Exploring the Hopes of Arabic Language Students Through the Scale to Assess Possible Selves (SAPS) in Metro City

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Abstract : This study explores the motivational dimensions of Arabic language learning in Indonesia through the lens of the possible-selves theory, addressing a critical gap in research that has predominantly focused on English language learners. The main objective is to examine how students in Metro City envision their future selves in relation to Arabic language competence and to assess the applicability of the Scale to Assess Possible Selves (SAPS) in this context. Employing a quantitative approach, data were collected through questionnaires adapted from the SAPS instrument, translated into Indonesian for clarity, and analyzed using crosstab analysis with SPSS to identify relationships between learners' self-perceptions, motivation, and institutional factors. The findings reveal significant and consistent gaps between students' current abilities and their expected selves across multiple Arabic programs, suggesting a systemic aspiration, attainment mismatch influenced by program design and institutional support. The study's novelty lies in its cross-institutional analysis that operationalizes the possible-selves framework within Arabic education, providing theoretical extension and practical implications for curriculum design, mentoring systems, and motivational interventions in Indonesian Islamic higher education. Future research is recommended to expand this framework through longitudinal and mixed-method approaches to examine the dynamic development of students' possible selves across diverse Islamic higher education contexts.

INTRODUCTION

After more than a decade of formal Arabic instruction, many students in Islamic higher education continue to struggle with functional communicative competence, revealing a persistent paradox in Arabic language education.[1] This gap cannot be sufficiently explained by instructional methods or curriculum design alone, but rather points to deeper motivational and psychological

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[1] Moslem Yousefi and Mohammad Hadi Mahmoodi, "The L2 Motivational Self-system: A Meta-analysis Approach," *International Journal of Applied Linguistics* 32, no. 2 (2022): 274–94, https://doi.org/10.1111/ijal.12416.

dimensions of language learning.[2] Over recent decades, the role of future-oriented self-representations in academic and language-learning contexts has become increasingly prominent. In educational psychology, the concept of *possible selves* directly links self-concept and motivation, individuals imagine the person they hope to become, the person they expect to become, and the person they fear becoming, thereby influencing their goals, behaviours, and perseverance.[3] This framework is especially important in language learning, where the learner's vision of their future self as a competent speaker of a second or foreign language can serve as a powerful engine for sustained effort and progress.

In the domain of second/foreign language (L2) learning, one of the most influential theoretical frameworks is Zoltán Dörnyei's *L2 Motivational Self System* , which posits that a learner's Ideal L2 Self (the future self as a successful L2 user) and Ought-to L2 Self (the future self-one believes one ought to become) are central motivational components.[4] These future self-guides generate discrepancy with the current self and hence drive motivated behaviours. Dörnyei argues that language learners who hold vivid, plausible, and personally relevant visions of their future selves are more likely to persist and engage in learning.

Research in applied linguistics has shown that motivating future self-images are particularly relevant for Less Commonly Taught Languages (LCTLs) such as Arabic, learners of Arabic often face distinct motivational challenges making the role of possible selves even more critical. Moreover, the local cultural, religious, and educational conditions (for example in Indonesia) may mean that learners of Arabic conceive their future selves differently from English learners.

The measurement of possible selves in language learning has been advanced by efforts such as the work by Peter D. MacIntyre, Sean P. Mackinnon, and Richard Clément, who developed the *Scale to Assess Possible Selves (SAPS)* to operationalize these constructs in language-learning contexts.[5] Meanwhile, in the Arabic learning context, Alshammari reports on the paucity of validated measures for motivation and future-self in Arabic L2/FL contexts.[6] The possible selves

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[2] Ema Ushioda, "Language Learning Motivation, Self and Identity: Current Theoretical Perspectives," *Computer Assisted Language Learning* 24, no. 3 (2011): 199–210, https://doi.org/10.1080/09588221.2010.538701.

[3] Ekaterina Vasilevskaya and Olga Molchanova, "Possible Selves and Academic Motivation in Russian and American College Students," *Психология. Журнал Высшей Школы Экономики* 18, no. 2 (June 30, 2021): 352–65, https://doi.org/10.17323/1813-8918-2021-2-352-365.

[4] Zoltán Dörnyei, "The L2 Motivational Self System," in *Motivation, Language Identity and the L2 Self* (Canada: Multilingual Matters, 2009), 9–42.

[5] Peter D. Macintyre, Sean P. Mackinnon, and Richard Clément, "Toward the Development of a Scale to Assess Possible Selves as a Source of Language Learning Motivation," in *Motivation, Language Identity and the L2 Self*, ed. Zoltán Dörnyei and Ema Ushioda (Canada: Multilingual Matters, 2009), 193–214, https://doi.org/10.21832/9781847691293-011.

[6] Alya Alshammari, Danya Shaalan, and Badriyya Al-onazi, "Instruments Measuring Motivation to Learn Arabic as a Second Language: Evidence of Validity and Reliability,"

theory was first introduced by Markus & Nurius, who argued that future self-representations incorporate hopes, goals, fears and threats, and thereby link self-concept with motivation.[7] In academic domains, possible selves have been shown to motivate behaviour, for example in adolescents' academic achievement and self-regulation.[8]

MacIntyre et al. developed the Scale to Assess Possible Selves (SAPS) to assess how possible selves may act as sources of language-learning motivation. Subsequent studies have extended this line of inquiry, for example, research investigating the measurement of future selves in L2 contexts in Saudi Arabia found that future-self visions are relevant motivators in collectivist settings.[9] Likewise, Karimi & Norouzi (2019) developed several measures of possible language teacher selves, demonstrating validity and reliability in different contexts.[10] Calafato (2019) studied non-Arab expatriate learners of Arabic in the UK curriculum and found that motivational profiles using the L2 Motivational Self System framework show distinct patterns in Arabic learners compared to other language learners.[11] More recently, Alshammari notes that instruments to assess motivation and future selves in Arabic learning contexts are scarce and that validation work is needed.[12]

Moreover, while Arabic language motivation research exists (for example studies on Arabic learning motivation in Singapore, or motivation of Arabic learners in Japan), few of these explicitly address the possible-selves construct or apply SAPS in Arabic-language learner populations.[13] In the Indonesian context, although there are many studies on language-learning motivation (primarily English), fewer studies focus on Arabic learning, and even fewer incorporate

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Humanities and Social Sciences Communications 11, no. 1 (July 6, 2024): 887, https://doi.org/10.1057/s41599-024-03381-y.

[7] Hazel Markus and Paula Nurius, "Possible Selves.," *American Psychologist* 41, no. 9 (September 1986): 954–69, https://doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.41.9.954.

[8] Evropi Efthymiadou, Eleftheria N. Gonida, and Grigoris Kiosseoglou, "Academic Possible Selves, Motivational Beliefs, and Self-Regulation Among Adolescents Attending General and Vocational Schools: Does the Type of School Matter?," *Behavioral Sciences* 15, no. 2 (February 1, 2025): 158, https://doi.org/10.3390/bs15020158.

[9] Alshammari, Shaalan, and Al-onazi, "Instruments Measuring Motivation to Learn Arabic as a Second Language: Evidence of Validity and Reliability."

[10] Mohammad Nabi Karimi and Monireh Norouzi, "Developing and Validating Three Measures of Possible Language Teacher Selves," *Studies in Educational Evaluation* 62 (September 2019): 49–60, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.stueduc.2019.04.006.

[11] Raees Calafato and Fei Tang, "The Status of Arabic, Superdiversity, and Language Learning Motivation among Non-Arab Expats in the Gulf," *Lingua* 219 (February 2019): 24–38, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.lingua.2018.11.003.

[12] Alshammari, Shaalan, and Al-onazi, "Instruments Measuring Motivation to Learn Arabic as a Second Language: Evidence of Validity and Reliability."

[13] Katsunori Sumi and Akiko M. Sumi, "The Arabic Learning Motivation Questionnaire: Development of a New Japanese Measure Based on Self-Determination Theory," *Psychology* 10, no. 16 (2019): 2209–23, https://doi.org/10.4236/psych.2019.1016140.

possible-selves theory. This gap suggests that Arabic-language learners in Indonesia represent an under-explored group in terms of future-self imagery, motivational orientations and the application of instruments such as SAPS.

While prior research has made valuable contributions, several gaps remain. First, despite the existence of SAPS and related scales for language learning motivation, empirical application of SAPS in Arabic language learner contexts is minimal. Second, existing Arabic-language motivation research often addresses general motivational orientation rather than future-self imagery (possible selves). Third, the specific socio-cultural and educational context of Indonesian Arabic-language learners, especially in cities such as Metro city, remains under-investigated regarding their hopes, fears and expected selves in language learning.

The main problem and need can be articulated as follows How do Arabic language learners in Kota Metro imagine their future selves (in terms of corresponding to Arabic language competence/use)? What is the relationship between their possible selves (hopes, expectations, fears) and their current motivation, engagement and behaviours in Arabic-language learning? Addressing this gap is important not only for theoretical extension of possible selves and the SAPS instrument, but also for practical implications insights from this research can inform curriculum designers, educators, and institutional policy for Arabic programs in Indonesia, helping them to harness future-self imagery as a motivational resource.

This research makes both theoretical and practical contributions. Theoretically, it extends the possible-selves framework and the SAPS instrument into the context of Arabic language learning in Indonesia, thereby broadening the cross-cultural and cross-linguistic validity of future-self-motivational research. Practically, the findings offer valuable insights for Indonesian Arabic language programs by illuminating how students envision their future selves, educators can design interventions, curriculum and pedagogical strategies that align with those visions and thereby enhance motivation, persistence and achievement in Arabic learning.

METHOD

This study employed a quantitative research approach aimed at describing data obtained through questionnaires distributed to respondents. The research instrument adopted the Scale to Assess Possible Selves (SAPS) developed by MacIntyre et al. The measurement of possible selves in language learning has been advanced by efforts such as the work by Peter D. MacIntyre, Sean P. Mackinnon, and Richard Clément, who developed the *Scale to Assess Possible Selves (SAPS)* to

operationalize these constructs in language-learning contexts.[14] To ensure clarity and ease of understanding, the instrument was translated into Indonesian, allowing respondents to provide more accurate and meaningful answers. The SAPS instrument in this study consisted of three main indicators, ideal self indicators (statements 1–6), ought-to self indicators (statements 7–12), and learning experience indicators (statements 13–18). These indicators were designed to explore students' self-perceptions and aspirations related to their Arabic language learning process.

The respondents of this research comprised all students enrolled in Arabic Language Education (PBA) programs at four higher education institutions that served as the research sites. For the undergraduate level (strata 1), participants were selected from first-, second-, third-, and fourth-year students, while for the postgraduate level (strata 2), participants were drawn from first- and second-year students. The inclusion criteria were based on the assumption that students who are still actively engaged in academic activities would provide relevant and representative data regarding their expectations in Arabic language learning. This classification aimed to capture diverse perspectives by considering variations in university affiliation, academic year, and educational level.

Based on data from the Higher Education Database (Pangkalan Data Pendidikan Tinggi), the total population of respondents was 350 students, distributed 99 from UIN JUSILA (PBA S1), 41 from UIN JUSILA (BSA S1), 34 from UIN JUSILA (PBA S2), 54 from UMALA (PBA S1), 44 from UNISLA (PBA S1), and 78 from IAI Darul A'mal (PBA S1). To determine the research sample, the Slovin formula with a 5% margin of error (Sugiyono, 2022) was applied, resulting in a total of 187 respondents. The sample distribution was then determined through the proportionate stratified random sampling technique to ensure balanced representation across all study programs and strata. Accordingly, the number of samples from each institution was 53 from UIN JUSILA (PBA S1), 22 from UIN JUSILA (BSA S1), 18 from UIN JUSILA (PBA S2), 29 from UMALA (PBA S1), 24 from UNISLA (PBA S1), and 41 from IAI Darul A'mal (PBA S1).

The collected data were analyzed using crosstab analysis with the assistance of SPSS statistical software. This analytical technique was chosen to identify relationships and patterns among the variables, particularly to explore how students' possible selves and learning experiences vary according to their academic levels and institutional contexts. The use of SPSS facilitated systematic data processing and interpretation, thereby enhancing the accuracy and reliability of the research findings.

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[14] Macintyre, Mackinnon, and Clément, "Toward the Development of a Scale to Assess Possible Selves as a Source of Language Learning Motivation."

RESULT AND DISCUSSION
Future self-imagery of Arabic language learners

The cross-tabulation below presents data obtained from respondents based on their respective universities. This analysis provides information regarding the current state of motivation and aspirations among Arabic language students across different higher education institutions.

Table 1.
Cross-Tabulation of the Current Condition of Arabic Language Students Across Universities

| | | Category of Current Condition | | | Total |
		Low	Moderate	High	
PBA/UIN JUSILA	Count	6	25	22	53
	% within Prodi/PT	11,3%	47,2%	41,5%	100,0%
BSA/UIN JUSILA	Count	4	10	8	22
	% within Prodi/PT	18,2%	45,5%	36,4%	100,0%
MPBA/UIN JUSILA	Count	1	13	4	18
	% within Prodi/PT	5,6%	72,2%	22,2%	100,0%
PBA/UMALA	Count	8	20	1	29
	% within Prodi/PT	27,6%	69,0%	3,4%	100,0%
PBA/UNISLA	Count	2	6	16	24
	% within Prodi/PT	8,3%	25,0%	66,7%	100,0%
PBA/IAI Darul A'mal	Count	3	27	11	41
	% within Prodi/PT	7,3%	65,9%	26,8%	100,0%
Total	Count	24	101	62	187
	% within Prodi/PT	12,8%	54,0%	33,2%	100,0%

Table 1 presents a cross-tabulation between the categories of current condition and the study programs and universities attended by Arabic language students across institutions. In general, out of a total of 187 respondents, the majority fall into the "moderate" category at 54.0%, followed by the "high" category at 33.2%, and the "low" category at 12.8%. This indicates that, overall, Arabic language students across different universities demonstrate relatively good academic and non-academic conditions.

More specifically, students from the PBA program at UIN JUSILA show a fairly balanced distribution, with most falling under the moderate (47.2%) and high (41.5%) categories. Similarly, students from the BSA program at UIN JUSILA show a comparable pattern, although the proportion in the high category is slightly lower (36.4%). Meanwhile, MPBA students at UIN JUSILA are predominantly in the moderate category (72.2%), suggesting a stable academic condition that, while good, has not yet reached the optimal high level.

Interestingly, students from the PBA program at UMALA occupy the highest proportion in the moderate category (69.0%) but a very low proportion in the high category (3.4%), which can be interpreted as indicating untapped potential for improving their academic quality. In contrast, the PBA program at UNISLA shows a positive tendency, with the highest proportion in the high category (66.7%),

suggesting superior performance compared to other universities. Meanwhile, students from the PBA program at IAI Darul A'mal are mostly in the moderate category (65.9%), followed by the high category (26.8%), reflecting relatively stable student conditions, though certain aspects still require further improvement.

The data in the table 1 illustrate the variation in the conditions of Arabic language students across different universities, with the moderate category being dominant. This indicates that although most students are in a fairly good condition, there remains room for improvement, particularly in strengthening competencies and motivation so that more students can reach the high category.

Table 2.
Cross-Tabulation of Arabic Language Students' Expectations Across Universities

		Expectation Category			Total
		Low	Moderate	High	
PBA/UIN JUSILA	Count	1	9	43	53
	% within Prodi/PT	1,9%	17,0%	81,1%	100,0%
BSA/UIN JUSILA	Count	2	8	12	22
	% within Prodi/PT	9,1%	36,4%	54,5%	100,0%
MPBA/UIN JUSILA	Count	0	9	9	18
	% within Prodi/PT	0,0%	50,0%	50,0%	100,0%
PBA/UMALA	Count	1	4	24	29
	% within Prodi/PT	3,4%	13,8%	82,8%	100,0%
PBA/UNISLA	Count	1	0	23	24
	% within Prodi/PT	4,2%	0,0%	95,8%	100,0%
PBA/IAI Darul A'mal	Count	0	7	34	41
	% within Prodi/PT	0,0%	17,1%	82,9%	100,0%
Total	Count	5	37	145	187
	% within Prodi/PT	2,7%	19,8%	77,5%	100,0%

Table 17 presents a cross-tabulation between students' expectation categories and their respective study programs (Prodi) and universities (PT). In general, out of a total of 187 respondents, the majority of Arabic language students across institutions fall within the high expectation category at 77.5%, followed by moderate expectations at 19.8%, and only 2.7% in the low category. These results indicate that, overall, students possess a very positive level of optimism and expectations toward their future studies, careers, and personal development in the field of Arabic language.

More specifically, students from the PBA program at UIN JUSILA show a very strong dominance in the high expectation category (81.1%), with smaller proportions in the moderate (17.0%) and low (1.9%) categories. Meanwhile, BSA students at UIN JUSILA display a more balanced distribution, with 54.5% in the high and 36.4% in the moderate category, indicating good expectations, though not as strong as the previous group. MPBA students at UIN JUSILA are evenly distributed between moderate (50.0%) and high (50.0%) categories, reflecting a stable yet not extreme level of expectation.

Students from PBA UMALA and IAI Darul A'mal demonstrate a very positive trend, with a dominant proportion in the high category at 82.8% and 82.9%, respectively. A similar yet even stronger pattern appears among PBA UNISLA students, nearly all of whom (95.8%) fall within the high expectation category, making them the group with the highest level of optimism among all respondents.

Figure 1 illustrates the differences between students' current conditions and their expectations in the PBA program at UIN JUSILA.
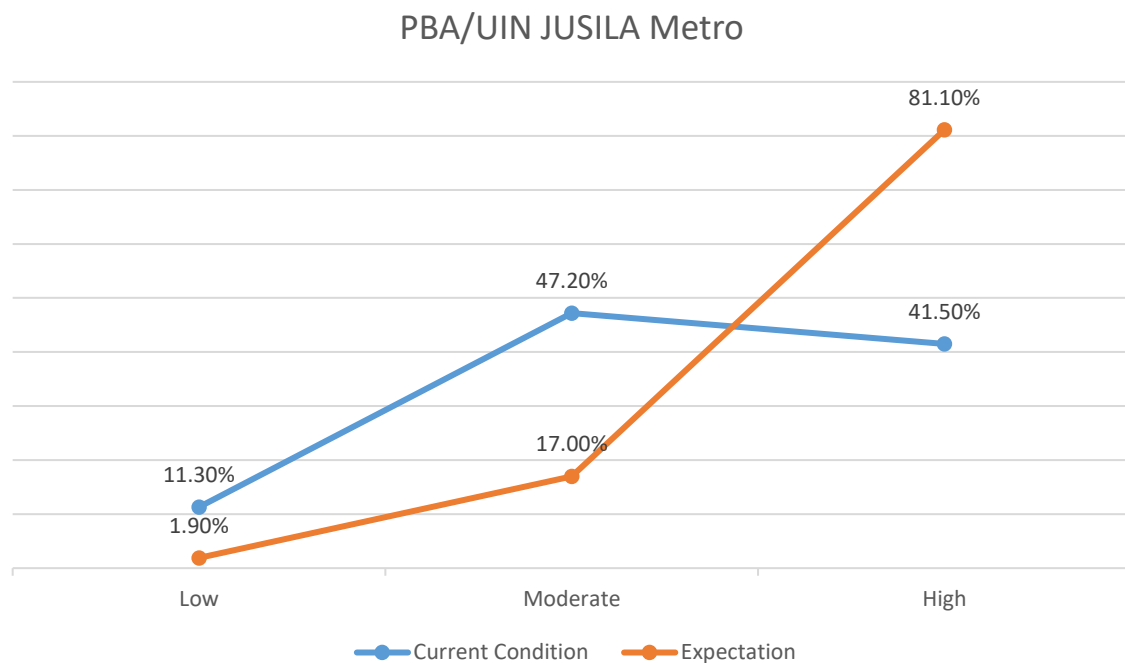

Figure 1. Graph of the Current Condition and Expectations of PBA/UIN JUSILA Students

Figure 1 illustrates a significant gap between the current condition and the expectations of students in the Arabic Language Education Program (PBA) at UIN JUSILA regarding their studies. In the low category, only 11.3% of students are currently in this condition, while merely 1.9% express expectations to remain there. This indicates that most students do not wish to stay in a low-performing state, reflecting a strong drive to improve their circumstances.

In the moderate category, 47.2% of students are presently in this condition, but only 17.0% hope to remain at this level. This suggests that although many students are currently in a relatively good state, they aspire to move toward higher achievement. The most striking difference appears in the high category, where the current condition stands at 41.5%, while expectations reach 81.1%. This nearly 40% gap demonstrates a very strong aspiration among students to achieve an ideal condition such as academically, motivationally, and personally. The graph reveals that PBA/UIN JUSILA students possess strong motivation and optimism toward improving their personal quality and academic achievement. Although the

current condition is still dominated by the moderate category, the high level of expectation reflects great potential for progress, provided that the institution can offer sufficient support, resources, and a conducive learning environment to help students realize these aspirations.

Figure 2 illustrates the differences between students' current conditions and their expectations in the BSA program at UIN JUSILA.
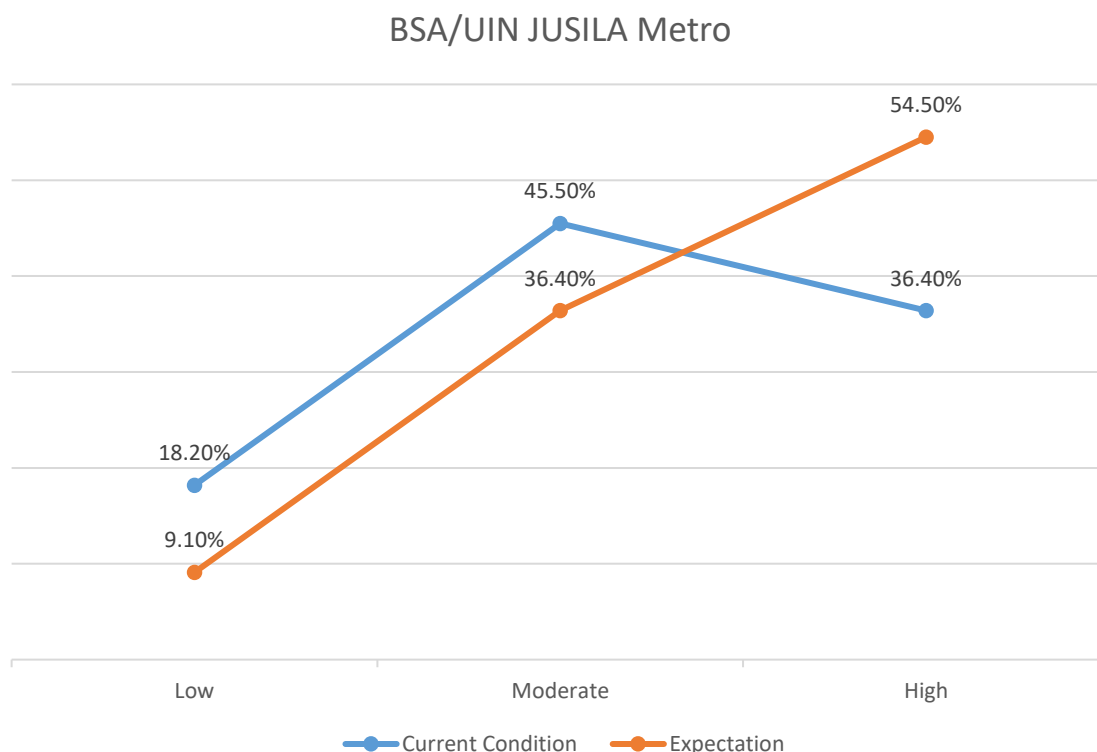

BSA/UIN JUSILA Metro

Figure 2. Graph of the Current Condition and Expectations of BSA/UIN JUSILA Students

Figure 2 shows that 18.2% of students are currently in the low category, while only 9.1% express low expectations. This indicates that BSA students have a strong desire to move out of less favorable conditions and improve their personal and academic quality. In the moderate category, 45.5% of students are presently at this level, while 36.4% expect to remain there. This suggests that most students who are currently at the moderate level aim to progress to a higher state, reflecting a considerable degree of motivational drive.

Meanwhile, in the high category, there is a notable increase from 36.4% in the current condition to 54.5% in expectations. This 18% difference indicates that BSA students possess strong aspirations to achieve an ideal condition, both in terms of academic competence, learning experience, and mastery of the Arabic language. The graph reveals that BSA/UIN JUSILA students demonstrate a positive level of optimism regarding their personal and academic development. Although many students are still situated in the moderate category, the sharp rise in the proportion of students with high expectations reflects a strong spirit and

determination to advance. Therefore, the study program should continue to strengthen academic support, mentoring, and enrichment activities that can bridge the gap between students' current conditions and their ideal aspirations.

Figure 3 illustrates the differences between students' current conditions and their expectations in the MPBA program at UIN JUSILA.
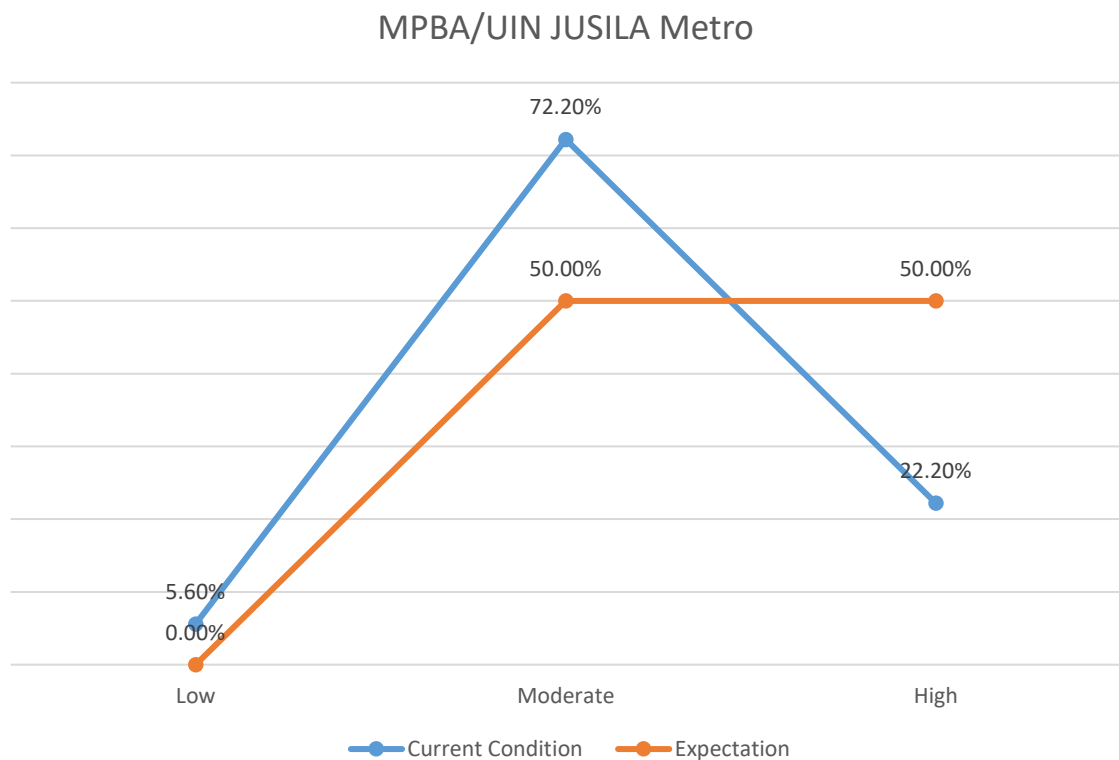

Figure 3. Graph of the Current Condition and Expectations of MPBA/UIN JUSILA Students

Figure 3 shows that 5.6% of students are currently in the low category, while none (0%) express a desire to remain at that level. This clearly indicates that all students wish to move out of the low condition and strive to improve their achievements. In the moderate category, 72.2% of students are presently situated there, reflecting that the majority are currently at a middle level in terms of academic performance, motivation, and Arabic language proficiency. However, only 50.0% of students expect to remain in the moderate category, suggesting that a significant portion of them aspire to progress toward a higher level.

A notable change appears in the high category, where the current condition is only 22.2%, while students' expectations reach 50.0%. This approximately 28% gap highlights the strong aspiration among MPBA students to achieve higher levels of academic and personal excellence. They are not satisfied with the moderate condition that currently dominates and display a strong desire to grow and improve. The graph illustrates that MPBA/UIN JUSILA students possess high optimism and a strong internal drive for self-improvement. Although their current condition remains concentrated in the moderate category, the upward

trend in the high-expectation category signifies great potential for both academic and professional development. Therefore, strategic support from the study program is essential through improved learning quality, academic mentoring, and the provision of platforms for self-actualization to help students realize their aspirations more effectively.

Figure 4 illustrates the differences between students' current conditions and their expectations in the PBA program at UMALA.
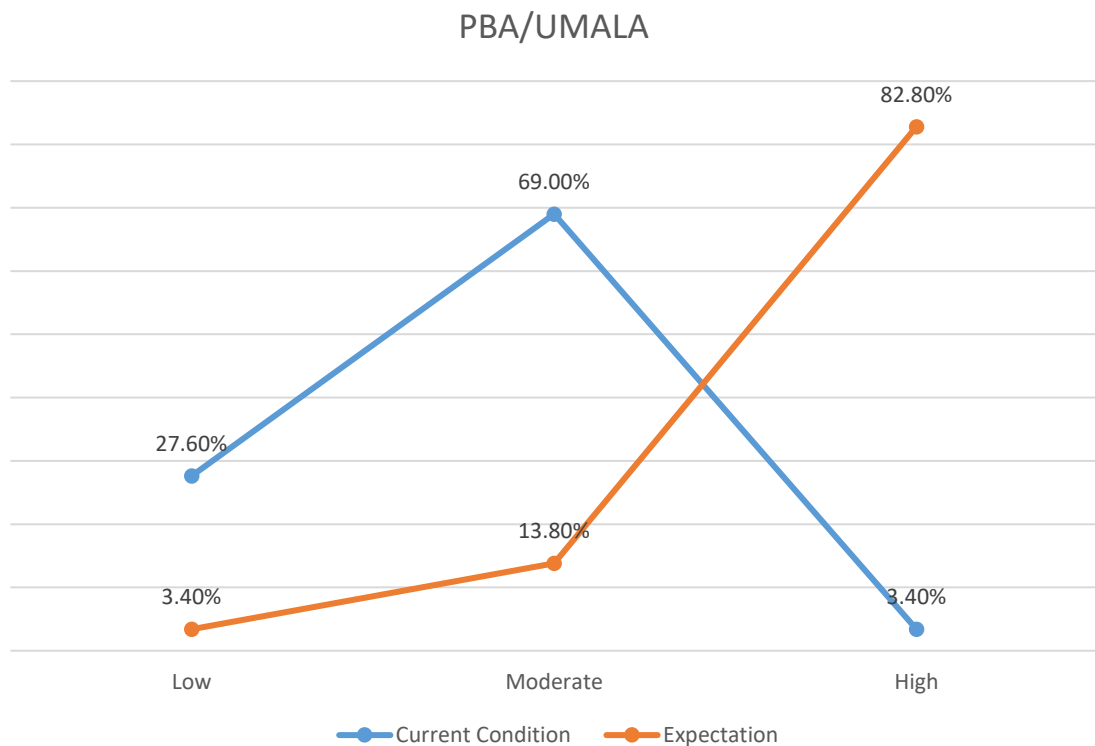
PBA/UMALA

Figure 4. Graph of the Current Condition and Expectations of PBA/UMALA Students

Figure 4 shows that 27.6% of students are currently in the low category, while only 3.4% express expectations to remain at that level. This indicates that most students wish to move out of less favorable conditions and are striving to improve their situation. In the moderate category, 69.0% of students are currently positioned there, yet only 13.8% expect to stay at that level. This suggests that the majority of students are not satisfied with their present condition and seek significant improvement in their academic abilities and overall quality.

The most striking change appears in the high category, where the current condition is only 3.4%, while expectations soar to 82.8%. This gap of over 79% reflects the exceptional ambition and optimism of PBA/UMALA students in achieving the highest level of performance such as academically, linguistically, and professionally. The graph demonstrates that PBA/UMALA students possess very high motivation and expectations for self-development, even though their current condition remains far below their aspirations. These findings highlight the

crucial role of the institution and study program in providing intensive academic support.

Figure 5 illustrates the differences between students' current conditions and their expectations in the PBA program at UNISLA.
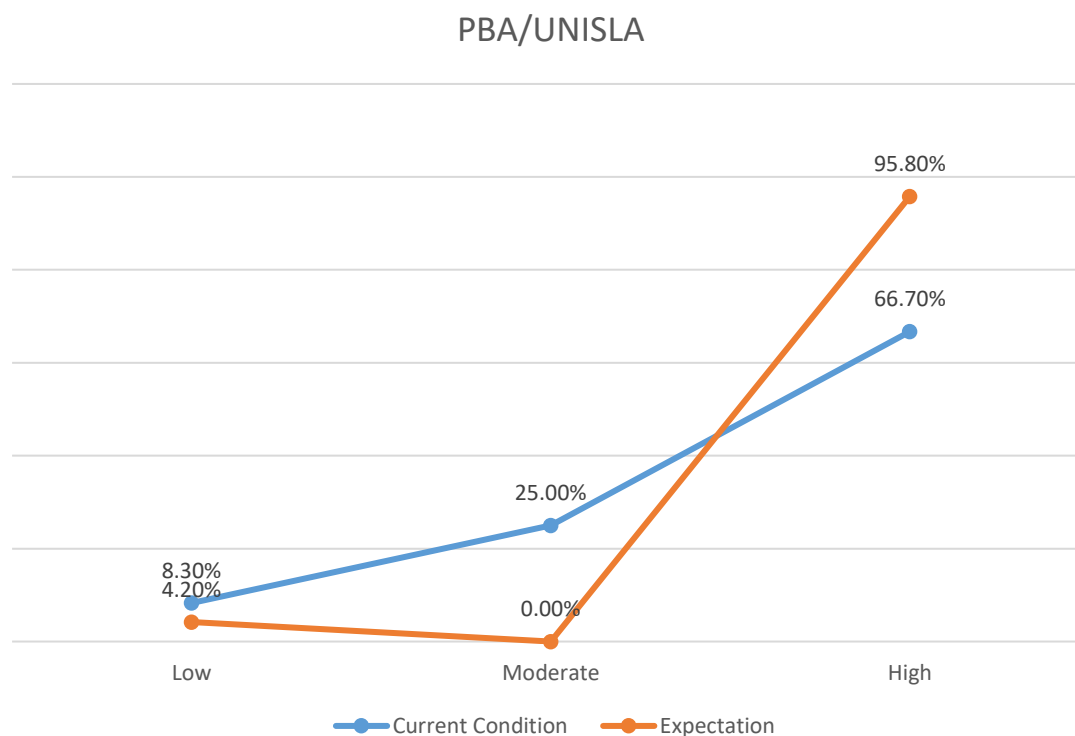

PBA/UNISLA

Figure 5. Graph of the Current Condition and Expectations of PBA/UNISLA Students

Figure 5 shows that 8.3% of students are currently in the low category, while only 4.2% express expectations to remain at that level. This indicates that most students do not wish to stay in a low condition and are motivated to improve themselves. Interestingly, in the moderate category, 25.0% of students are presently at this level, but none (0%) expect to remain there. This means that all PBA/UNISLA students aspire to advance to a higher condition, reflecting a collective drive toward greater achievement.

The most striking difference appears in the high category, where the current condition reaches 66.7%, while expectations sharply increase to 95.8%. This nearly 30% gap illustrates the very strong aspirations among students to reach the peak of academic quality and professional excellence in the field of Arabic language studies. The graph reveals that PBA/UNISLA students possess a very high level of optimism and enthusiasm for learning. They not only demonstrate commendable performance in their current state but also hold ambitious goals for continuous improvement. With an already strong current condition, their expectations indicate an exceptional learning ethic and commitment to academic and career advancement. This finding serves as a positive indicator for the

institution to maintain and further strengthen the existing learning system while continuing to accommodate the students' high expectations.

Figure 6 illustrates the differences between students' current conditions and their expectations in the PBA program at IAI Darul A'mal.
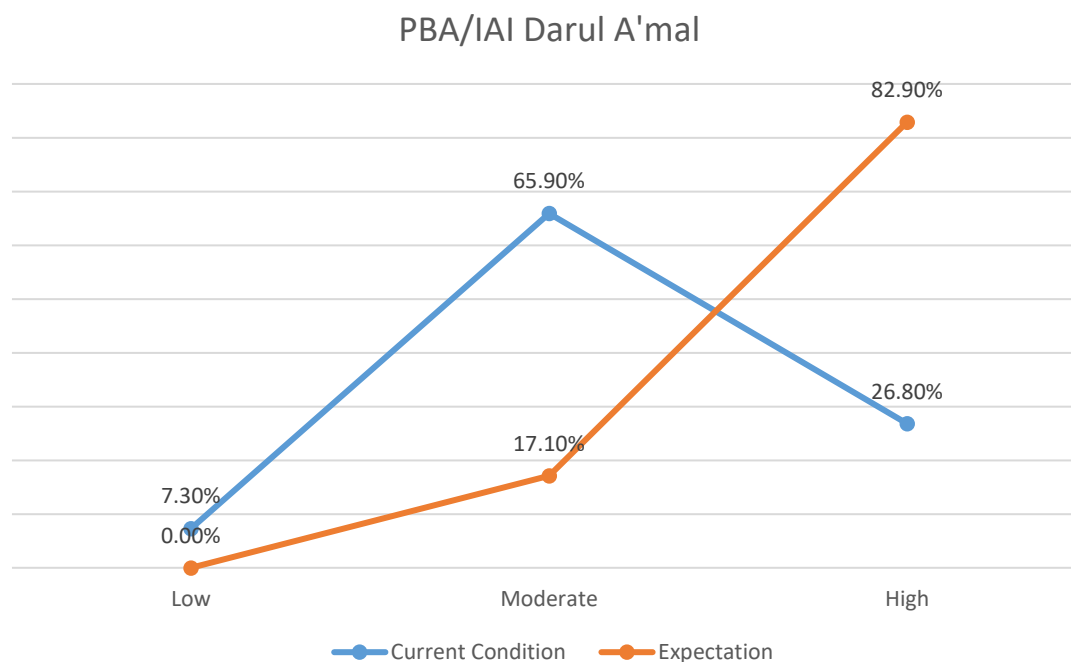

PBA/IAI Darul A'mal

Figure 6. Graph of the Current Condition and Expectations of PBA/IAI Darul A'mal Students

Figure 6 shows that 7.3% of students are currently in the low category, while none (0%) expect to remain at that level. This indicates that all students aim to move beyond the low category and enhance their competencies. Such a pattern reflects a strong motivation for continuous growth and self-improvement. The moderate category presents an interesting point, as 65.9% of students are currently at this level, yet only 17.1% wish to stay there. This significant difference demonstrates that most students aspire to reach the high category, highlighting a progressive spirit in their learning process and development of Arabic language proficiency.

The most striking shift occurs in the high category, where the current condition stands at only 26.8%, while expectations rise sharply to 82.9%. This dramatic increase reflects the students' strong ambition to achieve the highest standards of academic excellence, both in Arabic language mastery and in the professionalism and religiosity that characterize PBA programs in Islamic higher education institutions. The graph illustrates that PBA/IAI Darul A'mal students possess a highly positive and improvement-oriented pattern of aspiration. They recognize their current condition as being at a moderate stage but hold strong aspirations toward academic perfection. These findings can serve as a foundation for the institution to strengthen its learning strategies, academic motivation, and

institutional support, ensuring alignment with students' high expectations and optimism about their future in the field of Arabic Language Education.

The Relationship between Learners' Possible Selves (Hopes, Expectations, and Fears) and Their Motivation, Engagement, and Behaviours in Arabic Language Learning

The findings across the six institutional contexts consistently demonstrate a strong and meaningful relationship between students' possible selves and their current motivation, engagement, and learning behaviours in Arabic language education. The recurring pattern observed in all graphs is the substantial gap between students' current conditions and their future expectations, especially the pronounced aspiration to move from moderate or low categories into the high category. This discrepancy reflects the operation of a vivid future-oriented self-image that functions as a motivational driver, shaping how students perceive their present efforts and guiding their commitment to improvement in Arabic language competence and use.[15]

Students' hoped-for possible selves are clearly evident in the sharp rise of the high-expectation category across all institutions, regardless of their current standing. For instance, students in PBA/UIN JUSILA, MPBA/UIN JUSILA, and PBA/IAI Darul A'mal show particularly large gaps between their present condition and desired future state. Such patterns indicate that learners strongly envision themselves as academically competent, linguistically proficient, and professionally prepared Arabic language users. These ideal self-images serve as cognitive representations that energize motivation by providing learners with a clear sense of direction and purpose.[16] The strong aspirations reflected in the data suggest that students' motivation is not passive or incidental, but rather future-driven and goal-oriented, influencing their willingness to invest sustained effort in Arabic learning activities.

Students' expectations appear to regulate their engagement in more pragmatic and realistic ways. In programs where the moderate category remains dominant in the current condition, such as MPBA/UIN JUSILA and PBA/UMALA, students' expectations show a gradual but decisive shift toward higher levels rather than an immediate leap. This indicates that learners are aware of their current limitations but still believe that progress is attainable.[17] Such

[15] Phil Hiver and Ali H Al-Hoorie, "Reexamining the Role of Vision in Second Language Motivation: A Preregistered Conceptual Replication of You, Dörnyei, and Csizér (2016)," *Language Learning* 70, no. 1 (2020): 48–102, https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1111/lang.12371.

[16] Wen-Ta Tseng, Hsing-Fu Cheng, and Xuesong Gao, "Validating a Motivational Self-Guide Scale for Language Learners," *Sustainability* 12, no. 16 (2020): 6468, https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.3390/su12166468.

[17] Mark Feng Teng and Junjie Gavin Wu, "An Investigation of Learners' Perceived Progress during Online Education: Do Self-Efficacy Belief, Language Learning Motivation, and

expected selves function as self-regulatory mechanisms, helping students calibrate their learning behaviours, persist through challenges, and maintain engagement even when immediate outcomes do not match their long-term aspirations. The alignment between moderate current conditions and elevated expectations thus reflects a motivational state characterized by resilience rather than frustration.[18]

The role of feared possible selves, although not directly measured as a separate category, can be inferred from the near-total rejection of the low category in students' expectations across all institutions. In several cases, no students expressed a desire to remain in the low category.[19] This pattern suggests that learners actively seek to avoid an undesirable future identity marked by poor academic performance, limited Arabic proficiency, or diminished professional prospects.[20] The avoidance of such feared selves likely contributes to students' behavioural engagement, encouraging them to participate more actively in learning tasks, seek academic support, and remain committed to improvement. In possible selves' theory, this avoidance-oriented motivation complements ideal-self aspirations by creating psychological pressure to act in ways that prevent negative outcomes.[21]

The data further reveal that the strength of students' possible selves is closely related to their observable engagement and learning behaviours. Institutions where students already demonstrate relatively strong current conditions also exhibit exceptionally high expectations, suggesting a reinforcing cycle between current success and future-oriented motivation.[22] Learners' engagement appears to be sustained not merely by external requirements, but by an internalized vision

Metacognitive Strategies Matter?," *The Asia-Pacific Education Researcher* 33, no. 2 (2024): 283–95, https://doi.org/10.1007/s40299-023-00727-z.

[18] Shengli Yang and Weirong Wang, "The Role of Academic Resilience, Motivational Intensity and Their Relationship in EFL Learners' Academic Achievement," *Frontiers in Psychology* 12 (2022): 823537, https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2021.823537.

[19] Kitty Te Riele and Sarah Stewart, "Moving from Past Selves Shaped by Adversity to Hoped-for Possible Selves: Experiences of Young People in Flexible Learning Options," *The Australian Educational Researcher*, 2025, 1–18, https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1007/s13384-025-00802-y.

[20] Amir Reza Rahimi and Zahra Mosalli, "Exploring the Direct and Indirect Effects of EFL Learners' Online Motivational Self-System on Their Online Language Learning Acceptance: The New Roles of Current L2 Self and Digital Self-Authenticity," *Asian-Pacific Journal of Second and Foreign Language Education* 9, no. 1 (2024): 49, https://doi.org/10.1186/s40862-024-00266-0.

[21] Neil Harrison, "Using the Lens of 'Possible Selves' to Explore Access to Higher Education: A New Conceptual Model for Practice, Policy, and Research," *Social Sciences* 7, no. 10 (2018): 209, https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.3390/socsci7100209.

[22] Paolo Bozzato, "The Future Orientation of Italian Adolescents in Post-Pandemic Times: Associations with Self-Efficacy and Perceived Academic Achievement," *Education Sciences* 14, no. 2 (2024): 170, https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.3390/educsci14020170.

of continuous growth and excellence.[23] Conversely, in institutions where current conditions remain largely moderate or low, the magnitude of students' aspirations indicates latent motivational potential that has not yet been fully translated into performance. This gap highlights the importance of institutional mediation in transforming possible selves into concrete learning behaviours through structured support, mentoring, and meaningful learning experiences.

Across all contexts, the consistency of these patterns suggests that possible selves operate as a unifying psychological mechanism linking students' internal aspirations with their external academic behaviours. Learners who strongly envision themselves as competent future users of Arabic are more likely to demonstrate persistence, optimism, and proactive engagement, even when their current abilities do not yet reflect their ideals.[24] The data also imply that without adequate institutional support, the motivational energy generated by these possible selves may remain aspirational rather than fully realized. Thus, the relationship between possible selves and current motivation is not linear but interactive, shaped by contextual factors such as learning environment, instructional quality, and academic scaffolding.

Cross-Institutional Aspiration–Attainment Gap as a Structural Pattern

The cross-institutional patterns report signal more than transient optimism, they point to a systemic aspiration–attainment mismatch that aligns with theoretical work on "possible selves" and empirical literature on the aspiration–attainment (or aspiration–expectation) gap. MacIntyre et al.'s framework for measuring possible selves (SAPS) explains how strongly imagined future selves drive motivation in language learners, and it helps interpret why so many students report very high expectations even when current performance is moderate.[25] Empirical studies show that such aspiration–attainment gaps are common and meaningful, they predict later transitions and mismatches in outcomes after school (the aspiration–attainment literature) and are shaped by institutional, pedagogical, and socio-economic factors.[26]

[23] Barry Bai and Jing Wang, "The Role of Growth Mindset, Self-Efficacy and Intrinsic Value in Self-Regulated Learning and English Language Learning Achievements," *Language Teaching Research* 27, no. 1 (2023): 207–28, https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1177/1362168820933190.

[24] Hezi Y Brosh, "Arabic Language-Learning Strategy Preferences among Undergraduate Students," *Studies in Second Language Learning and Teaching* 9, no. 2 (2019): 351–77, https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.14746/ssllt.2019.9.2.5.

[25] Macintyre, Mackinnon, and Clément, "Toward the Development of a Scale to Assess Possible Selves as a Source of Language Learning Motivation."

[26] Désirée Nießen et al., "'You Can't Always Get What You Want': Prevalence, Magnitude, and Predictors of the Aspiration–Attainment Gap after the School-to-Work Transition," *Contemporary Educational Psychology* 71 (October 2022): 102091, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cedpsych.2022.102091.

Drawing on the integration of these findings and empirical evidence, three key analytical insights emerge. First, the magnitude and consistency of the gaps across distinct Arabic programs indicate that the phenomenon is not simply individual optimism but likely structural, because similar gaps recur even where baseline conditions differ.[27] Second, the pattern matches findings that motivation and identity (including mastery orientation and "possible selves") strongly influence aspirations but require institutional scaffolding (mentoring, curriculum alignment, meaningful formative assessment) to convert into attainment; these results therefore implicate institutional support as the critical moderator between aspiration and achievement.[28] Third, program-by-program variance in gap size (e.g., UMALA's >79% vs. UNISLA's ~30%) suggests targeted interventions will be more effective than one-size-fits-all policies, programs with large gaps may need intensive academic remediation plus career scaffolding, whereas programs with smaller gaps should focus on sustaining excellence and preventing complacency. These findings both confirm established theory (possible selves & aspiration–attainment gaps) and sharpen policy-relevant diagnosis by quantifying where and how much institutional action is needed to turn high expectations into measurable gains.[29]

The novelty of this study lies in three interrelated contributions. First, this research conducts a cross-institutional quantification by systematically comparing students' current conditions and future expectations across multiple Islamic higher education institutions and study programs. Second, the study advances theoretical integration by operationalizing the possible selves framework within Arabic language education and empirically linking learners' hoped-for, expected, and avoided future selves to their present motivation, engagement, and learning behaviours. Third, the study offers a practical prioritization framework by translating empirical gaps between current conditions and future expectations into actionable institutional insights. This framework enables study programs to identify which aspects of learning support, mentoring, and curriculum development should be prioritized to effectively bridge the gap between students' aspirations and their actual learning experiences.

Building upon these findings, two practical extensions can enhance both the analytical depth and institutional relevance of this study. First, a methods

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[27] Javier Mendoza-Villafaina and Natalia López-Mosquera, "Educational Experience, University Satisfaction and Institutional Reputation: Implications for University Sustainability," *The International Journal of Management Education* 22, no. 3 (November 2024): 101013, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijme.2024.101013.

[28] Kourosh Amrai et al., "The Relationship between Academic Motivation and Academic Achievement Students," *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences* 15 (2011): 399–402, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2011.03.111.

[29] Macintyre, Mackinnon, and Clément, "Toward the Development of a Scale to Assess Possible Selves as a Source of Language Learning Motivation."

appendix could be developed to statistically link the Scale to Assess Possible Selves (SAPS), derived scores with institutional predictors such as mentoring hours, student–teacher ratio, and frequency of formative assessments. Through regression analysis, this would empirically determine which institutional factors most strongly predict the aspiration. Such modeling would not only quantify institutional impact but also strengthen the study's explanatory power within the data-driven paradigm of educational research.[30]

Second, a policy brief can be produced that translates the quantitative insights into actionable strategies. This one-page summary would map program-specific interventions, such as enhanced mentoring for UMALA (with the widest gap), enrichment programs for JUSILA and MPBA, and sustainability measures for UNISLA (with the smallest gap), directly to the magnitude of each institution's aspiration gap. By doing so, the brief would function as a practical tool for institutional leaders and policymakers to prioritize resources effectively. These extensions bridge the divide between research and practice, the first offering empirical validation through advanced statistical modeling, and the second delivering policy translation to ensure that findings inform real educational improvement.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that Arabic Language Education students across multiple Islamic higher education institutions consistently exhibit strong future-oriented aspirations, regardless of variations in their current academic conditions. The substantial gap between students' present states and their desired ideals confirms the central role of possible selves in shaping motivation, engagement, and learning behaviours in Arabic language learning. As a novel contribution, this research offers a cross-institutional and quantitatively grounded application of the possible selves framework in Arabic education, a context that remains underexplored in motivational research. The findings underscore that institutional support is essential for translating aspirational motivation into actual academic achievement. Future research should build on this framework by employing longitudinal and intervention-based designs to examine how institutional strategies can effectively bridge the gap between learners' aspirations and realized outcomes.

The results imply that program administrators should strengthen academic mentoring, career guidance, and curriculum innovation to better align learning pathways with students' aspirations. Educators need to provide consistent feedback, create motivational classroom climates, and integrate reflective learning

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[30] Yuliya Vladimirovna Grecu, "Differentiated Instruction: Curriculum and Resources Provide a Roadmap to Help English Teachers Meet Students' Needs," *Teaching and Teacher Education* 125 (April 2023): 104064, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2023.104064.

practices that help students monitor their growth. At the policy level, institutions are encouraged to reinforce quality assurance systems, support lecturer capacity building, and expand authentic learning opportunities through partnerships with schools, *pesantren*, and language centers.

This study is limited by its reliance on self-reported data, its regional scope, and its cross-sectional design, which restricts broader generalization and understanding of aspiration development over time. Future research should adopt longitudinal and mixed-methods approaches, expand to wider institutional contexts, and examine specific predictors of aspiration such as autonomy support, teaching quality, and prior learning experience. Experimental or intervention-based studies are also recommended to evaluate the effectiveness of mentoring programs and reflective pedagogical models.

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