

The Transformation of Arabic Learning Motivation of Indonesian First-Year Students at the University of Tabuk

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Article History:

Received : 14 October 2025

Revised : 17 December 2025

Published : 17 December 2025

Keywords:

Learning Motivation; Motivation Transformation; Phenomenology.

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DOI: 10.32332/ijalt.v7i02.11656

Abstract: Indonesian students pursuing Arabic studies in Saudi Arabia often face a significant decline in learning motivation during their first year due to culture shock, language barriers, and academic pressure. This phenomenon represents a complex inner journey of adaptation that has not been deeply explored within the specific context of the University of Tabuk. This study aims to analyze the transformation of Arabic learning motivation among newly enrolled Indonesian students at the University of Tabuk during their first academic year. It seeks to describe the dynamic shifts in motivation and identify the internal and external factors influencing these changes. Employing a descriptive qualitative phenomenological approach, data were collected through in-depth semi-structured interviews. The data were analyzed using a phenomenological analysis model to identify significant themes regarding the participants' lived experiences. The results reveal a dynamic trajectory where motivation initially surges due to religious and academic idealism, declines caused by adaptation challenges, and eventually restabilizes through a shift toward intrinsic motivation. Key factors facilitating this resilience include a supportive academic environment, the integration of spiritual values (*ibadah*), social connectedness, and the utilization of technology for independent learning. This research offers novelty by identifying spiritual values as a unique primary anchor for resilience, distinguishing Indonesian students from general international students who rely mostly on academic integration. The study suggests that future research employ longitudinal approaches over the full four-year program and comparative studies across other Middle Eastern universities to validate whether the "Tabuk experience" is a regional phenomenon.

INTRODUCTION

Every year, hundreds of Indonesian students travel to Saudi Arabia with the dream of mastering the Arabic language and excelling in Islamic studies. However, during their first semester, nearly half of them experience a sharp decline in learning motivation due to cultural shock, academic pressure, and language barriers. This often-unseen struggle demonstrates that studying abroad is not merely a crossing of geographical boundaries, but also an inner journey that tests perseverance, conviction, and the meaning of their life purpose.

Changes in learning motivation are a natural part of the academic adaptation process experienced by every student, as motivation is inherently dynamic. Similarly, new Indonesian students at the University of Tabuk arrive with high enthusiasm after undergoing a long process to be accepted and travel to Saudi Arabia, yet this initial drive does not always persist. A new environment, different from their place of origin, can lead to fatigue and a sense of unfamiliarity that affects the consistency of motivation. This aligns with the view of Fernando who asserts that motivation can strengthen and direct learning efforts to achieve the desired goals.¹

The University of Tabuk has become one of the strategic educational destinations for Indonesian students because it offers an academic environment rich in knowledge. Established in 2006 in the northwestern region of Saudi Arabia, the university comprises various faculties, including Medicine, Engineering, Computer Science, Pharmacy, Applied Health Sciences, Nursing, Science, Business Administration, Sharia and Law, Arts and Design, as well as Education.² Currently, there are 25 active Indonesian students with diverse backgrounds, reflecting the variety of experiences and learning motivations they bring.

Some previous studies relevant to this research include the following: First, a study conducted by Muassomah titled “*Demotivation of AFL Students in Online Learning*.” The results indicated that students’ lack of participation reflects demotivation (a decline in motivation) among learners of Arabic as a Foreign Language (AFL). Four main factors contributed to this decrease in motivation: infrastructure, learning structure, peers, and teachers.³

Second, research conducted by Reem J. Razem and Jillian Pandor titled “The Motivational Orientations of Undergraduate Students to Learn Arabic in a Dubai Private University” examined the learning motivation of foreign (expatriate) students in acquiring a language other than English, specifically Arabic in the context of Dubai. Their research found that integrative motivation, the desire to interact and integrate with Arabic-speaking cultures was more dominant than instrumental motivation, which involves practical aims such as employment opportunities or academic achievement.⁴

¹ Yogi Fernando, Popi Andriani, and Hidayani Syam, “Pentingnya Motivasi Belajar Dalam Meningkatkan Hasil Belajar Siswa,” *ALFIHRIS: Jurnal Inspirasi Pendidikan* 2, no. 3 (May 10, 2024): 61–68, <https://doi.org/10.59246/alfihris.v2i3.843>.

² University Of Tabuk, “University Of Tabuk,” educational, University of Tabuk: A journey of knowledge and discovery, September 11, 2025, <https://www.ut.edu.sa/en>.

³ Muassomah, “Demotivation Of AFL Students In The Online Learning,” *Ijaz Arabi Journal of Arabic Learning* 6, no. 1 (February 25, 2023), <https://doi.org/10.18860/ijazarabi.v6i1.16884>.

⁴ Reem J. Razem and Jillian Pandor, “The Motivational Orientations of Undergraduate Students to Learn Arabic in a Dubai Private University,” *Journal of Language Teaching and Research* 14, no. 1 (January 1, 2023): 96–107, <https://doi.org/10.17507/jltr.1401.11>.

Third, research conducted by Wirdatul Khasanah titled "Students' L2 Motivation Shift in Two-Year Access Micro scholarship Program." The findings reveal that Indonesian students participating in the English Access Micro scholarship Program experienced a shift in their motivation to learn English after two years. This change, influenced by positive learning experiences and exposure to foreign cultures, shaped the learners' goals and attitudes.⁵

Based on the previous body of research, it can be concluded that there is still no study that specifically examines the context of Indonesian students learning Arabic abroad, particularly at the University of Tabuk. Moreover, no research has employed a phenomenological approach to understanding students' personal experiences in the process of changing their learning motivation. Therefore, the gap of this study lies in its effort to explore in depth the transformation of Arabic learning motivation among newly enrolled Indonesian students at the University of Tabuk a context that has not been investigated before.

The issue examined in this research focuses on how the learning motivation of newly enrolled Indonesian students to study Arabic changes during their first academic year at the University of Tabuk. Investigating these motivational shifts is essential because the first year represents a critical stage in both academic and social adaptation, which can significantly influence overall academic success. This research aims to describe whether the learning motivation of first-year students increases or decreases, as well as to identify the internal and external factors that influence these changes.

In understanding the dynamics of learning motivation, this research employs several theoretical frameworks. The first is Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory, which explains that human motivation is shaped by five levels of needs, ranging from physiological needs to self-actualization.⁶ In addition, this study draws on Self-Determination Theory proposed by Deci and Ryan, which emphasizes the importance of three basic psychological needs in fostering intrinsic motivation: competence, autonomy, and relatedness.⁷ Another relevant framework is Eccles' Expectancy-Value Theory, which posits that

⁵ Wirdatul Khasanah, "Students' L2 Motivation Shift in Two-Year Access Microscholarship Program," *Excellence Journal of English and English Education* 5, no. 1 (2025): 21, <https://doi.org/DOI:10.47662/ejee.v5i1.1137>.

⁶ Maslow, A. H., "A Theory of Human Motivation," *Psychological Review* 50, no. 4 (1943), <https://doi.org/10.1037/h0054346>.

⁷ Léandre Bouffard, "Ryan, R. M. et Deci, E. L. (2017). Self-determination theory. Basic psychological needs in motivation, development and wellness. New York, NY : Guilford Press," *Revue québécoise de psychologie* 38, no. 3 (November 14, 2017): 231–34, <https://doi.org/10.7202/1041847ar>.

learning motivation is influenced by two primary factors: an individual's expectation of success in a task and the value they assign to that task.⁸

The findings of this research are expected to serve as an evaluative reference for students in maintaining their learning motivation, as well as provide input for the university and sending institutions in designing more effective support programs. The results may also serve as a reference for prospective Indonesian students planning to pursue their studies in Arab countries, helping them better prepare for academic and cultural challenges.

METHOD

This research examines the transformation of learning motivation among newly enrolled Indonesian students pursuing their studies at the University of Tabuk, Saudi Arabia. The primary reason for selecting the University of Tabuk as the research site is that the author is a student at this institution. As a new student currently studying in Tabuk, the author has personally experienced changes in motivation to learn Arabic from the period before departure to the time spent within the university environment. These firsthand experiences have inspired the author's interest in investigating the phenomenon of motivational transformation in learning Arabic among newly enrolled Indonesian students at the University of Tabuk.

The focus of this research is to analyze the process of change in Arabic learning motivation experienced by newly enrolled Indonesian students during their first academic year. The unit of analysis in this study is the experiences and perceptions of these new Indonesian students regarding the transformation of their learning motivation. This research employs a descriptive qualitative phenomenological approach. The phenomenological approach is used to explore participants' direct experiences in the process of changing their motivation to learn Arabic. According to Helaluddin, the descriptive phenomenological method aims to present experiences as they are through direct interaction between the researcher and participants, and to describe each aspect of the phenomenon openly and in depth without preconceived assumptions about unexplored elements.⁹

The primary data for this study were obtained directly from participants through in-depth interviews. The participants consisted of eight newly enrolled Indonesian students at the University of Tabuk who had completed more than one year of study. Participant selection was conducted using purposive

⁸ Qi Wang and Mengchen Xue, "The Implications of Expectancy-Value Theory of Motivation in Language Education," *Frontiers in Psychology* 13 (November 8, 2022): 992372, <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2022.992372>.

⁹ Helaluddin, "Mengenal lebih Dekat dengan Pendekatan Fenomenologi: Sebuah Penelitian Kualitatif" (Open Science Framework, June 23, 2019), <https://doi.org/10.31219/osf.io/stgfb>.

sampling, a technique in which the researcher selects individuals based on specific criteria relevant to the research objectives, particularly their active involvement in learning Arabic.¹⁰

Data collection was carried out directly within the University of Tabuk area in Saudi Arabia, with support from the PPMI Tabuk organization. In-depth interviews were conducted to explore participants' experiences and perceptions comprehensively regarding their changing motivation to learn Arabic. The interviews were conducted directly by the researcher using a semi-structured guide, allowing participants the freedom to share their experiences openly.

Data analysis followed a phenomenological analysis model. First, the researcher read all interview transcripts to gain a comprehensive understanding of the context. Second, significant statements were identified from each transcript.¹¹ Third, meanings were formulated from these statements and organized into relevant categories. Fourth, similar categories were grouped to form major themes. Fifth, the researcher integrated descriptions according to participants' accounts related to each emerging theme. Sixth, a complete description of the findings was compiled. Finally, validation was carried out by returning the results to the participants for member checking.

Data credibility was tested through member checking, a process in which the interview data are returned to the participants to ensure consistency between the collected data and the information provided. Member checking aims to determine the extent to which the obtained data corresponds to the reality reported by the data providers.¹² Data is considered valid if agreed upon by the participants. The researcher conducted member checking by presenting the interview transcripts to the participants, asking whether any information needed to be added or corrected, and confirming agreement on the results.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This section on results and discussion presents the research findings on the dynamics of learning motivation among Indonesian students at the University of Tabuk, from their initial drive before beginning their studies to the transformation they experience during their academic journey. The discussion covers three main aspects: the initial motivation for enrolling at the University of Tabuk, changes in motivation throughout the learning process, and the influencing factors, such as the academic environment, spiritual values, social

¹⁰ Sugiyono, *Metode Penelitian Kuantitatif, Kualitatif, Dan R&D* (Bandung: Alfabeta, 2019).

¹¹ Praveena and Sasikumar, "Application of Colaizzi's Method of Data Analysis in Phenomenological Research," *Medico Legal Update* 21, no. 2 (March 12, 2021): 914–18, <https://doi.org/10.37506/mlu.v21i2.2800>.

¹² Dedi Susanto, Risnita, and M. Syahrani Jailani, "Teknik Pemeriksaan Keabsahan Data Dalam Penelitian Ilmiah," *Jurnal QOSIM Jurnal Pendidikan Sosial & Humaniora* 1, no. 1 (July 1, 2023): 53–61, <https://doi.org/10.61104/jq.v1i1.60>.

support, cultural adaptation, use of technology, and the students' level of maturity.

Initial Motivation for Enrolling at the University of Tabuk

Every first step toward a foreign country carries stories of hope and meaning. For Indonesian students who choose the University of Tabuk as their study destination, this decision is not merely an academic journey but also a spiritual and personal identity journey. Amid the desert heat and the religious atmosphere of the Arab land, they bring a drive born from a sincere intention to deepen their knowledge, understand the language of revelation, and embark on a new path toward intellectual and spiritual maturity. Here, their initial motivation takes shape as a blend of religious aspirations, social goals, and the desire to transcend the boundaries of learning experiences in an international context.¹³

Based on this, it can be stated that the initial motivation of Indonesian students to pursue their studies at the University of Tabuk is influenced by a combination of basic needs, psychological needs, and strong personal values regarding learning *Arabic* and gaining international academic experience. Within the framework of Maslow's, hierarchy of needs theory, this motivation begins with the effort to satisfy physiological needs, including the most basic requirements for students to survive and function well, as well as the need for security, such as access to learning facilities, scholarships, and a supportive environment. Once these basic needs are met, social drives emerge to build relationships among students, followed by esteem needs through achievement and recognition, and ultimately self-actualization needs, manifested in aspirations to become Arabic language experts or professional educators.¹⁴

From the perspective of Self-Determination Theory, their initial motivation to enroll at the University of Tabuk reflects the fulfillment of three basic psychological needs. First, competence, which refers to the belief in their ability to master Arabic. Second, autonomy, manifested in the independent decision to study abroad and choose a major that aligns with their interests. Third, relatedness, which is the desire to build positive relationships with lecturers, peers, and the Middle Eastern Arab community.¹⁵

Meanwhile, according to Expectancy-Value Theory, students' initial motivation is reinforced by their belief in their ability to adapt and succeed in

¹³ Difa Sri Utami et al., "Pentingnya Motivasi Dalam Meningkatkan Hasil Belajar Peserta Didik Sekolah Dasar," *MARAS: Jurnal Penelitian Multidisiplin* 2, no. 4 (December 17, 2024): 2071–82, <https://doi.org/10.60126/maras.v2i4.557>.

¹⁴ Maslow, A. H., "A Theory of Human Motivation."

¹⁵ Bouffard, "Ryan, R. M. et Deci, E. L. (2017). Self-determination theory. Basic psychological needs in motivation, development and wellness. New York, NY."

pursuing education in the Middle East, as well as their high valuation of learning Arabic there, encompassing religious, academic, career, and social aspects.¹⁶

It can be concluded that the initial motivation of Indonesian students to enroll at the University of Tabuk is driven not only by external factors, such as scholarships or opportunities to study abroad, but also represents a manifestation of complex internal drives, including the need for recognition, self-achievement, and spiritual values associated with Arabic.

Transformation of Students' Motivation

Change is an inseparable part of every learning journey.¹⁷ For Indonesian students at the University of Tabuk, the first year serves as a mirror reflecting how motivation can grow, waver, and eventually take on a new form. From initial admiration, their learning enthusiasm is tested by the realities of university life, language, and a different culture. Yet, amidst these challenges, some students discover new strengths, self-confidence, pride, and the conviction that every adaptation process is part of personal growth. This transformation of motivation becomes the driving force of their journey, illustrating how determination born from sincere intention can evolve into a mature and sustainable learning resilience.

The motivation of Indonesian students undergoes significant changes during their first academic year at the University of Tabuk. Some participants demonstrated an increase in learning enthusiasm after experiencing various positive events, both inside and outside the classroom. Improvements in Arabic language proficiency, easy access to campus facilities, and support from fellow countrymen strengthened their self-confidence. Enjoyable academic experiences fostered a sense of pride and reinforced their conviction in the study choices they had made.

Conversely, some students experienced a decline in motivation when facing language difficulties, cultural differences, and academic pressure. Challenges such as understanding the local dialect, managing heavy workloads, and navigating social adaptation led to fatigue and self-doubt. Feelings of frustration, boredom, and homesickness contributed to a weakening of their learning enthusiasm, although these challenges did not lead them to give up.¹⁸

¹⁶ Wang and Xue, "The Implications of Expectancy-Value Theory of Motivation in Language Education."

¹⁷ Haizatul Faizah and Rahmat Kamal, "Belajar Dan Pembelajaran," *Jurnal Basicedu* 8, no. 1 (February 6, 2024): 466–76, <https://doi.org/10.31004/basicedu.v8i1.6735>.

¹⁸ Abdullah Ahmed Alasmari, "Challenges and Social Adaptation of International Students in Saudi Arabia," *Heliyon* 9, no. 5 (May 2023): e16283, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.heliyon.2023.e16283>.

This transformation of motivation reflects the dynamic interaction between intrinsic and extrinsic factors.¹⁹ Intrinsic factors arise from personal drives to pursue knowledge in the Middle East, deepen Arabic proficiency, and broaden religious understanding. These drives are rooted in personal satisfaction and pride in one's achievements. Extrinsic factors, on the other hand, are manifested through family support, motivation from peers, scholarship assistance, and social recognition for successfully studying at a prestigious university. Both factors shape the process of learning motivation transformation, which can lead to increased motivation as students adapt to the University of Tabuk environment, or conversely, to a temporary decline during the initial adjustment phase.

Therefore, the transformation of students' motivation at the University of Tabuk is not singular but dynamic, influenced by the balance between positive experiences that strengthen intrinsic drives and external pressures that test the resilience of their motivation.

Factors Influencing the Transformation of Motivation

The factors influencing the transformation of learning motivation among Indonesian students studying at the University of Tabuk include several main aspects. First, the academic environment, which serves as the dominant factor in students' motivational changes. Second, spiritual factors and religious values. Third, social and family support. Fourth, cultural and social adaptation. Fifth, technology and independent learning. Sixth, maturity and self-awareness.²⁰

First, Academic Environment Factor. The academic environment is the most dominant factor influencing the transformation of learning motivation among Indonesian students at the University of Tabuk. This environment includes the campus atmosphere, interactions among students, relationships with lecturers, and the established learning culture. A conducive environment can create a sense of comfort, security, and appreciation, thereby encouraging students to be more enthusiastic in adapting and improving their academic performance.

Some participants stated that for Indonesian students studying abroad, the academic environment serves not only as a place to acquire knowledge but also as a social space that shapes their identity and learning motivation. When the campus environment demonstrates openness, inclusivity, and respect for

¹⁹ Riska Tangko et al., "Pengaruh Motivasi Intrinsik Dan Motivasi Ekstrinsik Terhadap Kinerja Karyawan Pada Pt. Melati Tunggal Intiraya," *JEMSI (Jurnal Ekonomi, Manajemen, dan Akuntansi)* 10, no. 1 (February 1, 2024): 301–8, <https://doi.org/10.35870/jemsi.v10i1.1888>.

²⁰ Nurul Anggraeni and A Octamaya Tenri Awaru, "Hambatan Guru Dalam Penerapan Pembelajaran Berbasis Digital Pada Mata Pelajaran Sosiologi Di Upt Sma Negeri 1 Barru," *Pinisi Journal of Sociology Education Review* 4, no. 3 (2024): 10.

diversity, students feel accepted and valued. This sense of acceptance acts as a strong psychological factor in fostering motivation for learning.²¹

The presence of an Indonesian student community in Tabuk also provides significant emotional support. Regular gatherings with fellow students and Indonesian nationals (WNI) working in the Tabuk area, including joint religious study sessions, help foster a sense of togetherness and renewed enthusiasm among students. The presence of such social support strengthens their intrinsic motivation to continue achieving and adapting to the new academic environment.²²

Based on previous research conducted by Muassomah, the quality of the learning environment, including the role of lecturers and social support, greatly affects students' motivation levels.²³ For instance, low participation in online learning reflects weak social bonds and an unsupportive learning environment. Conversely, at the University of Tabuk, an interactive and inclusive academic atmosphere strengthens students' enthusiasm to remain committed to their learning goals.²⁴

From a theoretical perspective, this condition can be explained through Maslow's, hierarchy of needs, which posits that a supportive academic environment allows the fulfillment of basic psychological needs, such as safety and a sense of belonging.²⁵ When these needs are met, students can more easily reach the stages of esteem and self-actualization, which serve as primary drivers of long-term learning motivation. Furthermore, according to Self-Determination Theory, a good academic environment can satisfy the three basic psychological needs of students: competence, autonomy, and relatedness.²⁶ At the University of Tabuk, students feel they have the space to develop their competence, the freedom to manage their learning process, and the opportunity to build positive relationships with lecturers and fellow students. These three aspects play a crucial role in fostering sustainable intrinsic motivation.

Second, Spiritual and Religious Values Factor. Spiritual factors and religious values constitute one of the most fundamental reasons motivating

²¹ Salah Eldin Kassab et al., "Influence of the University Campus Environment on Sociocultural Engagement and Satisfaction of Health Professions Education Students: Role of the Sense of Belonging," *BMC Medical Education* 24, no. 1 (December 21, 2024): 1512, <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12909-024-06534-4>.

²² Vika Nurul Mufidah and Nadiah Nurli Fadilah, "Hubungan Dukungan Sosial Terhadap Motivasi Belajar Mahasiswa," *Mozaic: Islam Nusantara* 9, no. 2 (October 31, 2023): 119–26, <https://doi.org/10.47776/mozaic.v9i2.850>.

²³ Muassomah, "Demotivation Of AFL Students In The Online Learning."

²⁴ Redhwan Qasem Ghaleb Rashed et al., "Enhancing Student Engagement and Motivation for Sustainable Education: The Role of Internship and Institutional Support," *Sustainability* 17, no. 12 (June 8, 2025): 5291, <https://doi.org/10.3390/su17125291>.

²⁵ Maslow, A. H., "A Theory of Human Motivation."

²⁶ Bouffard, "Ryan, R. M. et Deci, E. L. (2017). Self-determination theory. Basic psychological needs in motivation, development and wellness. New York, NY."

Indonesian students to study at the University of Tabuk. In general, students who choose to study in the Middle East are motivated not only by academic aspects but also by religious drives, such as the desire to deepen their understanding of Islamic teachings, learn the language of the Qur'an, and experience Islamic culture firsthand. This drive is intrinsic, as it arises from personal conviction and a sense of spiritual responsibility toward knowledge.

Learning motivation based on religious values tends to have greater resilience compared to instrumental motivation.²⁷ This is because spiritual motivation does not depend on external rewards, such as grades or degrees, but is rooted in the meaning of worship and devotion to Allah. When a student perceives the learning process as part of worship, every academic difficulty is no longer seen as a burden but as a test of patience and sincerity in seeking knowledge. This perspective explains why many students persist and adapt despite facing challenges such as language barriers, extreme weather, or cultural differences in Saudi Arabia.

According to Self-Determination Theory, this perspective emphasizes that intrinsic motivation grows when an individual experiences meaning and autonomy in their actions. In this context, students feel that learning Arabic and religious knowledge is a conscious choice aligned with their values and beliefs, rather than merely an academic requirement.²⁸ Therefore, spiritual motivation helps them achieve inner satisfaction while enhancing their resilience against academic pressures.

From the perspective of Maslow's hierarchy of needs, religious motivation can be categorized as part of self-actualization, the highest level of human motivation. When basic needs such as safety and social esteem are fulfilled, students begin to seek higher meaning, namely using knowledge to draw closer to God. In this context, academic success is measured not only by academic achievement but also by the enhancement of faith, morality, and spiritual awareness.²⁹

Furthermore, Expectancy-Value Theory explains that an individual is motivated when they perceive a learning activity as highly valuable. In the case of students at the University of Tabuk, learning Arabic holds great spiritual value because it is seen to directly understand the sources of Islamic teachings. This

²⁷ Khoirul Umam and Moch. Sya'roni Hasan, "Increasing Student Resilience Through Integration of Islamic Values in PAI Learning," *Tafkir: Interdisciplinary Journal of Islamic Education* 6, no. 2 (April 23, 2025): 388–350, <https://doi.org/10.31538/tijie.v6i2.1673>.

²⁸ Bouffard, "Ryan, R. M. et Deci, E. L. (2017). Self-determination theory. Basic psychological needs in motivation, development and wellness. New York, NY."

²⁹ Maslow, A. H., "A Theory of Human Motivation."

religious value reinforces the perception that academic success is not only for a career but also for the purpose of *da'wah* and service to the community.³⁰

Several previous studies also support this argument. Research by Razem and Pandor showed that integrative motivation, namely the desire to understand and engage with the culture of native Arabic speakers, is more dominant than instrumental motivation.³¹ In the context of Indonesian students, this integrative motivation is even extended into religious motivation, as learning Arabic is perceived as an effort to understand Islamic values. Furthermore, Khasanah also emphasized that cross-cultural learning experiences and interactions with a religious environment can shift motivation from external to a more internal and meaningful orientation.³²

It can be concluded that spiritual factors and religious values have a significant influence on the transformation of learning motivation among students at the University of Tabuk. A strong religious environment reinforces the perception of learning as worship, builds psychological resilience, and fosters stable and sustainable motivation. Religious values do not serve merely as temporary encouragement but also shape the paradigm that knowledge and faith mutually strengthen each other in students' academic journeys.

Third, Social and Family Support Factors. Support from family and the social environment is one of the key factors influencing students' learning motivation. This support may take the form of moral encouragement, financial assistance, emotional reassurance, and regular communication with family members in Indonesia. The presence of such social support enables students to feel cared for and valued, thereby reducing academic stress and enhancing their concentration in learning.

Students who receive support from their families generally show stronger learning motivation. For example, regular messages or phone calls from parents can provide psychological encouragement, helping students feel connected to home and reducing feelings of isolation. In addition, support from peers both fellow Indonesian students and international students creates a sense of belonging, offers opportunities to share learning experiences, and fosters mutual motivation.³³

Several informants revealed that maintaining communication with their families in Indonesia such as sharing achievements or talking about academic

³⁰ Wang and Xue, "The Implications of Expectancy-Value Theory of Motivation in Language Education."

³¹ Razem and Pandor, "The Motivational Orientations of Undergraduate Students to Learn Arabic in a Dubai Private University."

³² Khasanah, "Students' L2 Motivation Shift in Two-Year Access Microscholarship Program."

³³ Vika Nurul Mufidah and Nadiah Nurli Fadilah, "Hubungan Dukungan Sosial Terhadap Motivasi Belajar Mahasiswa," *Mozaic : Islam Nusantara* 9, no. 2 (October 31, 2023): 119–26, <https://doi.org/10.47776/mozaic.v9i2.850>.

challenges can enhance their learning motivation. The presence of caring friends or senior students also plays an important role in helping them adapt to a new environment, reducing feelings of loneliness, and encouraging independent learning.³⁴ For instance, the Indonesian student community in Tabuk often organizes social activities and group study sessions that help strengthen intrinsic motivation to achieve academic success. Self-determination theory emphasizes that social connectedness (relatedness) is one of the basic psychological needs that must be fulfilled to build intrinsic motivation. When students feel supported by their families and peers, they are more capable of maintaining long-term learning motivation.

It can be concluded that social and family support plays a crucial role in sustaining and transforming the learning motivation of Indonesian students at the University of Tabuk. Through moral encouragement, emotional support, and continuous communication, students feel valued and supported amid the academic and cultural challenges they encounter. Support from peers and student communities also reinforces a sense of belonging and nurtures intrinsic motivation to achieve success. In line with self-determination theory, social connectedness has been shown to be a key factor that enhances psychological resilience and academic achievement. Thus, social and family support can be regarded as an essential foundation in the process of transforming learning motivation within an international educational environment.³⁵

Fourth, Cultural and Social Adaptation Factors. Cultural and social adaptation factors are essential aspects that influence the success of Indonesian students in adjusting to academic life at the University of Tabuk.³⁶ This adaptation process includes the ability to understand and adapt the ability to adjust to the norms, habits, and social values practiced in Saudi Arabia both in daily life and within the campus environment is essential. The capacity to adapt quickly helps students reduce psychological pressure, create a sense of comfort, and strengthen their learning motivation optimally.³⁷

As students who come from different cultural backgrounds, many of them face initial challenges such as differences in communication styles, learning systems, and stricter social and religious norms. Nevertheless, Indonesian

³⁴ Jason Jeremy Sutedjo, "Family Communication Patterns in Enhancing Learning Motivation and Academic Achievement Among Students of Ciputra University Surabaya," *Eduvest - Journal of Universal Studies* 4, no. 3 (March 20, 2024): 1443–63, <https://doi.org/10.59188/eduvest.v4i3.1172>.

³⁵ Marjuki, Muh. Hanif, and Siminto, "The Role of Social Support in Enhancing Motivation and Psychological Well-Being of Students: Perspectives from Education in the Digital Era," *Indo-MathEdu Intellectuals Journal* 5, no. 2 (May 8, 2024): 1974–87, <https://doi.org/10.54373/imeij.v5i2.1003>.

³⁶ Abdullah Ahmed Alasmari, "Challenges and Social Adaptation of International Students in Saudi Arabia," *Heliyon* 9, no. 5 (May 2023): e16283, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.heliyon.2023.e16283>.

³⁷ Sefia Sungkowardani et al., "Dukungan Sosial Dan Penyesuaian Diri Terhadap Motivasi Belajar Pada Mahasiswa Perantauan Luar Jawa Di Kabupaten Banyumas," *PSIMPHONI* 3, no. 2 (September 15, 2022): 75, <https://doi.org/10.30595/psimphoni.v3i2.14610>.

students generally possess strong adaptive abilities due to the closeness of Islamic values and the shared moral principles between Indonesia and Saudi Arabia. This alignment facilitates the adjustment process, particularly in religious practices and social interactions.³⁸

Several informants revealed that their initial experiences in Tabuk required adjustments to a more formal academic climate with a high level of discipline. In addition, they had to understand the social etiquette of Arab society, including dress codes, the use of Arabic in daily communication, and the boundaries of interaction between men and women. Over time, the ability to adapt to these social norms fostered a sense of confidence and independence, which in turn strengthened their learning motivation.

The multicultural campus environment serves as an effective space for social learning. Interactions with students from various countries provide new insights into cultural diversity and different ways of thinking. This experience not only enriches cross-cultural knowledge but also fosters a tolerant, open, and communicative attitude.³⁹ In this context, the process of social adaptation becomes an important factor that drives personal development while broadening the meaning of learning motivation from mere academic achievement to the formation of a global character.

In conclusion, cultural and social adaptation plays a crucial role in shaping the learning motivation of Indonesian students at the University of Tabuk. The ability to adjust to a new environment, respect diversity, and interact effectively enhances students' confidence, resilience, and openness to learning experiences. This adaptation process not only strengthens intrinsic motivation but also contributes to the development of a mature academic and spiritual character. Thus, success in social and cultural adjustment becomes a key indicator of the sustainable transformation of learning motivation in an international environment.

Fifth, Technology and Independent Learning Factors. Technology and independent learning factors include students' ability to utilize various digital learning resources and manage the learning process independently. In the era of modern education, especially in international environments such as the University of Tabuk, this ability becomes crucial because students must adapt to differences in learning systems, limited face-to-face interaction, and the need to study effectively outside the classroom. Mastery of technology in independent

³⁸ Abdullah Ahmed Alasmari, "Challenges and Social Adaptation of International Students in Saudi Arabia," *Heliyon* 9, no. 5 (May 2023): e16283, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.heliyon.2023.e16283>.

³⁹ Satya Anggi Permana, "Sikap Toleransi Mahasiswa Dalam Kehidupan Kampus Multi Kultural," *An Nadwah* 29, no. 1 (April 13, 2023): 10, <https://doi.org/10.37064/nadwah.v29i1.15206>.

learning enables students to access materials, collaborate online, and organize their time and learning strategies according to their individual needs.⁴⁰

Indonesian students at Tabuk generally utilize technology to support their learning activities, such as the Al-Jazeera e-learning platform, communication applications with lecturers like WhatsApp, Outlook, and Gmail, online learning videos such as YouTube, as well as additional learning resources like *kitab turats* and digital books. The use of technology not only facilitates access to independent learning but also helps students review materials, understand complex concepts, and prepare assignments and exams independently.

Independent learning encourages students to take initiative and be responsible for their own learning process. Students who are accustomed to organizing their study schedules, setting priorities, and evaluating their understanding independently tend to have higher motivation because they feel a sense of control over their learning. This aligns with the principles of Self-Determination Theory, which emphasizes that autonomy in learning is one of the main drivers of intrinsic motivation.

Technology and independent learning factors not only support academic activities but are also closely related to psychological aspects that influence students' learning motivation. In relation to Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs, the use of technology can fulfill various levels of learning needs. Access to digital platforms helps students achieve learning security, providing a sense of safety in accessing information, understanding materials, and obtaining guidance without limitations of space or time, fulfilling the safety need in Maslow's structure. When used for academic interaction and discussion, technology also satisfies the love or belonging need, as students remain connected to the learning community even in an international environment. Successfully mastering materials through independent methods increases self-confidence and self-esteem, and ultimately, proficiency in technology enables students to reach self-actualization as they can learn and develop without relying entirely on formal teaching systems.⁴¹

In addition to Maslow, the use of technology in independent learning is also highly relevant to Self-Determination Theory Deci & Ryan. Technology provides a space for autonomy, as students can choose their study time, types of materials, comprehension strategies, and even reading pace according to their personal needs. When they successfully complete online assignments or

⁴⁰ Devita Cahyani Nugraheny, Niken Vioresa, and Islahuddin Islahuddin, "Educational Innovation: Digital Learning in The Disruptive Era," *PUSAKA: Journal of Educational Review* 2, no. 2 (January 31, 2025): 105–15, <https://doi.org/10.56773/pjer.v2i2.83>.

⁴¹ Andriansyah Bari and Randy Hidayat, "Teori Hirarki Kebutuhan Maslow Terhadap Keputusan Pembelian Merek Gadget," *MOTIVASI* 7, no. 1 (February 4, 2022): 8, <https://doi.org/10.32502/mti.v7i1.4303>.

independently understand Arabic texts using tools such as *Almaany* or Reverso Arabic Dictionary, their competence needs are fulfilled because they feel capable of mastering learning challenges. When students engage in discussions via Google Classroom, edit peers' work on Google Docs, or share reflective notes on blogs and Moodle E-Learning, a sense of relatedness with the learning community is also formed, which according to SDT, significantly enhances intrinsic motivation.⁴²

From this perspective, according to Expectancy-Value Theory technology supports learning motivation because its two main components expectancy (expectation of success) and task value can develop through independent learning experiences.⁴³ When students feel capable of understanding materials with the help of digital applications, their expectancy of success increases because they see evidence that they can succeed. Various digital resources, such as YouTube Arabic learning videos, digital kitab, electronic *turats* literature, and interactive exercises, make the learning process more engaging and relevant, thereby increasing the task value. The higher the perceived value of learning activities whether due to easy access to materials, engaging formats, academic career support, or alignment with personal needs the stronger their drive for independent learning.⁴⁴

Therefore, these three theories reinforce the understanding that technology is not merely a medium but a crucial component of students' independent learning. Technology provides a space to fulfill Maslow's psychological needs, fosters autonomy and competence according to Self-Determination Theory, and enhances expectancy of success and task value as outlined in Expectancy-Value Theory. The integration of these three perspectives illustrates that the ability to utilize technology is directly proportional to the enhancement of learning motivation, particularly in the context of Indonesian students at the University of Tabuk, who are required to be adaptive in an international academic system and independent learning environment.

Sixth, Maturity and Self-Awareness Factors. Maturity and self-awareness include students' ability to recognize themselves, manage emotions, understand personal strengths and weaknesses, and make appropriate learning decisions. Psychological maturity and self-awareness are important aspects in the transformation of learning motivation because they influence how students face

⁴² Bouffard, "Ryan, R. M. et Deci, E. L. (2017). Self-determination theory. Basic psychological needs in motivation, development and wellness. New York, NY."

⁴³ Siti Badriah and Surawan Surawan, "Peran Self-Determination dalam Meningkatkan Ketekunan Belajar Mahasiswa di Era Digital," *Observasi : Jurnal Publikasi Ilmu Psikologi* 3, no. 3 (June 16, 2025): 409–23, <https://doi.org/10.61132/observasi.v3i3.1506>.

⁴⁴ Wang and Xue, "The Implications of Expectancy-Value Theory of Motivation in Language Education."

academic challenges, manage stress, and adapt to the new environment at the University of Tabuk. Students with high levels of maturity and self-awareness tend to be more resilient, proactive, and responsible in managing their own learning process.⁴⁵

Students' maturity influences their ability to set learning goals, design achievement strategies, and maintain consistency and discipline in the learning process. Emotionally mature students can face academic pressure, cultural differences, and language barriers more wisely, thereby sustaining their intrinsic motivation. In addition, self-awareness encourages students to evaluate their learning progress objectively, identify obstacles, and seek appropriate solutions without being overly dependent on others.

In the context of Maslow, students who have reached a level of psychological maturity are generally at higher stages of needs, such as self-esteem and self-actualization, where learning motivation is no longer driven by basic needs but by the drive to grow, achieve, and maximize personal potential.⁴⁶ This aligns with Self-Determination Theory, which asserts that maturity and self-awareness enable students to satisfy the three psychological needs of competence, autonomy, and relatedness, thereby fostering strong intrinsic motivation in determining learning directions, making independent decisions, and adapting to various academic demands.

Meanwhile, Expectancy-Value Theory explains that emotionally mature students who are aware of their strengths and limitations possess more realistic expectations of success and evaluate learning tasks more positively, leading them to set clear goals, design effective learning strategies, and commit to achieving them.⁴⁷ Therefore, these three theories complement each other in illustrating how maturity and self-awareness serve as a crucial foundation for cultivating stable, reflective, and self-development-oriented learning motivation. The following Figure 1 summarizes the six key factors influencing the transformation of learning motivation:

⁴⁵ Stefa Bella Fitra, Rahma Widyana, and Mulianti Widanarti, "Hubungan Antara Konsep Diri Akademis Dengan Resiliensi Akademis Pada Mahasiswa," *PSIKOSAINS (Jurnal Penelitian Dan Pemikiran Psikologi)* 16, no. 2 (September 12, 2022): 117, <https://doi.org/10.30587/psikosains.v16i2.4561>.

⁴⁶ Badriah and Surawan, "Peran Self-Determination dalam Meningkatkan Ketekunan Belajar Mahasiswa di Era Digital."

⁴⁷ Wang and Xue, "The Implications of Expectancy-Value Theory of Motivation in Language Education."

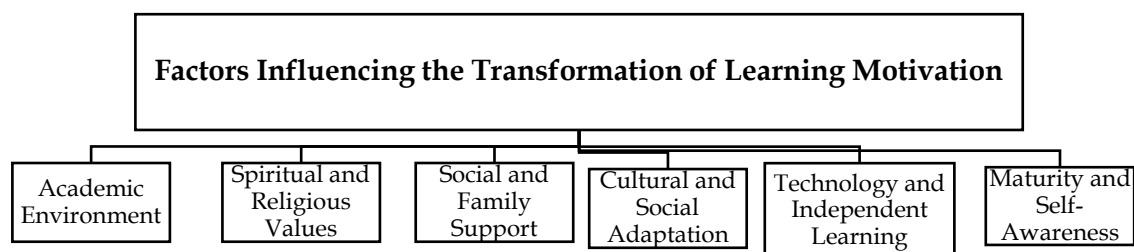


Figure 1. Factors Influencing the Transformation of Learning Motivation

Implications of Motivation Transformation

The transformation of motivation has a tangible impact on students' learning strategies. The shift from initial external motivation to internal motivation encourages students to develop more independent learning methods.⁴⁸ The use of digital technology, dictionary applications, and online learning platforms has become part of daily routines. Learning focus becomes increasingly directed toward long-term academic achievements, such as mastery of *fusha* and *'amiyah* Arabic, improvement of academic writing skills, and success in examinations. Study time planning becomes more structured as students recognize the importance of consistency rather than relying solely on short-term enthusiasm.

The transformation of motivation also influences students' social and cultural adaptation. Students who initially felt awkward interacting with the local community gradually demonstrated greater confidence. Their ability to understand local dialects, social customs, and Arab cultural etiquette improves as they gain the courage to engage in everyday conversations. Integration with the campus environment and surrounding community becomes easier because learning motivation is not solely oriented toward academic achievement, but also toward social connectedness.⁴⁹

The significance of motivation changes is reflected in students' academic achievements and personal development. Increasingly intrinsic motivation strengthens perseverance, creativity, and the willingness to continue learning despite challenges. This process aligns with the concept of self-actualization in Maslow's Theory, which positions learning to realize one's highest potential. The fulfillment of competence, autonomy, and related needs, as explained in Self-Determination Theory, leads to deep and sustainable learning satisfaction. Expectations of success and the perceived value of Arabic, according to

⁴⁸ Sunarti Rahman, "Pentingnya Motivasi Belajar Dalam Meningkatkan Hasil Belajar," *Pascasarjana Universitas Negeri Gorontalo Prosiding Seminar Nasional Pendidikan Dasar*, 2021.

⁴⁹ Adedapo Tunmise Aladegbaiye, Menno D.T. De Jong, and Ardion D. Beldad, "How International Students' Acculturation Motivation Develops over Time in an International Learning Environment: A Longitudinal Study," *Journal of International Students* 12, no. 2 (September 6, 2021), <https://doi.org/10.32674/jis.v12i2.3642>.

Expectancy-Value Theory, provide a foundation for maintaining consistent effort, enabling students to achieve their academic goals while developing as socially and emotionally mature individuals.

These findings offer a critical perspective that expands upon previous scholarship regarding motivational shifts. While Muassomah identified that demotivation among Arabic learners is often a terminal state caused by external factors such as infrastructure and learning structure,⁵⁰ this study argues that motivational decline is a temporary, transitional phase that can be repaired through internal adaptation and psychological resilience. Furthermore, this research refines the conclusions of Razem and Pandor, who found that "integrative motivation" (the desire to interact with the culture) was the dominant factor for expatriate students in Dubai.⁵¹ In the context of the University of Tabuk, this study reveals that integrative motivation for Indonesian students is not merely about social acculturation but is deeply intertwined with a "religious integrative" drive. Unlike the general expatriates in Razem and Pandor's study, Indonesian students' desire to integrate is fueled by the spiritual goal of understanding Islamic values and the language of the Qur'an, making their motivation more resilient than standard social integration.

Consequently, the primary novelty of this research lies in the identification of spiritual values (*ibadah*) as a unique, independent anchor for academic resilience, a factor largely overlooked in general studies on international student adaptation. Existing literature, such as Alasmari's work, heavily emphasizes social adaptation and overcoming culture shock as the keys to survival in Saudi Arabia.⁵² However, this study argues that for Indonesian students, the transformation from extrinsic to intrinsic motivation is uniquely sustained by framing academic struggles as a form of worship. This distinguishes the "Tabuk Experience" from other study-abroad contexts, the motivation here is not driven solely by degree acquisition or career prospects, but by a transcendental purpose that acts as a buffer against demotivation. By highlighting this spiritual dimension within the unexplored context of the University of Tabuk, this research contributes a new theoretical perspective on how religious worldviews function as a critical mechanism for sustaining learning motivation in rigorous foreign environments.

⁵⁰ Muassomah, "Demotivation Of AFL Students In The Online Learning."

⁵¹ Razem and Pandor, "The Motivational Orientations of Undergraduate Students to Learn Arabic in a Dubai Private University."

⁵² Alasmari, "Challenges and Social Adaptation of International Students in Saudi Arabia," May 2023.

CONCLUSION

This research concludes that the learning motivation of newly enrolled Indonesian students at the University of Tabuk is a dynamic phenomenon that undergoes a distinct transformation during the first academic year. The study reveals a trajectory where motivation initially surges due to religious and academic idealism, experiences a decline caused by culture shock and academic pressure, and eventually restabilizes through a process of adaptation. This transformation is not a linear path but a complex interaction between internal drives and external challenges. The findings indicate that while initial motivation is often instrumental or idealistic, the successful transition to sustainable, intrinsic motivation relies heavily on specific influencing factors: a supportive academic environment, the integration of spiritual values, strong social and family support, successful cultural adaptation, the utilization of technology for independent learning, and personal psychological maturity.

The arguments presented in this study reinforce the applicability of Self-Determination Theory and Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs within a specific cross-cultural and religious educational context. A key strength of this research lies in its identification of spiritual values as a primary anchor for resilience, unlike general international students who may rely solely on academic integration, Indonesian students at Tabuk derive profound motivation from viewing their studies as a form of worship (*ibadah*). Furthermore, this study strengthens the argument that social connectedness (relatedness) facilitated by the Indonesian student community and family communication is not merely a support system but a fundamental psychological need that, when met, directly prevents prolonged demotivation. The research validates that the shift from external validation to internal autonomy is the critical mechanism that allows these students to survive and thrive in a rigorous foreign environment.

Despite these significant contributions, this research acknowledges certain limitations that outline the trajectory for future studies. First, as a phenomenological study with a purposive sample of eight students, the findings provide deep insight into specific lived experiences but cannot be statistically generalized to all Indonesian students in Saudi Arabia. Second, the study focuses exclusively on the University of Tabuk, which may have different environmental dynamics compared to universities in larger cities like Mecca or Medina. Therefore, future research is recommended to employ a longitudinal approach to track motivation changes over the full four-year degree program, rather than just the first year. Additionally, comparative studies involving Indonesian students across multiple universities in the Middle East would provide a broader understanding of whether the "Tabuk experience" is unique or representative of

a wider regional phenomenon. Such research would further refine the support systems necessary to ensure the academic success of Indonesian students abroad.

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