

Cultural Mediation of Self-Determination in Arabic Learning Motivation at Salafi Pesantren Mambaus Sholihin

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Abstract

The urgency of Arabic language learning in Islamic boarding schools lies not only in linguistic mastery as a medium of Islamic scholarly communication, but also in fostering sustained learning motivation within religious and social environments. This study aims to examine the implementation of Self-Determination Theory (SDT), which includes autonomy, competence, and relatedness, in Arabic language learning at Pesantren Salafi Mambaus Sholihin, and how these components are mediated by the cultural context of the pesantren. This research employs a qualitative approach using data collection methods including observation, interviews, and documentation, followed by thematic analysis. The findings indicate that student autonomy develops gradually through a structured learning system, competence is strengthened through a tiered curriculum and direct feedback from teachers, and relatedness is built through ukhuwah-based social relationships and intensive teacher-student interaction. These results show that SDT is more effective when adapted to pesantren cultural values, thereby enhancing intrinsic motivation in Arabic learning. In conclusion, the integration of modern motivational theory with traditional Islamic education contexts contributes significantly to the development of more adaptive and contextualized learning strategies. Future research is recommended to explore different pesantren contexts to enhance the generalizability of the findings.



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A. Introduction

Arabic language learning holds a crucial position in the Islamic education system (Hidayat, 2026), particularly in pesantren (Islamic boarding schools), as it functions not only as a medium of communication but also as a key instrument for understanding primary Islamic sources such as the Qur'an and Hadith (Abdi & Hidayat, 2026). In recent decades, increasing attention has been given to the psychological aspects of language learning, especially learning motivation as a determining factor in successful foreign language acquisition. Self-Determination Theory (SDT), developed by Deci and Ryan, is one of the most widely used frameworks to explain how intrinsic motivation can be fostered through the fulfillment of basic psychological needs. In the context of Arabic language learning in pesantren, this approach is highly relevant because the learning environment is not only academic but also religious and social. Ryan & Deci (2020) emphasize that sustained motivation is strongly influenced by the fulfillment of autonomy, competence, and relatedness, all of which are highly relevant in traditional Islamic educational settings.

In both global and national contexts, there is a growing trend toward integrating modern pedagogical approaches into traditional Islamic education systems. Pesantren in Indonesia, as the oldest and largest Islamic educational institutions, are undergoing transformation in their teaching methods, including Arabic language instruction. Data from various studies indicate that many pesantren have begun adopting more systematic and structured curricula to improve graduate quality, particularly in foreign language mastery. However, this transformation is not always accompanied by strengthening students' motivational aspects. In many institutions, learning is still dominated by authoritative approaches emphasizing obedience, resulting in limited attention to students' psychological needs such as learning autonomy. This creates a gap between curriculum modernization and the need to develop students' intrinsic motivation in Arabic language learning.

A key problem in Arabic language learning in pesantren is the low consistency of students' long-term learning motivation (Asrori et al., 2025). Although pesantren environments provide intensive learning exposure, not all students demonstrate sustained active engagement in the learning process. Several studies show that foreign language learning motivation is strongly influenced by learning experiences that support self-confidence, social engagement, and opportunities for decision-making in learning processes (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2013). However, in practice, pesantren learning often focuses on memorization and structural mastery without providing sufficient space for learner autonomy. As a result, some students struggle to maintain intrinsic motivation, especially when facing complex or tiered learning materials.

Self-Determination Theory (SDT) offers a comprehensive perspective for understanding motivational dynamics through three basic psychological needs: autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Autonomy refers to individuals' need to feel in control of their learning actions and decisions. Competence relates to the feeling of being effective and capable in completing learning tasks. Meanwhile, relatedness reflects the need to feel socially connected to others in the learning environment. According to Ryan & Deci (2020), the simultaneous fulfillment of these needs can enhance intrinsic motivation and learners' psychological well-being. In language education contexts, SDT has been widely used to explain

learning success, which depends not only on teaching methods but also on the quality of social interaction and learning experiences.

In pesantren contexts, the concept of autonomy within SDT presents unique dynamics because traditional Islamic boarding school systems emphasize discipline, obedience, and hierarchical teacher–student relationships. However, autonomy does not necessarily mean unrestricted freedom; rather, it can be understood as a gradual opportunity for students to take active roles in their learning processes. Several studies suggest that structured learning environments that still provide limited decision-making space can support the development of intrinsic motivation (Arabai, 2021). In practice, some pesantren have begun implementing learning systems that allow students to choose learning strategies, manage independent study time, and actively participate in language activities. This reflects an adaptation of autonomy within the distinctive cultural framework of pesantren.

The competence aspect in Arabic language learning in pesantren is typically developed through a structured and continuous tiered curriculum system. Students are trained through systematic stages, ranging from basic mastery of nahwu (syntax) and sharaf (morphology) to reading and comprehending classical texts. Direct feedback from teachers is an essential element in building students' sense of competence. Gan et al. (2021) emphasize that clear, consistent, and constructive feedback plays a significant role in improving student motivation and learning performance. In pesantren contexts, feedback is often delivered directly during the learning process, allowing students to immediately correct their mistakes. However, the effectiveness of this competence development depends on how feedback is delivered and how well students internalize it as part of their learning progress.

Relatedness in pesantren environments is particularly strong because these institutions are based on intensive communal living systems. Interactions among students, teachers, and peers occur not only in classrooms but also in daily dormitory life. This creates strong social bonds known as ukhuwah Islamiyah (Islamic brotherhood). According to Shelton-Strong (2020), positive interpersonal relationships in language learning contexts can enhance student engagement and motivation. In pesantren, close teacher–student relationships often play a crucial role in shaping positive attitudes toward Arabic language learning. However, the challenge lies in ensuring that this social relatedness also supports the development of autonomy and competence, so that it is not only emotional but also pedagogically meaningful.

Previous studies have extensively discussed the application of Self-Determination Theory in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning contexts, but research specifically focusing on Arabic language learning in pesantren remains limited. Furthermore, most studies focus on formal modern educational settings such as schools or universities, which differ structurally from pesantren systems. Cibro et al. (2023) show that pesantren have unique characteristics shaped by religious values, culture, and social structures, making them not fully explainable through conventional educational approaches. This gap indicates the need for deeper investigation into how modern motivational theories such as SDT can be adapted within traditional Islamic education contexts, particularly in Arabic language learning, which has its own pedagogical and cultural complexity.

The novelty of this study lies in its in-depth analysis of how the three psychological needs in SDT are mediated by pesantren culture, resulting in a contextualized model of learning motivation. In this study, autonomy is understood not as absolute freedom but as gradual autonomy aligned with pesantren educational structure. Competence is strengthened through a tiered curriculum system integrated with direct evaluation, while relatedness is reinforced through social relationships based on Islamic values. This approach contributes new insights to the language education literature, particularly in understanding how modern motivational theories can adapt to traditional educational systems. Thus, this study enriches theoretical discussions on SDT while also offering a new perspective on integrating educational psychology with local cultural contexts in Arabic language learning.

Based on the discussion above, the main objective of this study is to analyze the implementation of Self-Determination Theory in Arabic language learning at Pesantren Salafi Mambaus Sholihin and to identify how autonomy, competence, and relatedness are mediated by pesantren culture. This study also aims to explore how these three aspects contribute to enhancing students' intrinsic motivation in learning Arabic. Theoretically, this research is expected to enrich the literature on SDT application in traditional Islamic educational contexts. Practically, the findings are expected to serve as a reference for pesantren administrators and educators in designing more effective, adaptive, and contextual Arabic language learning strategies, thereby improving the quality of learning and students' motivation in a sustainable manner.

B. Method

This study employs a qualitative research design to explore in depth the implementation of Self-Determination Theory (SDT) in Arabic language learning within an Islamic boarding school context. Qualitative research is considered appropriate because it aims to understand social phenomena holistically, particularly related to motivation, learning experience, and cultural mediation processes. According to Creswell, W. John & Creswell (2018), qualitative research is suitable for investigating complex educational settings where meaning is constructed through participants' experiences. The approach used in this study is a case study, focusing on Pesantren Salafi Mambaus Sholihin as the research locus. This setting was selected due to its strong integration of traditional Islamic education with structured Arabic language learning, making it a relevant site for examining SDT in a culturally embedded learning environment.

The data sources in this study consist of primary and secondary data. Primary data were obtained from key informants, including Arabic language teachers (ustadz), pesantren administrators, and selected santri who are actively involved in Arabic learning activities. The selection of informants was conducted using purposive sampling, which allows researchers to choose participants based on their relevance to the research focus (Patton, 2015). The criteria for selecting santri included active participation in Arabic learning programs, varying levels of proficiency, and willingness to participate in interviews. Secondary data were collected from institutional documents such as curriculum guidelines, learning schedules, teaching materials, and evaluation reports. This combination of data sources enables a comprehensive understanding of how SDT principles are applied in the pesantren context.

Data collection techniques in this study include participant observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation. Participant observation was conducted to directly examine learning activities, teacher–student interactions, and classroom dynamics related to autonomy, competence, and relatedness. In-depth interviews were carried out with ustadz and santri to explore their perceptions, experiences, and motivational dynamics in Arabic language learning. Documentation was used to complement observational and interview data by reviewing written materials relevant to the learning process. According to Bogdan & Biklen (1997), the combination of these techniques strengthens qualitative inquiry by enabling researchers to capture both behavioral and contextual dimensions of the phenomenon under study. This triangulated approach ensures that the data collected reflects both lived experiences and institutional structures.

Data analysis in this study follows the interactive model proposed by Miles, M. B., Huberman, A. M., & Saldaña (2014), which consists of data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. First, data condensation involves selecting, simplifying, and organizing raw data obtained from interviews, observations, and documents. Second, data display is carried out by presenting the data in structured narrative forms and thematic categories aligned with the dimensions of Self-Determination Theory, namely autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Third, conclusions are drawn through iterative interpretation and verification processes to ensure consistency and conceptual accuracy. Additionally, thematic analysis as outlined by Braun & Clarke (2006) is employed to identify recurring patterns and meanings across the data set, particularly those related to motivational dynamics in Arabic language learning.

To ensure the validity and reliability of the findings, this study applies several strategies of data validation, including triangulation of sources and methods, member checking, and prolonged engagement in the research field. Triangulation is used to compare data obtained from interviews, observations, and documentation to ensure consistency (Denzin, 2017). Member checking is conducted by confirming interview interpretations with participants to ensure accuracy of meaning. Prolonged engagement in the field allows the researcher to build trust and obtain more authentic data. In qualitative research, Lincoln & Guba (1985) emphasize credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability as key criteria for trustworthiness, all of which are applied in this study. Through these procedures, the research aims to produce findings that are not only contextually rich but also methodologically rigorous and reliable.

C. Findings and Discussion

Guided Autonomy Implementation in Arabic Language Learning

The implementation of guided autonomy in Arabic language learning within pesantren settings fosters a nuanced interplay between student independence and structured support. Drawing from the principles of Self-Determination Theory (SDT), autonomy in educational contexts is essential for fostering intrinsic motivation and promoting effective learning outcomes. The findings reflecting a gradual approach to autonomy where senior students enjoy greater freedoms in selecting learning themes and assessing their projects align with Deci and Ryan's assertion that autonomy, competence, and relatedness are fundamental to fostering motivation (Putra, 2022). For advanced students, opportunities to tailor their learning to areas of personal interest exemplify the application of autonomy,

thereby enhancing engagement and promoting deeper learning. This is consistent with earlier research that highlights the importance of autonomy in language learning, particularly with respect to providing choices that resonate with students' interests (Wiranti & Widiyati, 2022).

However, the limited autonomy granted to beginner-level students serves an important pedagogical function in maintaining discipline and structure early in their educational journey. This aligns with findings on the developmental appropriateness of autonomy strategies (Arifin et al., 2020). While beginner students engage within a prescribed framework during their initial stages, including adherence to a fixed learning schedule, the gradual introduction of more autonomous practices caters to their burgeoning capacity for self-directed learning, as outlined by researchers emphasizing the critical role of maturity in educational autonomy (Izzah et al., 2024). Furthermore, mentor figures enrich this experience by facilitating dialogue about individual learning strategies, reinforcing the notion that guided autonomy can adapt to varying levels of student readiness while still nurturing their autonomous learning skills (Ismath et al., 2023). This mentor-supported approach underscores the principles of guided interaction, which affirm that structured support enhances student confidence in transitioning towards independence (Tuan, 2021).

Critics might argue that the stringent guidelines imposed on novice learners could stifle enthusiasm and intrinsic motivation, especially if they perceive their learning as too controlled (Amalia et al., 2022). Furthermore, literature has indicated that overly prescriptive frameworks can lead to disengagement, resulting in a passive learning experience rather than one characterized by active participation and self-direction. The results from studies indicate that while structure is necessary, it must be balanced with opportunities for learner agency and exploration, impacting overall language proficiency negatively (Izzah et al., 2024). To address these potential pitfalls, ongoing dialogue among educators, students, and administrators should emphasize the need for flexible methods that increasingly promote self-efficacy and ownership of the learning process as students progress in their language journey (Saleh et al., 2022).

In conclusion, the application of guided autonomy within Arabic language learning in *pesantren* settings effectively exemplifies a balanced approach adhering to the principles of Self-Determination Theory. It acknowledges the critical development of autonomy while ensuring that students are adequately supported in their learning processes. As students mature, providing opportunities for independent learning choices not only augments their motivation but also fosters a deeper engagement with the language (Aprianto et al., 2020). Thus, careful consideration and scaffolding are necessary to successfully navigate the continuum from guided to autonomous learning in Arabic language pedagogy.

Autonomy as a Driver of Motivation and Learning Initiative

The findings presented highlight the significant role of autonomy in enhancing intrinsic motivation and learning initiatives among students, particularly in the *pesantren* educational context. Autonomy, a core principle of Self-Determination Theory (SDT), posits that when individuals are given the freedom to make choices regarding their learning, they are more likely to engage with the content and pursue learning actively. Studies suggest that learner autonomy is intrinsically linked to enhanced motivation and engagement (Hurdle et al., 2024). This resonates with Freire's notions of empowerment through autonomy, emphasizing

the transformative potential of educational contexts that support student agency (Khonamri et al., 2020).

The emergence of independent student initiatives, such as the establishment of Arabic debate clubs, illustrates not only the students' desire for self-directed learning but also their capacity to act on their interests without direct institutional guidance. Certain studies indicate that such self-initiated activities correlate positively with intrinsic motivation (En-yun et al., 2022; Melvina, 2023). The flexibility observed in the language program, allowing students to choose varied activities, further supports the theory that autonomy fosters deeper engagement and personal investment in the learning process. Notably, the allocation of 30% elective materials within the curriculum not only empowers students to explore their interests but also nurtures a conducive environment for autonomous learning (Anh et al., 2022).

Moreover, research shows that when learners set their own academic goals and take ownership of their learning processes, they exhibit increased discipline and involvement (Utami & Kuswando, 2023). Such findings point to the importance of educators fostering an autonomy-supportive environment, as it has been demonstrated that teacher actions facilitating autonomy significantly enhance students' intrinsic motivation and educational outcomes (Rovai et al., 2020; Wang et al., 2023). This reflects effective pedagogical strategies that harness the principles of SDT, highlighting that supporting learners in a way that respects their autonomy leads to more engaged and motivated learners (Alrabai, 2021).

In contrast, while autonomy can significantly enhance motivation, some studies indicate that not all learners are familiar with or capable of exercising this autonomy effectively (Artini et al., 2022; Bhattarai, 2021). This implies that while the framework of autonomy is critical, educators must also scaffold learners' understanding and skills to navigate their autonomy in learning contexts. Addressing this gap is essential to ensure that students can benefit fully from the autonomy afforded to them (Rahman et al., 2022; Saeed, 2021).

In conclusion, integrating autonomy into educational practices, particularly within contexts like *pesantren*, has proven to enhance students' intrinsic motivation and encourage proactive learning initiatives. The interaction between student autonomy and motivation is well documented, providing a robust framework for developing educational strategies aimed at fostering learner independence and engagement.

A Gradual Strategy for Developing Arabic Language Competence among Santri

The development of Arabic language competence among *santri* in *pesantren* through a structured and gradual approach can be analyzed through the lens of Self-Determination Theory (SDT). This theoretical framework, posited by Deci and Ryan, emphasizes the importance of satisfying the basic psychological needs of competence, autonomy, and relatedness to foster intrinsic motivation and successful learning outcomes (Codina et al., 2020; Sasek, 2023). The curriculum designed in three phases foundational, intermediate, and advanced aligns with SDT principles by ensuring that each learning stage presents appropriate challenges tailored to the students' current abilities, thereby supporting their sense of competence. Research indicates that structured guidance and gradually increasing challenges are critical in helping students progress within their zone of proximal

development, enhancing their self-efficacy and mastery experiences (Méndez et al., 2021; Бабенко & Lee, 2022).

Providing continuous and immediate feedback during learning activities, such as oral examinations and *muhadatsah*, plays a significant role in reinforcing competence (Codina et al., 2020). By enabling students to engage in spontaneous debates and memorization with real-time corrections, the educational process not only strengthens linguistic abilities but also promotes critical thinking key components of effective language acquisition cited in SDT literature (Mynard & Shelton-Strong, 2022). This structured feedback loop allows students to experience a reinforced sense of competence, resulting in improved performance, as indicated by an increase in oral exam scores.

Furthermore, a sense of autonomy is nurtured through active engagement and participation in discussions and dialogues, supporting learners' intrinsic motivation (Mynard & Shelton-Strong, 2022). In an environment that fosters autonomy-supportive relationships, such as between *ustadz* and students, learners are more likely to take ownership of their language-learning journeys (Vo et al., 2022). By setting a stage for learners to interact in Arabic and lead discussions, the *pesantren* environment cultivates not only linguistic skills but also a dedication to lifelong learning objectives that flourish in autonomy-supportive atmospheres (Clerck et al., 2023).

However, while the structured approach in the *pesantren* is beneficial for fostering competence and motivation, it may risk creating environments where individuals feel pressured to perform or conform to specific standards, potentially stifling creativity or interest in language learning (Vo et al., 2022). If students perceive the learning process as overly rigid or controlling, this might inhibit their autonomous motivation, which SDT posits is essential for optimal learning outcomes (Shelton-Strong, 2020). Thus, it is crucial that while the structured curriculum advances students, it must be implemented with flexibility to maintain student interest and intrinsic motivation in their Arabic language studies.

In summary, the implementation of a gradual and structured language curriculum in *pesantren* supports the development of Arabic language competence by satisfying the psychological needs outlined in Self-Determination Theory. By balancing structured guidance with opportunities for autonomy and competence, educators can create a supportive learning environment, fostering immediate language skills and long-term motivational engagement.

Competence as a Driving Force for Motivation and Self-Confidence

In analyzing the role of competence as a driving force for motivation and self-confidence within the context of Islamic educational environments such as *pesantren* (boarding schools), Self-Determination Theory (SDT) provides a compelling framework. This theory posits that an individual's intrinsic motivation is deeply connected with the fulfillment of three basic psychological needs: autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Lou & Noels, 2020). In the context of Arabic language learning, an increased sense of competence significantly influences learners' motivation and self-confidence, particularly when they engage in tasks that align with their perceived capabilities.

Research indicates that successful experiences in utilizing the Arabic language such as translating poetry and receiving positive reinforcement from teachers translate into heightened self-esteem and intrinsic motivation (Câmpean et al., 2024; Gan et al., 2021). Teacher feedback is crucial here, as it provides validation

and nurtures an environment where students feel empowered to take risks in their language use. Empirical evidence has shown that positive feedback, especially when perceived as informative and supportive, leads to increased engagement in learning (Gan et al., 2021; Guo & Zhou, 2021). Moreover, praises from teachers, such as expressions of encouragement, promote a sense of mastery and reinforce students' belief in their abilities, fostering a cycle of motivation-driven competence (Putri et al., 2021).

Furthermore, peer interactions in informal contexts significantly contribute to this dynamic. The support students provide each other such as assisting peers during language games cultivates a low-stakes environment where they are motivated to practice and refine their language skills (Selvaraj et al., 2021). This collaborative learning setting can mitigate anxiety related to performance, allowing learners to explore their linguistic competencies more freely. Prior research supports this, suggesting that when students perceive their educational environment as supportive, their motivation to learn increases substantially (Sotlikova, 2023).

Nonetheless, while student engagement and motivation can flourish in enriched environments, it is essential to recognize that individual experiences may vary. Some students continue to express anxiety in formal settings, suggesting that the gap between perceived competence and real-world application remains a concern (Giray et al., 2022). This highlights a potential challenge within the implementation of feedback processes. The relationship between teacher feedback and student motivation can diverge; if feedback is perceived as critical or non-reinforcing, it can adversely affect students' self-regulatory behaviors and sense of competence (Nguyen et al., 2022). Thus, maintaining a balance between constructive criticism and positive reinforcement is crucial.

In summary, students' engagement in learning Arabic is notably influenced by their sense of competence, significantly enhanced by positive teacher feedback and peer support. However, it is critical to consider the nuanced ways in which different learning contexts can alter students' perceptions of competence and motivation. Educational strategies that foster both intrinsic and extrinsic motivations by empathetically integrating feedback mechanisms can enhance overall learning outcomes and student confidence.

Emotional Connectedness in Social Relationships and Pesantren Culture

The findings of the research regarding emotional connectedness within the *pesantren* culture substantially align with the principles of Self-Determination Theory (SDT). SDT posits that human behavior is motivated by the fulfillment of three basic psychological needs: autonomy, competence, and relatedness, with the latter particularly relevant to the relationships observed among *santri*, *ustadz*, and *kyai* in the *pesantren* environment. The affection and nurturing character of these relationships significantly contribute to the students' feelings of connectedness and support their psychological well-being (Khalfaoui et al., 2020; Sutarsih & Misbah, 2021).

For instance, the characterization of *ustadz* as paternal figures who exhibit care, such as visiting sick students, exemplifies strong emotional ties that foster relatedness. This parental-like engagement resonates with findings indicating that positive teacher-student relationships significantly influence students' emotional and academic outcomes (Eleje et al., 2022; Kincade et al., 2020). Moreover, the institutional emphasis on "*ukhuwah islamiyah*" (Islamic brotherhood) creates a

supportive environment that enhances emotional connections and promotes an active participatory culture among students, thereby addressing their need for competence through collaborative learning experiences (Endedijk et al., 2021).

Conversely, one could argue that the inherent authoritarian structure of traditional educational environments where power dynamics may stifle autonomy could limit the extent of emotional connectedness. Nonetheless, this research indicates that the warm and approachable demeanor of *ustadz* helps mitigate potential authoritarian impacts, thereby enhancing students' sense of belonging. Evidence suggests that students' perceptions of their relationships with teachers can indeed lead to greater emotional stability, thereby amplifying engagement and improving learning outcomes (Farhah et al., 2021; Pollak et al., 2023).

Furthermore, the use of Arabic not only in an academic context but as part of everyday life within the *pesantren* underscores how language functions as a medium for emotional connectedness and community-building. Such culturally ingrained practices among peers and with educators form a robust framework of communal identity that aligns with the values embedded in SDT. The holistic approach of incorporating personal connections and cultural practices situates the emotional connections observed in the study within a larger educational and psychological context (Demirel et al., 2023).

In conclusion, the findings present an enriching view of how emotional connectedness in pedagogical relationships within *pesantren* culture enhances students' psychological needs, particularly relatedness. The deliberate cultivation of love and compassion within these interactions fosters a nurturing educational environment, encouraging the development of well-adjusted individuals who thrive in their interpersonal relationships.

Strengthening the Sense of Belonging and Collaboration as a Source of Motivation

In the context of self-determination theory (SDT), the findings presented emphasize the importance of the psychological need for relatedness in fostering motivation among students. SDT posits that fulfilling the needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness enhances intrinsic motivation and well-being. The observed sense of belonging and collaboration within the student community highlights the fulfillment of the need for relatedness, which is pivotal for effective learning and emotional support.

Firstly, the emotional support system identified in the students' experiences reinforces their sense of belonging. One notable instance involves a student, despite facing academic challenges, being included in a "special team" that benefits from additional tutoring. This not only counteracts potential feelings of marginalization but actively embraces the student, fostering a climate of acceptance and valuing diversity (En-yun et al., 2022; Harrop & Hoppitt, 2023). Such evidence is underpinned by the assertion in the literature that perceived teacher support significantly influences the learning experiences and outcomes of students, indicating that students who feel emotionally supported are more likely to engage deeply with their studies (Xu et al., 2023).

Moreover, the collaborative programs, such as the *mu'asyarah* and *muhawarah jamā'iyah*, serve as mechanisms for enhancing both language proficiency and interpersonal relationships among peers. The intrinsic motivation to actively participate in these programs stems not only from a desire to achieve competence in language skills but also from social connections that emerge from shared

experiences (Zong & Yang, 2025) Research indicates that environments promoting collaboration can enhance students' learning strategies and overall academic performance (Trigueros et al., 2020). These collaborative strategies reflect the tenets of SDT by providing opportunities for students to feel connected, valued, and competent.

Furthermore, the influence of social dynamics on motivation is illustrated through the aspirations of students not to let down significant figures, such as their *ustadz*. This connection underscores the role of social responsibility in promoting engagement in learning activities; students are motivated not merely by personal academic gains but also by a sense of obligation to their peer group, reinforcing social ties (Zhao & En-yun, 2022). Similarly, studies show that environments fostering a strong sense of belonging often result in improved self-regulation and motivation, further validating the role of relational dynamics in academic (Xu et al., 2023).

In summary, the described experiences reflect core principles of self-determination theory, illustrating how emotional support, a sense of belonging, and collaborative practices enhance student motivation and learning outcomes. The findings underscore the critical nature of interpersonal relationships and emotional dynamics in educational settings, informing strategies to foster inclusive and supportive learning environments.

D. Conclusion

This study demonstrates that the implementation of Self-Determination Theory (SDT) in Arabic language learning at Pesantren Salafi Mambaus Sholihin provides a comprehensive understanding of how motivation is shaped within a culturally embedded Islamic educational environment. The findings reveal that student autonomy develops gradually within a structured disciplinary system, competence is strengthened through tiered curriculum design and continuous feedback from teachers, and relatedness is reinforced through strong social bonds based on *ukhuwah Islamiyah* and intensive teacher–student interaction. These results confirm that the three basic psychological needs in SDT are not applied in a purely Western individualistic form, but are mediated and adapted by pesantren culture, thereby producing a contextual model of intrinsic motivation. The study answers the research questions by showing that motivational dynamics in Arabic learning are deeply influenced by the integration of pedagogical structure and cultural-religious values, and it aligns with the expected outcomes stated in the introduction regarding the enhancement of intrinsic motivation through autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Theoretically, these findings contribute to the enrichment of SDT literature by extending its applicability to traditional Islamic education contexts, while practically offering insights for pesantren educators in designing more adaptive and motivationally supportive Arabic learning environments. However, this study is limited to a single pesantren context, which may restrict broader generalization. Therefore, future research is encouraged to explore comparative studies across different types of pesantren or Islamic educational institutions to further validate and expand the contextual model of SDT in Arabic language learning.

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