
Newsletter

Effects of Performance Pay Programs for Primary and Secondary Teachers on Student Academic Achievement: A Meta-Analysis Based on Experimental and Quasi-Experimental Studies

By Zhao, R., Wang, Y., Yang, J., & Du, Y.

Correspondence to: Jing Yang, Chengdu Normal University, China. E-mail: 201523010066@mail.bnu.edu.cn

DRAWING on the analytical frameworks of principal-agent theory and team production theory, this study seeks to examine the effects of performance pay programs for primary and secondary teachers on student academic achievement and relevant moderating factors, using meta-analysis techniques. The analysis is based on 312 effect sizes from 33 studies with experimental or quasi-experimental design.

Research Findings:

- The overall effect of teacher performance-related pay programs on student academic achievement is negative, while these programs have more favorable results in secondary schools than in primary schools.
- Moderating effect analysis reveals that team incentives are more effective for primary teachers, whereas individualized incentives are more so for secondary teachers; that merit pay programs have a positive effect on student mathematics results but a negative one on student reading performance; that performance pay programs implemented in developed countries or territories typically have a negative effect, while those in developing countries or territories tend to yield a positive effect; and that the amount of pay makes no significant difference to the outcomes of pay-for-performance programs.

The study's implications for the development of performance pay programs for Chinese basic education teachers includes paying attention to the specific subject and education phase the teacher works for, considering the economic development level of the region where the school is located, and taking into account both the incentive form and intensity in designing a scientific compensation program.

Source: China Economics of Education Review, 2025;10(4), 108-128.