weaken the motivational effect of monetary incentives by undermining instrumentality and trust in club management. Despite these insights, quantitative evidence linking specific monetary incentives to team performance outcomes in Malawi remains scarce, underscoring the need for empirical investigation.

Non-Monetary Incentives and Athlete Development

Non-monetary incentives have gained increasing attention in sport management literature as critical drivers of sustainable performance and athlete well-being. Research grounded in Self-Determination Theory suggests that access to quality training facilities, medical care, recognition, and educational opportunities enhances intrinsic motivation, commitment, and long-term performance consistency (Ryan & Deci, 2000). In African football systems,

where financial resources are often limited, non-monetary incentives may serve as cost-effective mechanisms for maintaining motivation and reducing performance volatility.

Empirical studies indicate that clubs offering structured non-monetary support such as career development programmes and medical services experience improved team cohesion and lower player turnover (De Coning & Keim, 2014). Tadesse et al. (2023) further report that players who perceive organisational support beyond financial rewards demonstrate higher levels of loyalty and sustained effort, even during periods of financial uncertainty. These findings suggest that non-monetary incentives can partially compensate for financial constraints when strategically implemented.

In Malawi, however, non-monetary incentive provision remains limited. Inadequate training infrastructure, limited access to specialised medical care, and absence of formal career transition programmes constrain players' developmental pathways (Chirwa, 2021). The underutilisation of non-monetary incentives represents a missed opportunity to enhance motivation and performance in a financially constrained football environment.

Incentive Design, Implementation, and Governance Challenges

Beyond the type of incentives offered, the effectiveness of incentive systems depends heavily on governance quality, communication, and administrative capacity. Studies across African sport organisations identify budget constraints, weak financial planning, and poor coordination between coaches and administrators as major barriers to effective incentive implementation (Darby et al., 2007; De Coning & Keim, 2014). When incentive structures are poorly communicated or inconsistently applied, players develop perceptions of unfairness, leading to internal conflict and reduced team cohesion.

Research further indicates that failure to incorporate player feedback in incentive design reduces perceived legitimacy and effectiveness of reward systems (Maqableh et al., 2022). In Malawi, governance challenges within football clubs including limited transparency and administrative inefficiencies exacerbate these issues, weakening the motivational impact of both monetary and non-monetary incentives (Kambuwe, 2024).

Despite recognition of these challenges, there is limited empirical work examining how incentive design strategies and implementation constraints directly relate to team performance outcomes in Malawian elite football. This study addresses this gap by analysing both incentive types and the organisational practices that shape their effectiveness.

Research Gap

The reviewed literature confirms that incentives are critical determinants of performance in elite football; however, several gaps remain. First, existing African studies rarely integrate monetary and non-monetary incentives within a single quantitative framework. Second, empirical evidence from Malawi is minimal, particularly regarding the relative and combined effects of incentive types on team performance. Third, limited attention has been given to governance and implementation challenges as mediating factors in incentive effectiveness.

This study responds to these gaps by providing a comprehensive, theory-driven quantitative analysis of player incentives and team performance in Malawian elite football clubs, thereby extending both academic understanding and practical policy discourse.

Materials and Methods

Research Design

This study employed a descriptive survey design to collect quantitative data from football players, coaches, and administrators in the Malawi Super League. The design was chosen because it allows the researcher to obtain detailed information about existing incentive practices, perceptions, and their relationship with performance from a large and diverse group of participants at one point in time. Other quantitative designs such as experimental or longitudinal studies were not suitable due to time and resource limitations. The descriptive survey design was therefore appropriate for exploring how incentive systems function in real football settings without manipulating variables.

Target Population and Sample

The target sample size for the study was 200 respondents, comprising 120 players and 80 officials (coaches and administrators) drawn from ten elite football clubs in the Super League of Malawi, selected through stratified sampling in which five clubs were drawn from the top eight teams and five from the bottom eight teams. Of the targeted players, 104 returned completed questionnaires, yielding a response rate of 86.7%, while 73 out of the targeted 80 officials participated, representing a response rate of 91.3%. Overall, 177 of the targeted 200 respondents participated in the study, resulting in a combined response rate of 88.5%, which was considered adequate for statistical analysis. To assess non-response bias, early and late responses were compared across key study variables for both players and officials, and no statistically significant differences were observed, indicating that non-response bias was unlikely to affect the study findings.

Research Instruments

Data were collected using structured questionnaires designed in two forms: one for players and another for coaches and administrators. The questionnaires contained both closed-ended and Likert-scale questions covering the types of incentives provided, their perceived effectiveness, and the challenges faced in implementing them. The instruments were developed based on relevant literature (Tadesse et al., 2023; Zhao et al., 2022; Gathwe et al., 2023) and were reviewed by experts in sports management to ensure content validity.

Validity and Reliability

To ensure the quality of data, the instruments were reviewed by two experts in sports management and research methods for content and face validity. A pilot test was conducted with 12 participants from non-sampled clubs to assess clarity and comprehension. Feedback from the pilot study led to minor revisions in question wording.

and sequencing. Reliability was measured using Cronbach's Alpha, which yielded a coefficient of 0.91 for the overall instrument, 0.93 for monetary incentives, and 0.88 for non-monetary incentives indicating high internal consistency. In addition, item-total correlations were examined during data screening to ensure that all items contributed meaningfully to their respective scales.

Data Collection Procedure

Permission to conduct the study was obtained from the Malawi National Council of Sports and the Super League of Malawi (SULOM). The questionnaires were distributed electronically and in hard copy to participants during training sessions and club meetings. Each participant received a brief explanation of the study's purpose, procedures, and confidentiality measures. Respondents completed the questionnaires voluntarily and returned them directly to the researcher or through team representatives.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval for the study was obtained from the Pan African University Life and Earth Institute (including Health and Agriculture). All participants gave informed consent before taking part in the study. They were assured that participation was voluntary and that they could withdraw at any time without penalty. Anonymity and confidentiality were strictly maintained; no personal identifiers were collected, and all responses were used solely for academic purposes. Data were stored securely on password-protected devices accessible only to the researcher.

Data Analysis

Collected data were coded and analysed using SPSS Version 26. Descriptive statistics such as frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations were used to summarize participants' responses. Pearson correlation analysis was performed to determine relationships between variables, and multiple linear regression was used to assess the predictive influence of monetary and non-monetary incentives on team performance. Data were checked for completeness, normality, and consistency before analysis to ensure accuracy of the results.

Limitations of the Method

The main limitation of the study was the reliance on self-reported data, which may have introduced response bias. In addition, the sample size was smaller than initially planned, which could limit the generalizability of the findings. The study also used a cross-sectional design, making it difficult to establish causal relationships. However, the use of validated instruments, reliability testing, and triangulation through different respondent categories helped minimize these limitations.

Results

This chapter presents the findings organized by respondent demographics, descriptive results and inferential analyses.

Types of Team Incentives Provided

Table 1

Descriptive analysis of the types of team incentives (monetary and non-monetary) that are provided to elite football players

S/N	Item Description	Yes	(%)	No	(%)	$\bar{X}$	SD
Monetary Incentives							
1	Salary	85	81.7	19	18.3	1.2	.39
2	Performance-based bonuses	47	45.2	57	54.8	1.5	.5
3	Winning bonuses	88	84.6	16	15.4	1.2	.36
4	Competition allowances	78	75.0	26	25.0	1.3	.44
5	Transfer allowances	91	87.5	13	12.5	1.3	.33
Non-monetary Incentives							
6	Scholarships or educational support	54	51.9	50	48.1	1.5	.50
7	Awards (medals, certificates)	-	-	104	100	2.0	.00
8	Access to modern training facilities	33	31.7	71	68.3	1.7	.47
9	Free medical care	55	52.9	49	47.1	1.5	1.8
10	Career development programs	17	16.3	87	83.7	.50	.37

Note. Items reflect whether each incentive is currently offered by clubs. Percentages indicate the proportion of players reporting availability.

Results show that clubs provide a strong base of monetary incentives, with high availability of salaries, winning bonuses, and transfer allowances. Performance-based bonuses, however, are less common than expected for elite sport, suggesting limited formal performance-pay mechanisms. Non-monetary incentives appear underdeveloped, with nearly all players reporting the absence of awards and most lacking access to modern training facilities or career development programs. Medical care and scholarships are moderately available but far from universal. Overall, the distribution indicates a monetary-heavy system with relatively weak investment in developmental or welfare-oriented incentives.

Strategies Used by Coaches and Administrators

Table 2

Descriptive analysis of the strategies used by coaches and administrators in designing and implementing effective incentive systems

Item	SA %	A %	N %	D %	SD %
Incentives aligned with team goals	1.4	2.7	45.2	50.7	0.0
Incentive structure clearly communicated	2.7	2.7	49.3	45.2	0.0
Player feedback considered	0.0	5.5	28.8	65.8	0.0
Financial constraints limit incentives	0.0	2.7	31.5	65.8	0.0
Tournament incentives are effective	0.0	5.5	30.1	64.4	0.0
Non-monetary incentives build cohesion	0.0	2.7	30.1	67.1	0.0
Incentives delivered consistently/on time	0.0	2.7	24.7	72.6	0.0
Structure helps retain players	0.0	2.7	30.1	67.1	0.0

Note. SA = Strongly Agree; A = Agree; N = Neutral; D = Disagree; SD = Strongly Disagree.

Across all strategic indicators, responses cluster heavily toward neutral and disagree, suggesting that clubs lack structured and functional approaches to incentive administration. The strongest disagreements relate to timely delivery and use of non-monetary strategies, indicating systemic weaknesses in implementation rather than a lack of awareness of incentive importance. Communication gaps and limited inclusion of player feedback suggest top-down decision-making where players have minimal input. Financial constraints are also widely acknowledged, highlighting the practical barriers clubs face in applying even the strategies they recognize as useful.

Challenges Affecting Incentive Implementation

Table 3

Descriptive analysis of the challenges faced by coaches and administrators in designing and implementing effective incentive systems.

Item	SA %	A %	N %	D %	SD %
Budget constraints limit incentives	64.1	33.3	2.6	0.0	0.0
Delayed or inconsistent delivery	71.8	20.2	3.8	0.0	0.0
Misalignment with expectations	73.1	23.1	3.8	0.0	0.0
Unfair distribution causes conflict	53.8	42.3	3.8	0.0	0.0
Administrative inefficiencies	70.5	26.9	2.6	0.0	0.0
Limited coach-admin collaboration	57.7	38.5	3.8	0.0	0.0
Repeated delays reduce motivation	62.8	34.6	2.6	0.0	0.0
Persistent misalignment reduces satisfaction	48.6	45.9	5.4	0.0	0.0

Note. SA = Strongly Agree; A = Agree; N = Neutral; D = Disagree; SD = Strongly Disagree.

The data show overwhelming consensus that budget limitations, payment delays, misalignment of incentives, and administrative inefficiency are serious barriers in clubs. The

consistency of SA/A responses (often above 90%) suggests these challenges are endemic rather than isolated. Delayed payments appear particularly problematic, which can substantially erode trust and reduce the motivational effect of incentives. The high levels of agreement regarding unfair distribution and limited collaboration further indicate that operational and governance shortcomings compound financial constraints.

Hypothesis Testing and Analysis

Hypothesis 1: There will be no significant relationship between incentives and athletic performance among elite football players in Malawi

Table 4

Correlation matrix showing the relationships between the independent variables and dependent variable

Items	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
Team performance	1										
Salary	.481	1									
Performance-based monetary reward	.465	.404	1								
Winning bonus	.552	.257	.562	1							
Competition allowance	.482	.448	.087	.023	1						
Transfer allowance	.434	.032	.233	.291	.265	1					
Scholarship	.521	.449	.345	.441	.257	.003	1				
Travel grants	.579	.042	.307	.322	.122	.774	.161	1			
Access to training facilities	.524	.456	.119	.131	.347	.199	.479	.183	1		
Free Medical	.552	.426	.441	.533	.364	.440	.522	.413	.444		1
										.542	

Note. Pearson's correlation coefficients (*r*). All relationships are positive and moderate.

All incentive types show positive correlations with team performance, indicating that higher availability of either monetary or non-monetary support corresponds to better reported performance. The strongest relationships appear with travel grants, free medical care, and winning bonuses, suggesting that both welfare-related supports and competition-linked rewards are closely tied to performance outcomes. While correlation does not indicate causation, this pattern strongly supports the premise that varied incentive types contribute meaningfully to performance dynamics.

Hypothesis 2: There will be no significant difference in the preference for incentive type between monetary and nonmonetary incentives among football players in Malawi.

Table 5

Summary of independent sample t-test on preferences for incentive types between monetary and nonmonetary incentives among football players in Malawi

Variable	Incentive	N	Mean	Std. Dev.	Df	t-value	Sig.	Remark
Preference for incentive type	Monetary	96	18.1103	0.4314	102	15.493	0.000	Sig.
	Nonmonetary	8	12.0452	0.4002				

Note. Higher means indicate stronger preference. $p < .05$ indicates statistically significant differences.

The difference between means is substantial, with monetary incentives scoring far higher than non-monetary ones. The very large t-value (15.493) and small p-value ($< .001$) confirm a statistically strong and reliable difference between the two groups. This indicates that players overwhelmingly prefer monetary incentives, and the difference is not due to chance. The large gap also suggests that non-monetary incentives, even when available, may not be perceived as satisfying core motivational needs as directly as financial rewards.

Hypothesis 3: There will be no joint contribution of monetary incentives (Salary, performance-based monetary rewards, winning bonuses, competition allowances, and transfer allowances) on team performance among elite football clubs in Malawi.

Table 6

Regression table showing the joint contribution of monetary incentives to team performance

Model	Sum of square	Df	Mean square	F	P
Regression	8398.162	5	1679.632	19.821	.000
Residual	8304.722	98	84.742		
Total	16702.885	103			
R = .709					
R² = .503					
Multiple R² adjustment = .477					
Analysis of Variance					

Note. Model includes salary, performance bonuses, winning bonuses, competition allowances, and transfer allowances.

The model explains roughly 48% of total variance in team performance, which is substantial for behavioural research. The significant F-value indicates that the set of monetary incentives, taken together, contributes meaningfully to predicting performance. This implies that financial structures have a strong and measurable influence on team outcomes.

Hypothesis 4: There will be no joint contribution of non-monetary incentives (scholarship, travel grants, access to training facilities) on team performance among elite football clubs in Malawi

Table 7

Regression table showing the joint contribution of nonmonetary incentives to team performance

Model	Sum of square	Df	Mean square	F	P
Regression	14187.818	4	3546.954	139.618	.000
Residual	2515.067	99	25.405		
Total	16702.885	103			
R = .922					
R² =.849					
Multiple R² adjustment = .843					
Analysis of Variance					

Note. Model includes scholarships, training facilities, medical care, and career development opportunities.

The model explains 84% of the variance, indicating a very strong predictive power of non-monetary incentives. This suggests that welfare, support systems, and development opportunities play a significant role in shaping performance outcomes. The large *F*-value confirms that the model is a very strong fit statistically.

Hypothesis 5: There will be no composite contribution of monetary and nonmonetary factors as determinants of team performance among elite football clubs in Malawi.

Table 8

Regression table showing the composite contribution of monetary and nonmonetary incentives to team performance

Model	Sum of square	Df	Mean square	F	P
Regression	4984.212	2	2492.106	21.479	.000
Residual	11718.673	101	116.026		
Total	16702.885	103			
R = .546					
R² = .298					
Multiple R² adjustment = .285					
Analysis of Variance					

Note. Predictor variables include composite monetary and composite non-monetary indices.

The composite model is statistically significant but explains **less variance** than the individual models. This suggests that monetary and non-monetary incentives operate through partly distinct mechanisms. When combined into broad indices, some explanatory precision is lost compared to treating each incentive type separately.

Discussion

Monetary Incentives and Expectancy Theory

The results demonstrated a strong and statistically significant relationship between monetary incentives and team performance. Both the correlation and regression analyses indicated that monetary incentives such as salaries, winning bonuses, and competition allowances were significant predictors of team performance. These findings support Expectancy Theory, which argues that motivation increases when individuals perceive a clear relationship between effort, performance, and valued rewards (Vroom, 1964).

In the Malawian elite football context, monetary incentives carry high valence because football often constitutes players' primary source of income. When financial rewards are perceived as attainable and linked to performance outcomes, players are more likely to exert effort that contributes to improved team performance. Similar findings have been reported in empirical studies conducted in Ethiopia and Jordan, where financial incentives were shown to enhance player motivation and match performance (Maqableh et al., 2022; Tadesse, Asgedom, & Taddese, 2023).

However, the findings also suggest that the motivational impact of monetary incentives is conditional. Where incentive payments are delayed or inconsistently delivered, the instrumentality component of Expectancy Theory is weakened, reducing the effectiveness of financial rewards. This observation is consistent with earlier studies on African football systems, which highlight financial instability and weak incentive governance as factors that undermine the effectiveness of monetary rewards (Darby, Akindes, & Kirwin, 2007; Chirwa, 2021).

Non-Monetary Incentives and Self-Determination Theory

A key finding of this study is that non-monetary incentives exhibited stronger explanatory power in the regression analysis than monetary incentives. This indicates that non-monetary incentives play a particularly important role in shaping team performance in elite football clubs in Malawi.

This result aligns closely with Self-Determination Theory, which posits that sustained motivation is driven by the satisfaction of psychological needs for competence, relatedness, and autonomy (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Ryan & Deci, 2000). Non-monetary incentives such as access to training facilities, medical care, recognition, and career development opportunities directly support these needs by enhancing players' sense of professional growth, organisational support, and belonging.

Empirical evidence from African football contexts supports this interpretation. De Coning and Keim (2014) found that clubs providing structured non-monetary support experienced improved player commitment and organisational stability. Similarly, Tadesse et al. (2023)

reported that non-monetary incentives were associated with sustained performance and reduced player turnover in financially constrained football environments. In the Malawian context, where financial resources are limited and incentive payments are often delayed, non-monetary incentives provide a more stable and reliable source of motivation, which helps explain their stronger contribution to team performance.

Incentive Structure and Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory

The differential effects of monetary and non-monetary incentives observed in this study can also be explained using Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory. According to this theory, monetary incentives function primarily as hygiene factors that prevent dissatisfaction but do not necessarily promote long-term motivation or performance improvement (Herzberg, Mausner, & Snyderman, 1959).

While players in this study expressed a strong preference for financial rewards, the regression results showed that monetary incentives contributed less to explaining performance variation than non-monetary incentives. Non-monetary incentives operate as motivators by fostering achievement, recognition, and personal growth. This finding supports Herzberg's argument that performance is more strongly influenced by intrinsic and developmental factors than by pay alone.

In elite football clubs in Malawi, where financial rewards are often uncertain, motivators such as access to medical care, training infrastructure, and recognition become particularly important in sustaining commitment and performance. This reinforces the importance of incentive structures that go beyond financial compensation.

Player Preferences, Effectiveness, and Practical Feasibility in Malawi

The study further revealed that players demonstrated a stronger preference for monetary incentives than for non-monetary incentives. This preference reflects the economic realities of elite football in Malawi, where players face financial insecurity and limited alternative income sources. Similar patterns have been observed in other African football contexts, where players prioritise regular salaries and bonuses due to livelihood considerations (Owusu & Frempong, 2019; Maqableh et al., 2022).

However, the findings indicate that preference does not necessarily equate to effectiveness in predicting performance outcomes. Despite being less preferred, non-monetary incentives exhibited stronger explanatory power in the regression analysis. From a practical standpoint, non-monetary incentives are often more feasible and sustainable for Malawian clubs, as they require lower recurrent financial outlays and are less vulnerable to funding volatility.

These findings suggest that elite football clubs in Malawi would benefit from adopting hybrid incentive systems that combine reliable monetary compensation with structured non-monetary support. Such systems are more likely to enhance both short-term motivation and long-term performance sustainability.

Governance and Implementation Implications

Finally, the study highlights that the effectiveness of incentive systems is influenced by governance and implementation practices. Weak alignment between incentives and performance goals, limited player involvement in incentive design, poor communication, and delayed delivery were identified as key challenges. These findings are consistent with empirical studies showing that governance deficiencies undermine incentive effectiveness in African sport organisations (Darby et al., 2007; De Coning & Keim, 2014).

From a theoretical perspective, these implementation challenges weaken the motivational mechanisms proposed by Expectancy Theory and reduce the effectiveness of both hygiene factors and motivators. Improving team performance therefore requires not only appropriate incentive structures but also stronger governance frameworks, transparent policies, and improved coordination between coaches and administrators.

Conclusion

This study examined how monetary and non-monetary incentives influence motivation and team performance among players, coaches, and administrators in Malawi's Super League. The findings revealed that while monetary incentives such as salary, winning bonuses, and competition allowances are widely provided and strongly preferred by players, their effectiveness is often undermined by delayed payments, inconsistent administration, and weak communication. Non-monetary incentives particularly medical care, scholarships, and career development programmes were shown to have an even stronger influence on performance, yet these incentives remain poorly institutionalised and are offered inconsistently across clubs. Regression results confirmed that both incentive types significantly contribute to performance, with non-monetary incentives offering the highest predictive value. Overall, the study concludes that Malawi's football clubs rely heavily on financial incentives but lack a balanced, structured, and dependable incentive framework capable of sustaining long-term motivation and performance.

Recommendations

Based on the study findings, the following recommendations are presented to guide improvement in incentive design and implementation:

Policy-Level Recommendations

1. **Standardise Incentive Guidelines:** The Football Association of Malawi (FAM) should establish clear national standards for incentive structures, including minimum requirements for salaries, medical care, and performance bonuses, to ensure fairness and consistency across clubs.

Management-Level Recommendations

2. **Strengthen Financial Planning and Timely Payments:** Clubs should adopt financial management systems that prioritise predictable and timely delivery of salaries and bonuses, as delays significantly weaken motivation and credibility.

3. **Institutionalise Non-Monetary Incentives:** Clubs should formalise non-monetary benefits such as medical insurance, access to training facilities, and career development, as these were shown to strongly influence sustained performance.

Club Operational Recommendations

4. **Enhance Communication and Transparency:** Clubs must improve communication regarding incentive eligibility, payment schedules, and performance criteria to ensure players understand how rewards are determined and delivered.
5. **Include Players in Incentive Decision-Making:** Establishing structured feedback mechanisms can improve alignment between incentives and player expectations, ensuring that reward systems reflect actual motivational needs.

Future Research Directions

Future research should explore incentive systems using longitudinal designs to observe how player motivation and performance change over time with variations in incentive delivery. Comparative studies across neighbouring African leagues such as Zambia, Tanzania, Mozambique, and South Africa would help identify regional best practices in incentive management. Further qualitative research involving interviews with players, coaches, and administrators could deepen understanding of psychological mechanisms such as perceived fairness, trust, and player–management relations. Additionally, mixed-method studies incorporating objective performance indicators (e.g., match statistics and fitness metrics) would help validate and expand the current findings.

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