

Student Achievement Rewards in Relation to Key Performance Indicator 3: A Qualitative Policy Evaluation at an Indonesian Public University

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ABSTRACT

This study evaluates a student achievement reward policy at an Indonesian public university and examines its relevance to the student-achievement dimension of Key Performance Indicator 3 (IKU 3). Using a qualitative evaluative single-case design structured by Dunn's six criteria, the study drew on 31 interviews—20 students, six faculty supervisors, four student-affairs officials and technical implementers, and one senior leader—alongside observation, document review, and institutional records from 2022–2025. Data were structurally coded and interpreted through cross-source triangulation and negative-case comparison. Rewards functioned primarily as institutional recognition and supplementary motivation rather than the main reason for entering competitions. SIMPELMAWA centralized submission and verification, but document deficiencies, peak-period workloads, limited status information, uneven dissemination, and partial financial coverage constrained administrative experience and equitable access. Because detailed expenditure data, formal service standards, faculty- and campus-disaggregated administrative denominators, and case-level reconciliation with official IKU 3 records were unavailable, the study does not claim formal cost-efficiency, statistically measured inter-unit equity, or measured IKU 3 conversion. Instead, it proposes a recognition-access-conversion model as an audit framework and recommends proactive communication, document pre-validation, service standards, system integration, equity monitoring, and periodic conversion audits.



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INTRODUCTION

Indonesian higher education governance is increasingly oriented toward results-based accountability. Ministerial Decree No. 358/M/KEP/2025 defines IKU 3 as the percentage of diploma and undergraduate students who participate in activities or achieve recognition outside their study programs. Eligible achievements include provincial, national, or international competitions in which students attain at least finalist status and receive validation from an academic supervisor or head of study program ([Ministry of Higher Education, Science, and Technology, 2025](#)).

This policy positions student achievement simultaneously as an indicator of individual development and institutional accountability. Performance measures can support decision-making and quality improvement when they are translated into clear data-collection and action mechanisms ([Val & Quintas, 2025](#)). Indonesian evidence similarly indicates that university performance evaluation should connect inputs, processes, outputs, productivity, and outcomes rather than depend only on aggregated indicators ([Hermanu et al., 2024](#)).

The reward policy should nevertheless be distinguished from IKU 3 as a whole. The policy primarily recognizes selected student achievements through a reward mechanism, whereas IKU 3 may encompass a broader range of student activities and recognitions. The reward policy should therefore be interpreted as a supporting mechanism for one relevant dimension of IKU 3 rather than as a complete representation of the indicator.

UNESA operates a reward policy for high-achieving students as part of its institutional identity as a “home for champions.” Institutional records indicate a substantial increase in documented student achievements between 2022 and 2025. However, this trend cannot by itself be attributed to the reward policy because coaching, facilities, competition access, and broader data-capture practices may also have contributed. The phrase “home for champions” refers to UNESA’s institutional identity emphasizing student achievement and competitive excellence.

The central policy problem is therefore not whether rewards exist, but whether their design and implementation provide equitable institutional recognition and support the documentation of student achievements that are relevant to IKU 3. The study evaluates the policy through effectiveness, efficiency, adequacy, equity, responsiveness, and appropriateness, and it asks how breakdowns in information, submission, verification, and recording affect policy benefits. Its practical objective is to develop evidence-based recommendations that strengthen student services while improving the auditability of achievement records that may be relevant to institutional performance monitoring.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Reward should not be reduced to a simple opposition between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. A reward can reinforce attention, task value, learning, and motivation when recipients interpret it as informative, fair, and competence-supportive, but it can lose value when it feels controlling or inaccessible ([Murayama, 2022](#)). Contemporary theoretical work consequently emphasizes that reward effects depend on design, meaning, context, and internalization rather than on the mere presence of an incentive ([Bardach & Murayama, 2025](#)).

Causal evidence also shows that financial incentives can produce benefits without serving as a universal explanation for student performance. A meta-analysis of 18 causal studies involving 20,286 students found that performance-based incentives could increase earned credits, modestly improve grade-point averages, and raise some examination scores, although the size of the payment was not the sole determinant of impact (Lintner, 2024). The implication for achievement rewards is that reach, recognition, administrative accessibility, and developmental continuity may be as important as nominal value.

Institutional support is another resource that can reinforce student engagement and outcomes. A national survey of 1,142 students found that facilities and institutional resources strongly predicted learning outcomes, followed by engagement and teaching quality (Lu et al., 2025). Faculty support is likewise associated with academic motivation, especially when support addresses psychological and functional needs rather than merely communicating rules (Raboca & Carbuñarean, 2024). Structured goal-setting support can additionally clarify why, when, and how students sustain purposeful activity in higher education (Martins van Jaarsveld et al., 2025).

Digital systems can widen access, but their value depends on users' ability to understand and navigate them. Student attitudes, digital literacy, and self-efficacy influence multiple dimensions of technology-mediated engagement in higher education (Getenet et al., 2024). Well-timed digital nudges can also increase students' access to key resources when communication is targeted, planned, and based on meaningful engagement data (Brown et al., 2024).

Service quality, information access, and organizational communication are essential because a sound policy may lose its value when students cannot locate information or complete procedures. Academic service quality and access have demonstrated positive relationships with student achievement in higher education (Dangaiso & Tsvere, 2025). Student voice is also necessary to ensure that support services are accessible, responsive, and attentive to heterogeneous needs (Hitches et al., 2025).

Equity must be distinguished from formal equality. Identical eligibility requirements do not guarantee equal opportunities when information flows, mentoring, and administrative capacity differ across faculties or campuses. Research on performance-based funding warns that incentive systems may reproduce or widen gaps when initial capacity and access to support are not considered (Chan et al., 2023).

Recent Indonesian research indicates that the implementation of national higher-education performance and accountability policies is mediated by institutional adaptation, organizational and staff capacity, coordination among implementing units, and reliable data governance. A mixed-method study of MBKM and university key performance indicators documented how national indicators were translated into institutional strategies, internal guidelines, and programmes (Dwijayanti et al., 2022), while evidence from 52 Indonesian universities highlighted the importance of organizational and staff capacity in achieving institutional objectives (Damayanti et al., 2022). Studies of PDDikti reporting and university performance management further identified data-quality problems, fragmented systems, duplicated data entry, limited interoperability, and cross-unit reporting burdens as central implementation constraints (Astuti et al., 2024; Badjuka et al., 2026). At the student-achievement level, institutional system-development studies show that web-based platforms can support information dissemination, centralized documentation, real-time retrieval, monitoring, and reporting of achievement records (Santi et al., 2023; Rohmah et al., 2024). Comparative credential-system research also demonstrates the importance of formal validation and verifiable records when individual achievements are incorporated into institutional information systems (Kistaubayev et al., 2023).

Recent research has generally examined rewards as motivational mechanisms, institutional support as a predictor of engagement, or performance indicators as

measurement tools. Few studies have evaluated student achievement rewards as a university-level public policy by simultaneously examining outcomes, process costs, adequacy, equity, responsiveness, and goal appropriateness. The literature also provides limited explanation of how an individually earned achievement becomes a validated institutional performance record.

Recent higher-education research supports the theoretical intersections underlying the proposed model. Studies applying street-level bureaucracy show that frontline academics exercise discretion when interpreting and implementing institutional policies, with policy ambiguity, workload, administrative procedures, and contextual judgments shaping actual service delivery (Lovell, 2024; Alsharefeen, 2025). Programme-theory and theory-of-change perspectives similarly trace the causal sequence connecting interventions and implementation processes with expected outputs and institutional outcomes (Moore et al., 2023; Hayward et al., 2024). Administrative service-quality research identifies reliability and responsiveness as important dimensions of students' service experiences (Rizos et al., 2022), while Indonesian higher-education evidence based on the DeLone and McLean model indicates that system quality, information quality, and service quality influence user satisfaction and perceived usefulness (Rulinawaty et al., 2024). Building on these perspectives, the recognition–access–conversion model adds a distinct conversion link: the auditable transition from a validated individual achievement to an accountable institutional performance record.

The novelty of this study lies in applying Dunn's six evaluation criteria to a student achievement reward policy under the current IKU 3 framework while triangulating interviews, observations, documents, and achievement trends across three campuses. Its conceptual contribution is a recognition-access-conversion model in which rewards support IKU 3 only when institutional recognition is translated into motivation, information is equitably accessible, applications can be completed, achievements are validated, and records enter the performance database. This model shifts evaluation away from nominal reward amounts alone and toward the reliability of the entire service and data-conversion chain.

METHODS

Research Design

The study employed a qualitative evaluative single-case design to examine the UNESA student achievement reward policy from the perspectives of multiple stakeholders. The qualitative approach was selected to explore the meanings, experiences, and implementation of the policy from the perspectives of its recipients and implementers. The case was bounded by institutional reward regulations, organizational and administrative arrangements, the Sistem Informasi Pelaporan Mahasiswa (SIMPELMAWA), and three campus contexts. Student interviews provided beneficiary perspectives, while interviews with faculty supervisors, student-affairs officials, technical implementers, and senior university leadership captured mentoring, operational, verification, and policy-design perspectives. This design maintained consistency among the research questions, data sources, analytical procedures, and resulting claims, as required in qualitative research (Creswell & Creswell, 2023), while enabling an intensive examination of a bounded policy system within its real institutional setting (Yin, 2018).

Dunn's six criteria formed the principal evaluation framework. Effectiveness assessed goal attainment, efficiency examined results relative to resources and administrative burden, adequacy considered whether benefits addressed student needs, and equity assessed the distribution of access and benefits. Responsiveness examined institutional reactions to needs and complaints, whereas appropriateness assessed the relevance of

policy goals and instruments (Dunn, 2018). Criterion-specific evaluative standards were established to avoid using Dunn’s criteria solely as descriptive categories. These standards were derived from the stated objectives of the reward policy, institutional procedures, Dunn’s definitions, and reasoned researcher-set benchmarks where no numerical institutional standard was available.

Table 1. Operational Evaluative Standards Based on Dunn’s Six Policy Evaluation Criteria

Criterion	Evaluative standard
Effectiveness	Reward functions as recognition and additional motivation without being treated as the sole cause of achievement growth.
Efficiency	Digital processing reduces physical administrative burdens; formal cost-efficiency is not assessed without budget data.
Adequacy	Reward provides recognition and partial cost recovery rather than full competition financing.
Equity	Uniform eligibility is accompanied by reasonably comparable access to information and support.
Responsiveness	Students receive clear responses, correction guidance, and adequate status information.
Appropriateness	Reward categories align with achievement-recognition goals without assuming measured IKU 3 conversion.

Researcher Positionality and Reflexivity

The lead researcher was a member of the UNESA academic community and therefore occupied an insider position in relation to the institutional context. This position facilitated access and contextual understanding but could also influence participant responses and interpretation. Potential institutional influence was managed through voluntary recruitment, participant pseudonymization, separation of research participation from reward administration, negative-case analysis, reflexive documentation, and supervisory review of the analytical process. None of the authors held a formal role in student affairs, reward verification, or SIMPELMAWA administration during the study. Accordingly, the authors had no decision-making authority over participants’ reward applications or outcomes.

Time and Place of Research

Preliminary document mapping and instrument preparation were conducted in May 2026. Formal data collection was conducted from June to July 2026. All 31 interviews were conducted online via Zoom. This modality accommodated participants from the Ketintang, Lidah Wetan, and Magetan campuses, including university leaders, student-affairs implementers, and faculty supervisors.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval was granted by the Research Ethics Committee, Institute for Research and Community Service, Universitas Negeri Surabaya, under reference number No. 177/UN38.16/KEP/EC/2026 on September 14, 2026. Before participation, each informant received written information explaining the study’s purpose, the voluntary nature of participation, confidentiality safeguards, recording procedures, and the right to withdraw without academic or administrative consequences. Written informed consent was obtained before each interview and stored separately from the research data. Interviews were audio-recorded with the participants’ permission. Pseudonymized data were stored in the research

team's secure research data repository, accessible only to authorized members of the research team, and will be retained for one year before being securely deleted.

Research Target and Data Corpus

The interview corpus comprised 31 purposively selected informants: 20 students, six faculty supervisors, four student-affairs officials and technical implementers, and one senior university leader. The student subsample consisted of eight students from Ketintang, eight from Lidah Wetan, and four from Magetan; 13 were reward recipients and seven were nonrecipients. A total of 31 prospective informants were approached, and all agreed to participate. No invited informant declined participation or withdrew from the study. The four Magetan students provided contextual variation and were not treated as an equivalent comparative campus subsample.

Potential informants were identified from SIMPELMAWA records, student achievement and reward-recipient lists, and institutional records held by the relevant student-affairs units. Participants were selected purposively based on their direct experience with the student achievement reward policy, including reward recipients, nonrecipients, faculty supervisors, student-affairs officials, technical implementers, and university leadership. The lead author invited prospective informants individually through WhatsApp. The lead author held no role in student-affairs administration, reward verification, SIMPELMAWA administration, or reward decision-making. Prospective informants were informed that participation or refusal would not affect their reward applications, academic standing, or access to university services. Thirty-one prospective informants were approached; all agreed to participate, none declined participation, and none subsequently withdrew.

Sample adequacy was justified through an information-power rationale. The study addressed a narrowly defined policy, used a theory-guided interview structure, recruited participants with direct policy experience, and incorporated variation across campuses, recipient status, mentoring roles, implementation functions, and university leadership. Formal chronological saturation was not documented; therefore, no specific interview is claimed as the point at which saturation occurred.

Table 2. Composition of participants and research data sources

Data source	Coverage	Analytical function
Student interviews	20: Ketintang 8, Lidah Wetan 8, Magetan 4; 13 recipients and 7 nonrecipients	Beneficiary experience, access, service barriers, and recommendations
Faculty-supervisor interviews	6	Mentoring, information dissemination, competition support
Student-affairs implementers	4	Verification, workload, administration, and SIMPELMAWA operation
Senior university leadership	1	Policy objectives, institutional alignment, and governance
Observation	19-item matrix	Limited corroboration of service and system processes
Document review	18-category documentary-review guide; available institutional documents obtained and reviewed	Policy, procedure, reporting, and administrative evidence
Institutional administrative records	Annual applications, approvals, revisions, rejections, and recipient students, 2022–2025	Descriptive administrative trend and contextual evidence; not causal impact evidence

Participant identities were protected through campus-based codes. MHS-KT identified participants from Ketintang, MHS-LD identified participants from Lidah Wetan, and MHS-MG identified participants from Magetan. These codes were retained throughout transcription, coding, cross-source comparison, and quotation reporting.

Research Procedure

The research proceeded through case delimitation, evidence collection, coding, cross-source comparison, and evaluative interpretation. Interview evidence was first organized according to participants' reward status and campus, after which observation and documentary evidence were aligned with Dunn's criteria. Institutional achievement trends were then used as contextual evidence rather than as a causal estimate of policy impact.

Instruments and Data Collection Techniques

Semi-structured interviews were structured around Dunn's six policy-evaluation criteria and explored participants' motivation, perceived policy benefits, administrative experiences, access to information, service responsiveness, and the appropriateness of the reward policy. The interview guide was adapted to the roles and experiences of students, faculty supervisors, institutional leaders, and technical implementers.

The interview, observation, and document-review instruments were developed by aligning the study objectives and data-collection prompts with Dunn's six evaluation criteria. The interview guide comprised 24 analytical domains. The non-participant observation matrix contained 19 items, while the document-review guide covered 18 categories of institutional documents. The documents obtained and reviewed included reward regulations, standard operating procedures, student achievement records, key performance indicator reports, budget documents, service reports, and reward-recipient lists. For each document, the research team recorded its title, identifier, year, relevant page range, issuing unit, and analytical function in a document-review matrix.

All interviews were conducted in Indonesian via Zoom between June and July 2026. Interview duration varied according to the participants' roles and the depth of the information provided. With participants' permission, the interviews were audio-recorded and subsequently transcribed verbatim by the research team. Quotations selected for publication were translated into English by a member of the research team proficient in both Indonesian and English. Another member of the research team independently checked the translations against the original Indonesian transcripts to ensure that their meanings were retained.

Non-participant observations were conducted during the formal data-collection period from June to July 2026. The observations covered relevant student-affairs service settings and the use of the SIMPELMAWA platform across the Ketintang, Lidah Wetan, and Magetan campuses. Members of the research team recorded field notes using the 19-item observation matrix, which covered administrative processes, system use, staffing, information accessibility, complaint handling, and verification procedures. Photographs and system screenshots were collected only when permission had been granted. Observation served as a limited corroborative source rather than as an equally weighted component of triangulation.

Data Analysis Technique

Analysis followed data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing or verification (Miles et al., 2020). Meaning units first received structural codes corresponding to Dunn's criteria and descriptive codes such as additional motivation, uneven information,

document revision, delay, reward amount, nonfinancial recognition, and status tracking. Codes were then compared across campuses and recipient status, displayed in cross-source matrices, and tested against negative cases before conclusions were finalized.

The analytical audit trail linked participant codes, interview transcripts, structural codes, descriptive codes, thematic categories, cross-source matrices, and final interpretations. Each major finding could therefore be traced to a participant code or documentary source. Comparisons among interviews, observations, documents, and trend data were recorded in working matrices to identify convergence, divergence, and negative cases. No formal intercoder-agreement calculation or participant member checking was undertaken. Dependability was instead supported through structured coding, negative-case comparison, cross-source matrices, maintenance of an audit trail, and supervisory review.

Trustworthiness

Credibility was strengthened through methodological triangulation across interviews, observations, document review, and institutional trend data. Source triangulation compared experiences across the three campuses and differentiated reward recipients from nonrecipients. Confirmability and dependability were supported by restricting interpretations to available evidence, retaining consistent participant codes, documenting coding matrices, and avoiding causal attribution from aggregate achievement trends.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

Institutional Achievement Context

Annual aggregate administrative records show that reward applications increased from 1,611 in 2022 to 2,815 in 2025. Approved applications numbered 1,429, 1,719, 1,948, and 2,710, while applications returned for revision numbered 97, 123, 336, and 336, respectively. Rejections numbered 182, 208, 259, and 105, and reported reward-recipient students numbered 1,122, 1,398, 1,410, and 1,932. The number of recipient students increased by 72.2% between 2022 and 2025, with year-on-year changes of 24.6%, 0.9%, and 37.0%. These administrative trends are descriptive and do not isolate the reward policy from coaching, facilities, competition availability, or changes in data-capture practices.

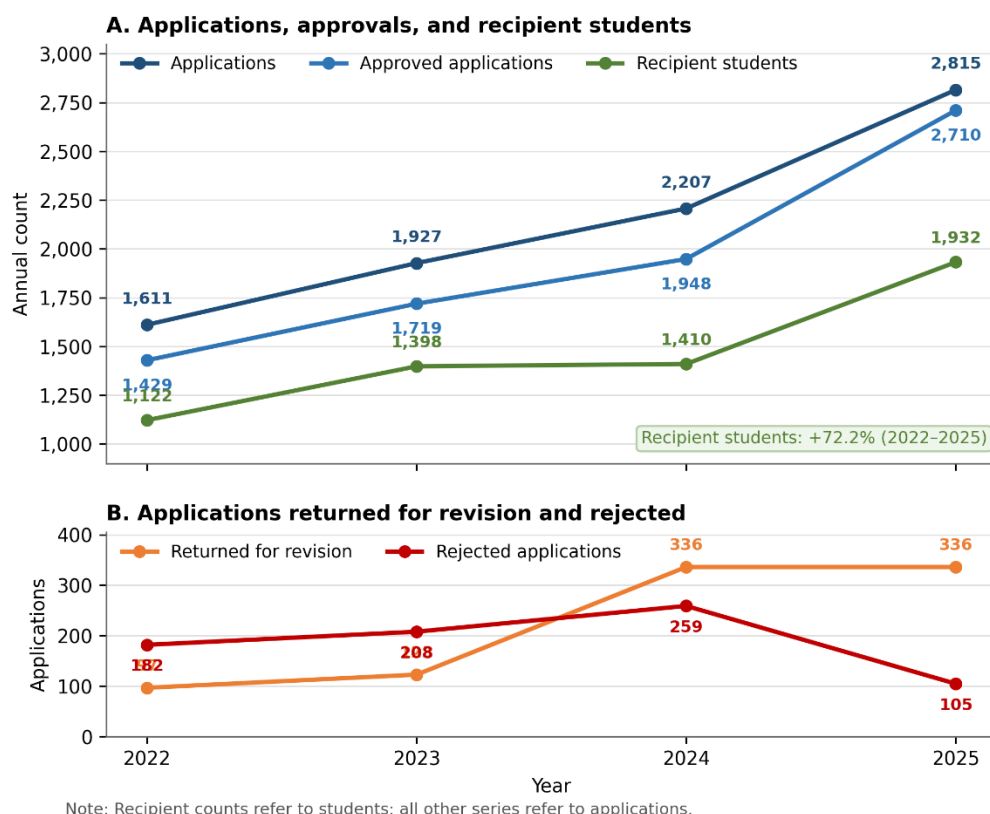


Figure 1. Annual aggregate reward applications, administrative outcomes, and recipient students, 2022–2025.

Source: *UNESA student achievement reporting and reward-administration records extracted from SIMPELMAWA (Sistem Informasi Pelaporan Mahasiswa), 2022–2025.*

Note. Recipient counts refer to students, whereas application, approval, revision, and rejection counts refer to applications. Applications returned for revision represent an interim administrative status and are not an additional mutually exclusive final outcome

Evaluation Across Dunn's Six Criteria

Table 3. Summary of the Reward Policy Evaluation Using Dunn's Six Criteria

Criterion	Evaluative standard	Main evidence	Evidence boundary	Evaluative assessment
Effectiveness	Reward functions as institutional recognition and additional motivation without being treated as the sole cause of achievement growth.	Eighteen participants reported increased motivation, while all stated that rewards were not their primary reason for competing. The annual number of reported reward-recipient students increased by 72.2% between 2022 and 2025.	Annual aggregate administrative counts were available, but application, approval, revision, rejection, and recipient counts disaggregated by faculty and campus were unavailable. The equity assessment	Effective as recognition and additional motivation, although a causal contribution to the achievement trend cannot be established.

			therefore concerns experienced information access rather than statistically measured between-unit differences in application or approval rates.	
Efficiency	Digital processing reduces physical administrative burdens. Formal cost-efficiency requires budget, staffing, and service-time evidence.	SIMPELMAWA enabled online submission and centralized verification, but seven participants reported administrative barriers and five experienced document revision. Verification reportedly slowed during periods of peak demand.	Detailed budget-allocation and expenditure-realization data, staffing ratios, formal service-level standards, and case-level verification, approval, and disbursement times were unavailable. Participant-reported processing periods therefore represent experiential rather than audited efficiency evidence.	SIMPELMAWA improved channel-level efficiency by centralizing submission and verification. Formal cost-efficiency could not be assessed because detailed budget-realization, staffing-ratio, and case-level service-time data were unavailable.
Adequacy	Reward provides institutional recognition and partial recovery of competition-related costs rather than comprehensive competition financing.	Eleven participants stated that the reward amount did not cover all competition-related costs, while eight proposed additional nonfinancial recognition. Budget availability remained subject to university financial capacity.	The study did not obtain detailed competition-cost profiles, standardized cost estimates, complete reward-expenditure records, or an institutional benchmark specifying the proportion of costs that the reward was expected to cover.	Adequate as appreciation and partial cost recovery, but insufficient as comprehensive competition and development support.

Equity	Uniform eligibility should be accompanied by reasonably comparable access to information, mentoring, administrative assistance, and submission opportunities across faculties and campuses.	Formal eligibility requirements were applied uniformly, but nine participants reported uneven dissemination, four did not know about SIMPELMAWA, and two submitted their applications after the deadline. Access was influenced by faculty communication, mentoring, student organizations, and campus support.	Annual aggregate denominators were available, but faculty- and campus-disaggregated records and case-level identifiers were unavailable. Distributional equity across units could therefore not be statistically assessed.	Procedural equality has not produced information equity because access varies with faculty, mentoring, organization, and campus support.
Responsiveness	Students receive timely and clear responses, specific correction guidance, adequate status information, and accessible mechanisms for resolving administrative problems.	Faculty-level operators were generally viewed as helpful and provided revision guidance. Students nevertheless requested automatic notifications, more specific revision reasons, and real-time information about their application status.	The study did not have access to a complete complaint log, response-time records, notification-delivery statistics, or system-generated histories of enquiries and corrective actions. The assessment is therefore based primarily on participant and implementer accounts.	Human responsiveness is positive, but the service remains reactive and lacks sufficient feedback and tracking features.
Appropriateness	Reward categories and verification procedures align with student-achievement recognition goals without assuming that validated reward records	Achievement categories and verification procedures support institutional recognition and accountability and are relevant to the student-achievement recognition	The study did not reconcile individual reward records with the official IKU 3 database and did not obtain complete annual IKU 3 values or calculate a reward-to-IKU	The policy is appropriate as a student-achievement recognition mechanism and is relevant to one dimension associated with IKU 3. Actual conversion into official IKU 3

have been converted into official IKU 3 records.	dimension associated with IKU 3. However, students may lose access to rewards because of information gaps, missed deadlines, or incomplete documents.	conversion rate. Relevance to IKU 3 should therefore not be interpreted as evidence of measured conversion.	reporting was not measured.
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Taken together, the policy should be continued with targeted service and data-governance redesign rather than retained unchanged or discontinued. Evidence supports its value as recognition and partial competition support, while current information, service, and documentation arrangements do not yet demonstrate fully equitable access, formal cost-efficiency, or complete conversion into official IKU 3 reporting.

Effectiveness: Recognition and Additional Motivation

Effectiveness was most visible in the symbolic function of the reward. Eighteen participants reported greater motivation, but all participants rejected the view that rewards were their primary reason for entering competitions. They instead identified disciplinary interest, personal goals, contribution through their work, university reputation, faculty coaching, and experience as the principal drivers.

MHS-MG04 illustrated this pattern: "Yes, but not as the main goal. My motivation still came from the desire to conduct useful research and improve my academic ability. The reward made me more confident to enter another competition because I felt supported by the university" (MHS-MG04). Institutional leaders similarly positioned reward as one component of a broader achievement-development system rather than as an independent cause of performance growth.

Negative cases clarify the boundary of this effectiveness. Students who did not know the procedure or submitted after the deadline continued to participate in competitions but lost access to formal recognition. The reward policy therefore did not create motivation from nothing; it strengthened existing motivation and made institutional support more visible.

Efficiency: A Digital Channel with Administrative Friction

SIMPELMAWA reduced the need for physical document submission and created a more consistent application pathway. Participants assisted by faculty-level operators or supervisors were more likely to complete their applications without revision. Students navigating the process independently more often selected incorrect evidence links, misunderstood document-format requirements, or waited for updates when the displayed status did not explain review progress, revision reasons, or expected completion times.

Seven participants reported administrative barriers, and five described document revisions. MHS-KT01 estimated that one and a half to two months elapsed between submission and reward receipt. MHS-KT02 requested time estimates for each stage because the basic application status could remain unchanged for several weeks without indicating the expected next step or completion time. Observation also identified slower system access during peak periods and limited staffing relative to application volume.

Implementer accounts indicated that verification workloads increased during reward-application periods because many files had to be reviewed simultaneously. Recurring

problems included incomplete certificates, inaccessible evidence links, inconsistent identities, and unclear supporting documents.

No formal service-level standard specifying maximum verification, approval, and disbursement times was identified in the available documents. Participant-reported processing periods are therefore interpreted as experiential evidence rather than compliance or noncompliance with an official service standard.

These findings distinguish channel-level efficiency from experiential efficiency. Although an online submission channel was available, students continued to absorb search costs, repeated input, document-correction burdens, and uncertainty about processing times. Integration with single sign-on, academic records, and the institutional achievement database could reduce these administrative burdens.

Detailed budget-allocation and expenditure-realization data were not available. Consequently, the efficiency assessment focuses on administrative workflow, implementer workload, digital processing, and beneficiary experience rather than formal cost-efficiency.

Adequacy: Helpful but Insufficient for All Needs

Eleven participants stated that the reward amount did not cover all preparation, registration, transportation, materials, training, or research costs. Nevertheless, participants did not define the reward as full reimbursement. Instead, they considered it adequate as institutional recognition and partial recovery of costs incurred while preparing for and participating in competitions.

MHS-KT01 explained, "The amount was helpful, particularly in replacing part of the expenditure I had incurred. However, compared with the total cost of preparation and participation, the reward did not fully cover the expenses" (MHS-KT01).

Eight participants proposed complementary nonfinancial rewards, including rector-issued certificates, achievement publicity, training, access to institutional facilities, mentoring, and opportunities to mentor other students. Adequacy was therefore multidimensional, encompassing financial, psychological, reputational, and developmental value.

Equity: Equal Formal Rights but Unequal Information

Documents and observations indicated that formal eligibility requirements were applied uniformly across faculties. However, nine participants considered the dissemination of information uneven, four did not know about SIMPELMAWA, and two missed the submission opportunity because they submitted after the deadline. Information often came from supervisors, coaches, faculty-level operators, senior students, WhatsApp groups, or social media rather than from a single official channel capable of reaching eligible students simultaneously.

MHS-LD08 summarized the distinction between formal equality and information equity: "The opportunity to receive the reward is the same for all students, but the delivery of information still depends on each faculty or supervisor" (MHS-LD08).

Annual aggregate administrative records contained application, approval, revision, rejection, and recipient counts for 2022–2025. However, corresponding denominators disaggregated by faculty and campus were unavailable. The equity finding therefore concerns experienced information access and procedural support rather than statistically measured differences in application, revision, approval, or rejection rates between institutional units.

Responsiveness: Supportive Staff but a Reactive System

Participants generally considered faculty-level operators and administrative staff responsive when contacted. They received explanations about missing documents and

guidance for correcting files. MHS-LD04 stated, “The faculty operator explained the required documents in detail and provided an example of an acceptable document, so I could immediately correct the revised file” (MHS-LD04).

Responsiveness nevertheless depended heavily on manual contact between students and administrative personnel. Participants repeatedly proposed automatic notifications, more specific revision reasons, deadline reminders, processing-time estimates, and more detailed real-time status updates.

Interpersonal responsiveness was supported by both student and implementer accounts, but system-level responsiveness remained limited by the absence of automatic notifications, detailed status information, and formal response-time standards. The organization was therefore responsive at the interpersonal level, while the service architecture remained insufficiently proactive in preventing recurring administrative barriers.

Appropriateness: Relevant Support for IKU 3, with Limits in Reward-Service Access

The policy was appropriately targeted because rewards were issued for achievements that satisfied specified achievement categories and administrative requirements. As MHS-LD06 explained, “The policy is appropriately targeted because rewards are given to students who satisfy the achievement and administrative requirements. What needs improvement is administrative guidance, especially for students applying for the first time” (MHS-LD06).

Verification was important for preventing invalid claims and maintaining institutional accountability. The policy was relevant to the student-achievement recognition dimension associated with IKU 3, although this study did not determine whether the reward mechanism covered all achievement and activity pathways included in the indicator.

Students with valid achievements could nevertheless lose access to rewards because they lacked information, submitted after the deadline, or did not complete the required documentation. The findings therefore identify a reward-service pathway consisting of achievement, access to information, reward submission, verification, and reward documentation.

Implementer accounts described an intended pathway from SIMPELMAWA submission and verification to institutional performance reporting. However, the study did not reconcile individual reward records with the official IKU 3 database and therefore did not calculate a conversion rate. The available evidence also did not permit case-level verification of whether unclaimed or unsuccessful reward applications were absent from the official IKU 3 database.

Cross-Dimensional Themes

Table 4. Frequency of Major Themes in the Student Interview Subcorpus (n = 20)

Theme	Participants	Policy meaning
Reward was not the primary reason for competing	20	Rewards reinforced rather than replaced intrinsic motivation and personal goals.
Reward increased motivation	18	Institutional recognition added energy for future competition participation.
Reward amount remained insufficient	11	Financial incentives were partial assistance rather than full financing.
Dissemination was uneven	9	Formal opportunity was equal, but information access differed.
Nonfinancial rewards were proposed	8	Students valued recognition, development, and visibility in addition to money.

Administrative barriers	7	Document burdens reduced the actual convenience of the digital channel.
Document revision	5	Guidance and pre-submission validation required improvement.
Unaware of SIMPELMAWA	4	Information leakage occurred at the initial stage of policy conversion.
Late submission	2	Deadline reminders did not reach all eligible students.

Note. Frequencies describe the purposively selected student interview subcorpus and are not prevalence estimates or statistical comparisons across campuses

Discussion

Rewards as Information About Competence

The finding that rewards served as additional encouragement rather than primary motivation is consistent with the reward-learning framework. Recognition can increase interest and goal-oriented behavior when it communicates success and the value of an activity (Murayama, 2022). The result also supports the rejection of a simple dichotomy between rewards that always help and rewards that always undermine motivation, because effects depend on design and recipient interpretation (Bardach & Murayama, 2025).

The UNESA case extends this explanation from individual learning to institutional policy. Students responded not only to money but also to a signal that the university recognized their competence and contribution. Evidence that constructive feedback can function as a reward when recipients perceive it as useful further supports the informational and emotional dimensions of recognition (Jansen et al., 2025).

Increasing the nominal amount is therefore not the only available policy option. Meta-analytic evidence supports financial incentives but also indicates that wider accessibility may matter more than concentrating large rewards among a small group (Lintner, 2024). Hybrid recognition through financial support, formal certification, publicity, mentoring, training, and access to facilities corresponds more closely to the multidimensional meaning reported by participants, while digital badges may also support motivation and feedback engagement when their meaning is clearly communicated (Goulding et al., 2024).

Institutional Support Connects Rewards and Engagement

Rewards did not operate in an institutional vacuum. Supervisors, coaches, faculty operators, facilities, and competition communities provided resources that helped students manage the simultaneous demands of academic work and competition participation. The study-demands-resources perspective explains that psychological needs, resources, and workload jointly shape well-being, engagement, and goal-directed behavior (Bakker & Mostert, 2024).

The importance of mentoring in the corpus is consistent with systematic evidence linking instructor support to students' psychological need fulfillment, self-efficacy, and engagement (Prananto et al., 2025). National survey evidence likewise connects institutional resources, engagement, and student learning outcomes (Lu et al., 2025). These relationships imply that the reward service should be evaluated together with the broader support ecosystem.

Policy evaluation should therefore extend beyond recipient counts and disbursed funds. It should measure whether students know about the policy, receive mentoring, complete applications, and return to competition or mentor other students. Such engagement is itself multidimensional and connected to achievement and well-being rather than reducible to a single participation indicator (Laranjeira & Teixeira, 2025).

Information Equity as a Condition for Benefit Equity

Unequal information did not originate from different formal eligibility criteria but from variations in communication pathways and mentoring. The existence of a service does not guarantee equitable use when access depends on personal networks, active operators, or membership in competition-oriented organizations. Student-centered support must therefore be accessible, personal, and responsive to student voice rather than merely administratively available ([Hitches et al., 2025](#)).

Organizational communication also shapes trust and inclusion. Fragmented digital information can exclude some groups even when the organization intends to increase engagement ([Galioto et al., 2025](#)). Announcements on social media alone are therefore insufficient, and official information should be pushed automatically through single sign-on, institutional email, application notifications, faculty operators, and supervisors.

The evidence on performance-based funding also warns that incentive policies may produce undesirable distributional effects when initial capacity is ignored ([Chan et al., 2023](#)). At UNESA, students with strong supervisory networks were better positioned to convert achievements into validated claims than equally successful students with weaker administrative support. An equity dashboard should therefore monitor application, revision, validation, and acceptance rates across campuses, faculties, study programs, and achievement categories.

From Achievement to Institutional Documentation: Implications for IKU 3

The reward policy can support the achievement-recognition dimension associated with IKU 3, but its institutional value depends on the quality of the service and documentation process. Performance indicators become useful only when definitions, collection procedures, and feedback are connected to corrective decisions ([Val & Quintas, 2025](#)). Indonesian university evaluation models similarly recommend linking antroponomic systems, performance measures, and output assessment rather than treating them as separate administrative activities ([Hermanu et al., 2024](#)).

SIMPELMAWA should consequently be treated as achievement-service infrastructure rather than simply an upload portal. Although the system provides basic status monitoring, notifications, revision explanations, expected completion times, and integrated data flows remain limited. These constraints can reduce the completeness and usability of reward-service documentation and may create risks for institutional reporting. This study did not, however, reconcile individual reward cases with the official IKU 3 database. Research on engagement prediction also emphasizes that high-quality behavioral and activity data are essential for educational decision-making ([Rizwan et al., 2025](#)).

Annual official IKU 3 values for 2022–2025 were not available to the study and are therefore not reported. The 72.2% increase in recorded achievement is promising context but not an estimate of reward impact. Establishing causal effects would require longitudinal records of recipient and nonrecipient participation, competition characteristics, coaching, costs, and a comparison strategy. The present qualitative contribution instead lies in identifying mechanisms and points of leakage that institutional managers can investigate and improve.

The Recognition-Access-Conversion Model

The multi-stakeholder synthesis supports a provisional recognition–access–conversion model. Student accounts primarily substantiate the recognition and access layers, whereas implementer accounts describe the intended verification and institutional-reporting pathway underlying the conversion layer. Because individual reward records were

not reconciled with the official IKU 3 database, conversion represents an auditable institutional mechanism rather than a measured outcome.

The model explains an apparent policy paradox. A reward can be motivationally effective but informationally unequal, digitally efficient but administratively burdensome, and substantively appropriate but incomplete in its data output. Policy success should therefore be measured not only by reward amounts and recipient counts but also by the integrity of each link from recognition to access and conversion.

Policy Implications and Recommendations

Improvement should concentrate on points that directly influence access, processing time, data quality, and developmental continuity. The recommendations below translate participant experiences and the six-criterion evaluation into measurable service actions. Each action pairs an implementation design with indicators that university managers can monitor periodically.

Table 5. Recommendations for improving the student achievement reward policy

Horizon	Recommendation	Primary owner	Resource implication	Proposed target
Quick win	Automated email and multichannel notifications	Ditmawa + IT	Low	At least 95% of application-status changes generate an automatic notification within five minutes; all registered applicants receive deadline reminders seven and two days before submission closes.
Quick win	Interactive document checklist and pre-validation	Ditmawa	Low	Reduce applications returned for revision from the 2025 baseline of 11.9% to no more than 8% in the next application cycle.
Medium term	Formal SLA and real-time tracking	Ditmawa + IT + Finance	Moderate	Publish formal verification, revision-response, approval, and disbursement standards within six months; at least 90% of cases meet the published stage-specific standards after the first year of implementation.
Structural	SSO–SIMPELMAWA integration	IT + Academic Administration	High	At least 90% of applicant identity and academic-status fields are automatically populated from verified institutional records within 12 months of implementation.
Medium term	Hybrid or additional financial rewards	University leadership + Finance	Budget required	All verified recipients receive standardized institutional recognition; reward categories and amounts are reviewed

				annually using competition-level and documented participation-cost information.
Medium term	Equity dashboard	Ditmawa + Planning Bureau	Moderate	All faculties and campus locations report applications, approvals, revisions, rejections, and final recipients in every reward cycle; access or approval gaps exceeding 10 percentage points trigger documented follow-up.
Structural	IKU 3 conversion audit	Planning Bureau + Ditmawa	Moderate–high	Reconcile 100% of validated reward records with the official IKU 3 reporting database annually and document the reason for every unmatched or excluded record.

Note. The targets are researcher-proposed monitoring benchmarks rather than existing UNESA service standards. They should be validated against institutional capacity, budget availability, and baseline system-log data before formal adoption.

Limitations and Future Research

The study incorporated student, faculty-supervisor, student-affairs implementer, and senior-leadership perspectives, but did not directly include treasury personnel, system developers, or the institutional unit responsible for final IKU data submission. Detailed budget-allocation and expenditure-realization data, formal service-level standards, and case-level processing logs were unavailable. Annual aggregate records were available for applications, approvals, revisions, rejections, and recipient students, but faculty- and campus-disaggregated denominators and case-level relationships among these categories were unavailable. Annual official IKU 3 values were not available, and individual reward records were not reconciled with the official IKU 3 database.

The findings are most analytically transferable to public universities with multi-campus structures, centralized or semi-centralized achievement-reporting platforms, uniform eligibility requirements, faculty-level administrative operators, and performance-accountability systems requiring validated student-achievement records.

The achievement trend was aggregated and did not include a comparison group, so it cannot estimate the causal effect of rewards. A single-institution design supports analytical transfer to similar policy contexts but not statistical generalization to all universities. Future research should combine multi-actor interviews, SIMPELMAWA process logs, cost and service-time data, audits of achievements that failed to convert, and quasi-experimental or interrupted time-series designs.

CONCLUSION

The student achievement reward policy functioned meaningfully as institutional recognition and additional motivation. Multi-stakeholder evidence indicates that SIMPELMAWA centralized submission and verification, while recurring document

deficiencies, peak-period workloads, limited status information, and uneven dissemination created administrative friction. Financial adequacy remained partial, and formally uniform eligibility did not consistently produce equal information access.

The study proposes a recognition–access–conversion model in which student accounts substantiate recognition and access, while implementer accounts describe the intended pathway from verified achievement records to institutional performance reporting. Because this pathway was not audited against the official IKU 3 database, the model should be interpreted as a framework for institutional auditing and service redesign rather than evidence of measured IKU 3 conversion.

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AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Conceptualization, M.N.K. and M.H.; Methodology, M.N.K. and M.H.; Validation, M.H., N., and A.K.; Formal Analysis, M.N.K.; Investigation, M.N.K. and N.; Resources, M.N.K. and N.; Data Curation, M.N.K.; Writing-Original Draft Preparation, M.N.K.; Writing-Review and Editing, M.N.K., M.H., N., and A.K.; Visualization, M.N.K.; Supervision, M.H., N., and A.K.; Project Administration, M.N.K.; Funding Acquisition, M.N.K. All authors contributed to the interpretation of the findings and the substantive revision of the manuscript. All authors have read and approved the final version of the manuscript

CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

All authors were affiliated with Universitas Negeri Surabaya, the institution whose policy was evaluated. None of the authors held a formal role in student affairs, reward verification, SIMPELMAWA administration, or decision-making concerning participants' reward applications during the study. Although this affiliation may create a perceived institutional interest, no university unit or funding sponsor influenced participant recruitment, data analysis, interpretation, manuscript preparation, or the decision to publish.

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