

Analysis of Learning Motivation of Third-Semester Students in the Islamic Religious Education Study Program at STAI Al-Gazali Soppeng

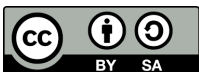
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Abstract: Learning motivation is one of the important factors that determine whether a student can succeed in college, especially for students of the Islamic Religious Education Study Program who must balance academic learning and religious values. This study aims to understand the learning motivation of third-semester students of the Islamic Religious Education Study Program at STAI Al-Gazali Soppeng, as well as the factors that influence this motivation. This study used a qualitative approach with descriptive methods. Data were collected through observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation of students selected purposively. Data analysis was carried out in three stages: data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. The results show that student learning motivation is influenced by internal factors such as learning interests, ideals, and religious awareness, as well as external factors such as the teaching methods of lecturers, the learning environment, and support from surrounding communities. These findings indicate that student learning motivation is in the fairly good category, but still needs to be improved. This study emphasizes the importance of innovation in teaching methods and guidance that combine academic and spiritual to continuously strengthen student learning motivation.

Keywords: Academic Motivation; External Factors; Internal Factors; Islamic Religious Education; Teaching Innovation.

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1. Introduction

Learning motivation is an important factor that influences how students succeed in higher education. This motivation originates from both internal and external sources, encouraging students to be more interested, diligent, and responsible in achieving their learning goals. In religious higher education, particularly in the Islamic Religious Education (PAI) Study Program, learning motivation plays an even broader role. In addition to supporting the understanding of academic materials, motivation also helps strengthen religious values, shape good character, and prepare students to become professional Islamic educators (Marfu et al., 2024).

National studies conducted over the past five years indicate that the learning enthusiasm of PAI students is influenced by various internal and external factors. Internally, these include learning interest, life goals, future perspectives, and the level of religious belief. Externally, factors include lecturers' teaching methods, the campus learning environment, family support, and the learning system implemented during lectures (Mahardhika & Rosyida, 2025). These studies found that learning motivation has a significant influence on students' learning processes and outcomes. Meanwhile, Firdiawan et al. (2023) demonstrated that the use of innovative learning models, such as Project-Based Learning, can enhance students' motivation and academic performance in Islamic Religious Education courses.

Other studies also show that the higher an individual's learning motivation, the better their learning ability and the more actively they participate in the learning process. Marfu et al. (2024) emphasized that learning motivation is a key factor in creating meaningful PAI learning. In addition, Septiyadi and Nugroho (2024) stated that extrinsic motivation also plays a role in determining students' attitudes and learning outcomes. However, most of these studies focus on final-year students or large public universities, and therefore do not fully represent the learning motivation conditions of early-semester students in private religious higher education institutions. Other findings indicate that strong learning motivation is associated with students' independent learning abilities and active participation in learning (Marfu et al., 2024).

Based on previous studies, there is an opportunity to conduct further research on the learning motivation of Islamic Religious Education students during the early stages of their academic journey, particularly in the third semester, within Islamic higher education institutions (STAI) located in regional areas. Research specifically examining the learning motivation of third-semester PAI students at STAI Al-Gazali Soppeng remains very limited, even though the early phase of higher education is a critical period for shaping students' learning habits, academic attitudes, and professional commitment. This condition highlights the need for more contextual and in-depth research.

This study aims to understand the reasons why third-semester students of the Islamic Religious Education Study Program at STAI Al-Gazali Soppeng engage in learning. This research employs a descriptive qualitative approach. The findings are expected to provide empirical evidence that can contribute to improving PAI teaching methods and serve as a reference for lecturers and program administrators in enhancing the quality of learning.

2. Theoretical Review

Concept of Learning Motivation

Learning motivation refers to internal and external drives that encourage individuals to strive toward achieving learning objectives. In the field of education, motivation is crucial as it promotes active engagement, persistence, and commitment in attaining academic success. Motivation is not only related to emotions but also involves cognitive processes and actions in the learning process. Individuals with high motivation tend to be more active in learning, complete tasks effectively, and achieve satisfactory outcomes. Learning motivation is generally categorized into two main types: intrinsic motivation, which originates from within the individual such as curiosity and the desire for self-development; and extrinsic motivation, which is influenced by external factors such as praise, rewards, or environmental pressures (Marfu et al., 2025).

Relevant Theories of Motivation

Abraham Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs Theory

Maslow's theory explains that an individual's motivation to learn can be understood through a hierarchy of needs, starting from physiological needs, safety needs, social needs, esteem needs, and culminating in self-actualization. Once basic needs are fulfilled, individuals are motivated to achieve higher-level needs, including personal development and educational goals (Abraham et al., 2022).

Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan)

This theory states that individuals demonstrate higher motivation when they experience autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Intrinsic motivation arises from enjoyment and meaningfulness in learning activities, whereas extrinsic motivation is driven by external factors such as praise or recognition from others (Nabila et al., 2025).

Behavioristic and Cognitive Theories

From a behavioristic perspective, motivation is dependent on the outcomes of actions, such as rewards or positive reinforcement. In contrast, the cognitive perspective emphasizes that motivation is associated with goals, expectations, and beliefs that learning efforts will yield desired outcomes. Studies integrating multiple perspectives highlight the importance of employing diverse motivational strategies in contemporary educational environments (Thohiroh et al., 2025).

Relevance of Learning Motivation in Islamic Religious Education (PAI)

In the context of Islamic Religious Education, learning motivation is not solely focused on academic achievement but also on the application of religious values in daily life. Islamic education aims to develop character, enhance spirituality, and foster ethical behavior. Learning motivation in this context reflects both personal intentions to deepen religious understanding and external influences such as family support, school environment, and teaching methods (Rohmah, 2022).

3. Research Method

This study employs a qualitative approach with a descriptive research design, aiming to obtain an in-depth and factual understanding of the learning motivation of third-semester students in the Islamic Religious Education Study Program at STAI Al-Gazali Soppeng. Qualitative research seeks to understand meanings, experiences, and how individuals perceive the social world from their own perspectives. This research is conducted in a natural setting without manipulation, with the researcher acting as the primary instrument. The data typically consist of words, narratives, experiences, and perceptions. The primary objective is to explore the meaning of human interactions or social phenomena in depth, rather than measuring frequency or testing hypotheses quantitatively. Data were collected through observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation, and then analyzed thematically to reflect participants' lived experiences (Metodologi, 2023).

This approach was chosen because it enables the researcher to understand the phenomenon of learning motivation based on the experiences, perceptions, and viewpoints of the research subjects in a contextual and natural manner.

Research Design

The research design used is descriptive qualitative, which focuses on describing social phenomena as they naturally occur without manipulating variables. This study seeks to illustrate the condition of students' learning motivation and the factors influencing it within the context of Islamic Religious Education.

Research Subjects

The research subjects consist of third-semester students of the Islamic Religious Education Study Program at STAI Al-Gazali Soppeng. Subjects were selected using purposive sampling, meaning that informants were intentionally chosen based on specific criteria, such as active participation in lectures and willingness to provide relevant information. These subjects are considered capable of representing the phenomenon under study.

Data Collection Techniques and Instruments

Data collection was carried out using several techniques:

Observation

Observation in qualitative research is a method of collecting data by directly observing events, actions, or situations in the field without manipulation, aiming to obtain accurate and in-depth information regarding the social context or phenomenon being studied (Putri & Murhayati, 2025). This technique allows researchers to capture natural and contextual realities, ensuring that the data reflect actual conditions. Observation is often supported by systematic recording, such as field notes or observation checklists, to enable comprehensive analysis. It may take various forms, including participant and non-participant observation, depending on the researcher's role and research objectives. In qualitative research, observation is closely associated with a naturalistic approach, where phenomena occur naturally without intervention (Wani et al., 2024).

Interviews

Interviews are a qualitative data collection method conducted through direct interaction between the researcher and participants, aiming to explore in-depth information,

meanings, experiences, perceptions, and viewpoints related to the studied phenomenon (Wani et al., 2024). Unlike casual conversations, interviews are guided systematically based on research objectives while remaining flexible to allow participants to express their thoughts freely and in detail. Qualitative interviews can be structured, semi-structured, or unstructured, but they all emphasize deep understanding through reflective and context-sensitive dialogue (Evhlín et al., 2025).

Data Analysis Technique

Data analysis was conducted qualitatively using an interactive model consisting of three stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. The collected data were selected and categorized according to the research focus, then presented in descriptive narratives to facilitate interpretation and conclusion formulation (Ash-shiddiqi et al., 2025).

Data Validity

Data validity was ensured by triangulating findings from observations, interviews, and documentation. The results indicate that the data are consistent and reliable, thereby providing a valid basis for drawing research conclusions (Susanto & Jailani, 2023).

Research Model

The research model illustrates that students' learning motivation is influenced by two main components: internal and external factors. Internal factors include learning interest, aspirations, and religious awareness, while external factors consist of teaching methods, academic environment, and social support. These factors interact to shape the level of students' learning motivation in the Islamic Religious Education learning process.

4. Results and Discussion

Data Collection Process and Location

This study was conducted at the Sekolah Tinggi Agama Islam (STAI) Al-Gazali Soppeng, particularly in the third-semester Islamic Religious Education (PAI) Study Program. Data collection was carried out over approximately two months, namely in January 2026. The research subjects were selected purposively, consisting of active third-semester students who were considered capable of providing in-depth information regarding their learning motivation.

Data collection techniques included in-depth interviews, observation of classroom activities, and documentation studies such as lesson plans (RPS), student attendance records, and academic reports. The researcher acted as the primary instrument while using semi-structured interview guidelines to maintain the research focus. Data validity was ensured through triangulation of techniques and sources.

Results of Data Analysis

Based on data analysis using the Miles and Huberman model (data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing), several key themes describing the learning motivation of third-semester PAI students were identified:

Intrinsic Motivation

Students reported having high learning motivation driven by the desire to gain a deeper understanding of PAI materials, improve self-quality, and strengthen religious values in daily life. This finding aligns with previous research (Saikhudin & Yeli, 2026), which states that learning motivation in Islamic Religious Education encompasses spiritual and moral aspects that reinforce communal values and shape students' religious character.

Extrinsic Motivation

Extrinsic motivation emerged from lecturer support, a religious campus environment, varied teaching methods, and family expectations. Several students stated that communicative and contextually relevant teaching styles enhanced their enthusiasm for learning. Additionally, career prospects for PAI graduates also serve as a significant external motivating factor.

Inhibiting Factors of Learning Motivation

The main challenges identified include limited learning facilities and heavy academic workloads, which led to decreased motivation at certain stages. This finding is consistent with previous studies (Amirah, 2025), indicating that students' motivation is dynamic and may fluctuate due to various academic challenges.

Table 1. Factors Influencing Learning Motivation of Third-Semester PAI Students

Kategori	Temuan Utama
Intrinsic Motivation	Religious awareness, career aspirations, learning interest
Extrinsic Motivation	Lecturer support, campus environment, family expectations
Inhibiting Factors	Facilities, academic workload, time management

Discussion

The learning motivation of third-semester students in the Islamic Religious Education Study Program at STAI Al-Gazali Soppeng is shaped by both internal and external factors. Theoretically, this finding supports the view that learning motivation is not a simple construct but a complex phenomenon influenced by psychological, spiritual, social, and academic environmental aspects. In this study, intrinsic motivation is dominant, including religious awareness, interest in deepening Islamic knowledge, and aspirations to become educators. This indicates that students engage in learning not only for practical purposes but also for values and meaning. These findings are consistent with previous research (Marfuah, 2024).

Based on the results presented in the table, extrinsic motivation functions as a reinforcement of students' intrinsic motivation. Lecturer support, student-friendly teaching methods, and a religious campus atmosphere have been shown to enhance student participation in learning. These findings align with previous research (Bagus et al., 2025), which states that lecturers' teaching competence and a conducive learning environment significantly influence students' learning motivation. Thus, students' motivation is not solely derived from internal factors but is also shaped by the quality of academic interactions they experience.

Factors that hinder learning motivation include inadequate learning facilities, excessive academic workload, and difficulties in time management, especially for students with responsibilities outside their studies. These findings indicate that learning motivation is dynamic and can fluctuate depending on academic conditions and personal circumstances. This is consistent with previous research (Amirah, 2025), which emphasizes that academic pressure and limited institutional support can reduce students' motivation despite strong intrinsic motivation.

The findings of this study are also consistent with Mahardhika & Rosyida (2025), who highlight the role of extrinsic motivation in Islamic education, particularly regarding family expectations and future career prospects. However, this study adds that for early-semester students, extrinsic motivation does not serve as the primary driver but rather as a supporting factor for pre-existing intrinsic motivation.

Alignment with Theory and Previous Studies

- a. **Theoretical Foundation of Learning Motivation in PAI**
Marfuah (2024) states that learning motivation drives learning behavior and encompasses affective, cognitive, and psychomotor aspects, all of which are essential for achieving success in PAI learning. This aligns with the present findings, where intrinsic motivation serves as the primary driving factor.
- b. **Lecturers' Pedagogical Competence as an External Factor**
Dewanti et al. (2025) found a positive relationship between lecturers' pedagogical competence and students' learning motivation, indicating that teaching strategies can enhance student engagement. This supports the finding that lecturer support is a key motivational factor at STAI Al-Gazali Soppeng.
- c. **Variability of Motivation in Academic Contexts**
Amirah (2025) explains that student motivation is dynamic and changes in response to academic challenges. This is consistent with the present findings, where students' motivation fluctuates when facing obstacles such as heavy workloads.
- d. **Extrinsic Motivation in PAI Learning**
Syamsurizal et al. (2025) found that external factors such as family expectations and job prospects influence students' academic choices and achievements. This supports the current findings, although in early-semester students, extrinsic motivation primarily acts as a supporting factor.

Differences from Previous Studies

Although this study identifies intrinsic motivation as the main driver of learning among PAI students, some previous studies emphasize the dominant role of extrinsic motivation in certain contexts. Monica et al. (2025), for example, found that external factors such as rewards, teacher appreciation, and social recognition had a stronger impact on students' academic performance at the junior secondary level. In contrast, this study finds that external motivation plays a supporting rather than primary role.

Similarly, Syamsurizal et al. (2025) demonstrated that praise and rewards significantly stimulate students' initial interest in PAI learning. However, this differs from the higher education context, where intrinsic motivation related to professional goals and spiritual values tends to be more dominant. This suggests that educational level and institutional context influence the relative importance of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation.

Theoretical Interpretation and Implications

The learning motivation of third-semester PAI students at STAI Al-Gazali Soppeng can be interpreted as a multidimensional construct formed through the integration of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. Theoretically, this finding confirms that motivation in Islamic education is influenced not only by academic needs but also by spiritual values, religious awareness, and life goals. The dominance of intrinsic motivation indicates that students perceive learning as a meaningful process for character development and strengthening Islamic identity, rather than merely fulfilling academic obligations.

This study contributes to motivational theory by reinforcing the view that individuals actively construct learning meaning through personal experience and social context. In Islamic education, learning motivation can be understood as an internal drive shaped by faith, ethics, and service orientation, supported by external factors such as lecturers, academic environment, and learning systems.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

This study concludes that the learning motivation of third-semester students in the Islamic Religious Education Study Program at STAI Al-Gazali Soppeng is formed through a combination of intrinsic and extrinsic factors, with intrinsic motivation serving as the primary driving force. Intrinsic motivation is reflected in religious awareness, curiosity about Islamic knowledge, and career aspirations, while extrinsic motivation functions as a supporting factor through lecturer support, learning environment, and teaching methods. The findings also indicate that learning motivation is dynamic and influenced by academic conditions and personal circumstances.

It is recommended that educational institutions and lecturers strengthen teaching strategies that sustain students' intrinsic motivation while also enhancing external factors such as teaching quality, availability of learning facilities, and a conducive religious academic atmosphere. This study is limited to one study program and one institution; therefore, the findings cannot be generalized broadly. Future research is suggested to involve more diverse subjects, apply mixed methods, and examine the relationship between learning motivation and other variables such as academic achievement, self-regulation, and professional readiness of PAI students.

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