The Relationship between Religiosity and Academic Motivation among University Students

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the relationship between religiosity and academic motivation among university students enrolled in statistics courses at Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM), Perak Branch. A total of 145 diploma students from the Diploma in Mathematics and Diploma in Statistics programmes participated in the study. Two validated instruments were used: the Malay version of the Motivated Strategies for Learning Questionnaire (MSLQ) and the Religiosity Scale. Descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation, independent samples t-test, and Mann-Whitney U test were employed to analyze the data. The findings revealed a statistically significant but weak positive correlation between religiosity and academic motivation ($r=0.317$, $p< .001$), indicating a tendency for higher religiosity to be associated with greater academic motivation. Notably, students scored higher on belief-based aspects of religiosity than on practical religious activities. Motivation levels were also higher among students enrolled in the STA111 course (first semester), possibly due to initial enthusiasm or less demanding course content compared to STA210. The study concludes that while religiosity is not the sole predictor of academic motivation, it plays a meaningful role in supporting students' academic engagement. These findings highlight the importance of integrating students' spiritual and psychological dimensions into educational strategies. Future research should examine which specific components of religiosity—such as spiritual coping or communal support—most strongly influence motivation and learning outcomes. The results offer practical implications for educators and policy-makers in developing holistic approaches that address both the academic and spiritual aspects of student development.

Keywords: Religiosity, academic motivation, statistics course, university students, MSLQ

INTRODUCTION

Understanding the factors that contribute to academic success is essential in higher education, particularly in today's increasingly diverse and multicultural learning environments. Among the various psychosocial influences, religiosity has emerged as a potential significant yet underexplored factor affecting students' academic behavior and engagement. Religiosity, defined as the degree to which individuals adhere to religious beliefs, practices, and values, has been shown to play a significant role in shaping personal identity, behavior, and motivation (Lipnicka & Peciakowski, 2021 & Feess, 2014). For university students, who often face academic, social, and emotional challenges, religiosity may serve as a source of resilience, purpose, and guidance.

Academic motivation, on the other hand, can be described as the combination of internal and external factors that stimulate and guide students' involvement in learning activities (Khaing & Myint, 2020 & Hsieh, 2014). This concept plays a vital role in shaping educational outcomes, including students' perseverance, academic performance, and overall success. Although a considerable amount of research has examined how elements such as socioeconomic status, family background, and peer influence contribute to academic motivation, the

specific influence of religiosity has been comparatively understudied-especially within culturally diverse settings such as Malaysia.

This study aims to address the limited body of research examining how religiosity, as a multidimensional construct, influences academic motivation among university students. Although earlier studies have highlighted potential associations between religiosity and academic motivation, limited attention has been given to examining the levels of religiosity and academic motivation among diverse student populations. Furthermore, there remains a lack of insight into how religiosity and academic motivation may differ among students enrolled in different statistics courses. Accordingly, this research is guided by three main objectives: (1) to explore the relationship between religiosity and academic motivation; (2) to examine the levels of academic motivation and religiosity among university students; and (3) to identify differences in academic motivation and religiosity between students enrolled in two different statistics course codes. Through these aims, the study seeks to deepen our understanding of the role of religiosity in academic engagement and provide practical insights for educators seeking to support student achievement in diverse learning environments.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Academic Motivation: Theoretical Perspectives

Academic motivation has been studied through different theories that help explain why students want to learn and keep trying. One important theory is the expectancy-value theory, which says that motivation depends on how much students expect to succeed and how important they think the task is (Wigfield & Eccles, 2020). Building on this understanding, Weiner's (2010) attribution theory proposes that students' tendency to explain academic outcomes (successes or failures) as arising from internal causes, such as ability or effort, versus external causes, such as luck or task difficulty, profoundly impacts their subsequent motivation. In addition, social-cognitive theory emphasizes the role of self-efficacy (confidence in one’s capabilities) and the dynamic interaction between thoughts, behaviours, and environmental factors in shaping motivation (Bandura, 1986, 2018). Another useful perspective is the achievement goal theory, which separates goals into mastery goals that focus on learning and improving, and performance goals that focus on doing better than others or avoiding failure. The effectiveness of each goal type may vary depending on the context, but mastery goals generally support intrinsic motivation, while performance goals can be effective in competitive settings (Senko, 2016). Finally, self-determination theory highlights the importance of meeting basic psychological needs like feeling in control (autonomy), feeling capable (competence), and feeling connected to others (relatedness) to build strong internal motivation and better academic results (Deci & Ryan, 2017; Ryan & Deci, 2020). Together, these theories show that academic motivation is complex and influenced by many factors, so using several theories helps us understand it better.

Religiosity and Its Dimensions

Religiosity is a concept that involves various aspects of an individual's beliefs and religious practices. According to Abu-Raiya et al. (2008), religiosity in Islam encompasses not only beliefs and ritual practices but also ethical principles, ways of coping with life’s challenges, and personal experiences related to faith. This broader understanding highlights the importance of internalizing faith, facing life’s challenges, and engaging with the religious community. Lucchetti et al. (2021) emphasize how religious beliefs, practices, community involvement, coping mechanisms, and religious struggles impact mental health. Similarly, Pearce et al. (2017) propose a model with five interrelated dimensions of religiosity: religious beliefs, religious exclusivity, external practice, private practice, and religious salience, providing a comprehensive approach to understanding religiosity, particularly in adolescents. Complementing these perspectives, Kaya et al. (2021) identified religious orientation, religious practices, and spiritual experiences as core dimensions of religiosity, with the findings of the study indicating that behaviours such as charitable giving and volunteering can mediate the relationship between religiosity and life satisfaction. These insights into the diverse dimensions of religiosity provide a useful framework for exploring how religiosity may influence academic motivation among university students.

Religiosity and Academic Performance

The relationship between religiosity and academic performance has garnered significant attention in recent research, with several studies suggesting that religious attitudes and practices may positively influence academic motivation. Heydari at al. (2020) found a significant positive correlation between religious attitudes and academic motivation, indicating that students with stronger religious attitudes tend to exhibit higher academic motivation. Similarly, Fatima et al. (2017) reported that students who are more engaged with Islamic practices and beliefs exhibit greater academic drive, concluding that fostering Islamic religiosity could enhance academic motivation among students. Supporting this view, Amalia et al. (2021) also found that international students with higher levels of religiosity tended to exhibit stronger academic motivation, reinforcing the view that religious commitment can positively influence students' academic engagement.

On the other hand, Guven (2013) conducted a study examining the relationship between intrinsic religious motivation and academic motivation. While the study did not find intrinsic religious motivation to significantly predict academic motivation, it highlighted the importance of teacher attitudes in influencing student motivation. Ariani (2021) further emphasized the role of religiosity and spirituality in motivating students and improving their academic performance, suggesting that integrating these elements into educational curricula could help enhance students' motivation and academic outcomes.

These findings collectively suggest that religiosity can play a significant role in shaping academic motivation, though other factors such as teacher engagement also influence students' academic performance.

Gaps in the Existing Literature

In summary, the reviewed literature highlights a meaningful link between religiosity and academic motivation, suggesting that religious beliefs, practices, and orientations may influence students' drive to succeed academically. Theoretical frameworks such as expectancy-value theory, attribution theory, social-cognitive theory, achievement goal theory, and self-determination theory provide a solid foundation for understanding the complexity of academic motivation. Meanwhile, the multifaceted nature of religiosity—encompassing beliefs, practices, and spiritual experiences—offers a valuable perspective for exploring its potential impact on educational outcomes. However, despite increasing interest in this area, especially within Islamic contexts, there remains a noticeable gap in research conducted among university students in Malaysia. Given the unique sociocultural context of Malaysian higher education, this study seeks to explore the relationship between religiosity and academic motivation among university students, aiming to contribute to a more nuanced understanding of how religious factors influence academic engagement and success.

METHODOLOGY

Instrument

A single set of questionnaires, comprising both the Religiosity Scale and the Motivated Strategies for Learning Questionnaire (MSLQ), was distributed to the participants. This combined questionnaire was designed to collect data on both religiosity and academic motivation simultaneously. Additionally, some items were added to the questionnaire to gather data about the demographic features of the participants.

To investigate the level of religiosity, the Religiosity Scale developed by Mohd Dali et al. (2019) was adapted. The scale includes two dimensions: Belief and Commitment to Practice. The Belief dimension consists of six items focusing on respondents' beliefs about Islam, while the Commitment to Practice dimension comprises ten items. For this study, only five items from the Belief dimension and seven items from the Commitment to Practice dimension were utilized to measure the religiosity scale.

To measure academic motivation, the Motivated Strategies for Learning Questionnaire (MSLQ) Malay version was employed. The original MSLQ developed by Pintrich consists of 81 items divided into two sections: motivation and learning strategies (Pintrich, 1993). However, for the MSLQ Malay version, only the motivation section, which includes 26 items, was used in this study. These 26 items measure motivation as a

whole and are further divided into six factors: Intrinsic Goal Orientation, Extrinsic Goal Orientation, Task Value, Control Beliefs about Learning, Self-efficacy for Learning and Performance and Test Anxiety. The scoring strategy is based on a 7-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (Not at all true for me) to 7 (Very true for me). The scores for all items were summed up and converted into percentage form for further analysis. Higher scores indicate higher levels of motivation. The reliability of the MSLQ Malay Version has been established, demonstrating that the measurement is both useful and reliable for assessing academic motivation. (Ismail et al., 2024).

Participants & Data Collection

The study involved 145 diploma students from the Diploma in Mathematics and Diploma in Statistics programmes at the Faculty of Computer and Mathematical Sciences, Universiti Teknologi MARA, Perak Branch. The questionnaire, delivered via Google Forms, was administered during their statistics courses—Fundamentals of Statistics (STA111) and Statistical Methods (STA210)—as these subjects are often perceived as challenging, making them suitable contexts to explore academic motivation and religiosity. The questionnaire also collected demographic data alongside the main variables.

Following the administration of the questionnaire, the collected data were processed and analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics software version 28. Descriptive statistics were used to summarize participants' responses, while inferential analyses were conducted to test the study hypotheses. Specifically, Pearson correlation was employed to assess the relationship between religiosity and academic motivation. In addition, independent samples t-tests and Mann-Whitney U tests were used to compare motivation and religiosity scores between students enrolled in two different courses: STA111 and STA210. These statistical methods were selected based on the results of the Shapiro-Wilk normality test. The overall analyses aimed to determine whether significant differences existed in motivation and religiosity levels between the two course groups and to examine the overall association between students' religiosity and academic motivation. The comprehensive use of these analytical techniques provided a robust understanding of the interplay between religiosity and academic motivation among diploma students in a Malaysian university context.

RESULTS

Table 1 presents the socio-demographic information of the 145 respondents. Most of the respondents were female and enrolled in the Diploma in Statistics programme. More than half were Semester 1 students, which aligns with the high number of students enrolled in the STA111 course.

In terms of study time per week for the statistics course, the largest group reported studying between 6–8 hours, though a notable proportion studied less than 6 hours.

Regarding academic performance, nearly one-third of the students reported a CGPA between 3.50 and 4.00. However, over half of the respondents did not report their CGPA, likely because many were first-semester students who had yet to receive their results.

Table 1: Socio-demographic Distribution of Respondents

Demographic	**Categories**	**n**	**%**
Gender	Male	32	22.1
	Female	113	77.9
Programme	Diploma in Mathematics	51	35.2
	Diploma in Statistics	94	64.8
Course	Fundamentals of Statistics (STA111)	84	57.9
	Statistical Methods (STA210)	61	42.1
Religion	Islam	145	100
Semester	1	81	55.9
	3	42	29.0
	4	10	6.9
	5	12	8.2

Estimated study time per week for the statistics course (Including attending lectures, completing exercises, and reviewing).	Less than 6 hours	34	23.4
	6-8 hours	56	38.6
	8 hours	21	14.5
	8-10 hours	24	16.6
	More than 10 hours	10	6.9
Cumulative Grade Point Average (CGPA)	Less than 2.00	1	0.7
	2.00 - 2.49	2	1.4
	2.50 - 2.99	4	2.7
	3.00 - 3.49	23	15.9
	3.50 - 4.00	42	29.0
	N/A	73	50.3

Table 2 presents the descriptive statistics for six motivational indicators derived from the Malay version of the Motivated Strategies for Learning Questionnaire (MSLQ), based on responses from 145 students. Among the six indicators, Control Beliefs about Learning recorded the highest mean score (M=5.86, SD=0.12), followed by Extrinsic Goal Orientation (M=6.26, SD=0.74), Task Value (M=5.72, SD=0.94), and Self-Efficacy for Learning and Performance (M=5.31, SD=0.97). Intrinsic Goal Orientation recorded a mean of 5.09 (SD=1.12), while Test Anxiety (reversed) had the lowest mean score (M=2.43, SD=1.14).

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics by indicator of Malay Version of MSLQ, n=145

Motivation Scale	**Min**	**Max**	**Mean**	**Standard deviation**
1.Intrinsic Goal Orientation	1	7	5.09	1.12
2.Extrinsic Goal Orientation.	3.60	7	6.26	0.74
3.Task Value	2.20	7	5.72	0.94
4. Control Beliefs about Learning	**1**	**7**	**5.86**	**0.12**
5. Self-efficacy for Learning and Performance.	1.86	7	5.31	0.97
6. Test Anxiety (reversed)	1	7	2.43	1.14

Table 3 presents the descriptive statistics for the Religiosity Scale based on responses from 145 participants. Overall, the results indicate a high level of religiosity among students, particularly in belief-related items. The highest mean score was recorded for the belief that the teachings and practices (Sunnah) of the Prophet Muhammad are relevant for all times (M=4.96, SD=0.224), followed closely by the belief in divine judgment and reward after death (M=4.94, SD=0.271). In terms of commitment and practice, the regular performance of the five daily prayers (M=4.62, SD=0.647) and ensuring proper covering of aurat (M=4.52, SD=0.667) were among the most consistently practiced aspects. However, lower mean scores were observed for practices such as following the sunnah in daily life (M=3.74, SD=0.864) and regularly practicing zikr (M=3.80, SD=0.883), indicating these practices are less consistently maintained among the students compared to belief-related aspects. Daily self-reflection (muhasabah) (M=3.90, SD=0.878) also showed a relatively moderate mean score. Overall, the findings suggest that students exhibit strong religious beliefs, while the degree of commitment to daily religious practices shows more variability.

Table 3: Descriptive Statistics by indicator of Religiosity Scale, n=145

Religiosity Scale	**Min**	**Max**	**Mean**	**Standard deviation**
Belief dimension 1. I believe Quranic teachings are suitable in today's life.	2	5	4.86	0.514
2. All mankind's good deeds will be judged and rewarded accordingly after death.	3	5	4.94	0.271
3. I believe that the teachings and practices (Sunnah) of the Prophet Muhammad are relevant for all times.	3	5	4.96	0.224
4. My religious beliefs influence every decision I make.	1	5	4.66	0.657
5. I believe that my faith is a source of comfort.	2	5	4.72	0.630
Commitment and practice dimensions	3	5	4.52	0.667

6. I make sure that my dress/cloth covers my aurat.				
7. I regularly practice *zikr* (remembrance of Allah).	1	5	3.80	0.883
8. I follow the *sunnah* in daily life.	1	5	3.74	0.864
9. My whole approach to life is based on my religion.	3	5	4.48	0.657
10. I take time to engage in self-reflection (*muhasabah*) every day.	2	5	3.90	0.878
11. I practice *dua* in my daily life.	1	5	4.43	0.851
12. I perform the five daily prayers regularly.	3	5	4.62	0.647

Correlation analysis

To examine the relationship between academic motivation and religiosity, a Pearson correlation analysis was conducted. Figure 1 presents the scatterplot of total motivation scores against total religiosity scores, illustrating a weak positive relationship between the two variables. Students with higher religiosity scores tend to report higher motivation scores, as indicated by the upward trend and clustering of data points.

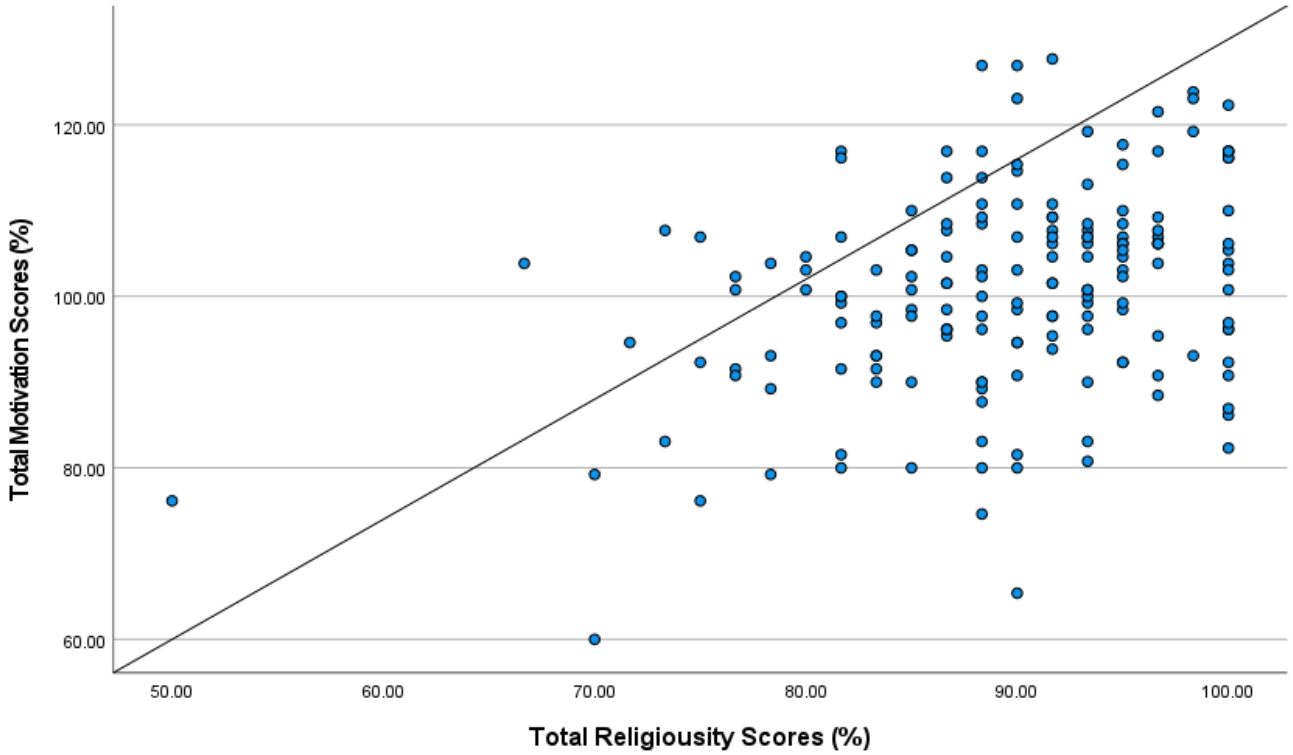

Figure 1: Scatterplot of Total Motivation and Religiosity Scores

Table 4: Pearson Correlation between Total Motivation Scores and Total Religiosity Scores (n=145)

		Total Religiosity Scores (%)
Total Motivation Scores (%)	Pearson Correlation	.317**
	Sig	<0.001
	N	145

The Pearson correlation test confirmed this observation from Figure 1, revealing a statistically significant but weak positive correlation between religiosity and motivation scores, $r(145) = 0.317$, $p < .001$, as shown in Table 4. This suggests that students with higher religiosity scores tend to report slightly higher levels of academic motivation.

Tests of Normality

Table 5 presents the results of the Shapiro-Wilk test, which was conducted to assess the normality of religiosity and motivation scores across the two courses, STA111 and STA210. The results revealed

that religiosity scores were not normally distributed in either course. For STA111 course, the Shapiro-Wilk test was significant, $W(84)=0.885$, $p<.001$, indicating a violation of the normality assumption. Similarly, for STA210 course, the Shapiro-Wilk test was also significant, $W(61)=0.956$, $p=0.027$, confirming non-normality for religiosity scores.

Table 5: Shapiro-Wilk Normality Test for Religiosity and Motivation Scores between STA111 and STA210 Courses (n=145)

Variables	Statistics Course	Statistic	df	Sig.
Motivation Scores	STA111	.987	84	.580
	STA210	.970	61	.135
Religiosity Scores	STA111	.885	84	<.001
	STA210	.956	61	.027

In contrast, **motivation scores met the assumption of normality** in both courses. For STA111 course, the Shapiro-Wilk test was not significant, $W(84)=0.987$, $p=0.580$, suggesting that the data were normally distributed. Similarly, for STA210 course, the Shapiro-Wilk test was not significant, $W(61)=0.97$, $p=0.135$, further supporting the normality of motivation scores.

Statistical Test Selection

Based on the normality test results, religiosity scores in both courses did not meet the assumption of normality. Therefore, a nonparametric test, such as the Mann-Whitney U test, is appropriate for comparing religiosity scores between STA111 and STA210 courses. This test does not assume normality and is suitable for comparing the median scores between two independent courses. In contrast, motivation scores were normally distributed in both groups. Consequently, an independent samples t-test will be used to compare the mean motivation scores between STA111 and STA210 courses, as this parametric test is appropriate when normality assumptions are met.

Comparison of Motivation Scores

An independent samples t-test was conducted to compare the total motivation scores (%) between students enrolled in two statistics courses: STA111 and STA210. Levene's test for equality of variances indicated that the assumption of homogeneity of variances was met, $F(1, 143)=0.119$, $p=0.731$. As shown in Table 6, students in STA111 ($M=102.79$, $SD=11.89$) scored significantly higher than those in STA210 ($M=97.73$, $SD=12.12$), $t(143) = 2.674$, $p=0.013$.

Table 6: Comparison of Motivation Scores Between STA111 and STA210 Courses Using an Independent Samples t-Test

Variables	**n**	**Mean**	**Std. Deviation**	**Test statistic**	**p-value**
Motivation Scores					
STA111	84	102.79	11.891	2.674	0.013
STA210	61	97.73	12.12		

Comparison of Religiosity Scores

Table 7 presents the results of a Mann-Whitney U test comparing religiosity scores between students enrolled in two statistics courses, STA111 and STA210. This analysis was chosen because the religiosity data did not meet the assumptions required for a parametric test. As shown in the table, students in STA111 had a higher mean rank (76.22) compared to those in STA210 (68.57). Since the p-value (0.277) exceeds the conventional alpha level of 0.05, the result confirms that there is no significant difference in religiosity scores between students enrolled in STA111 and STA210 courses.

Table 7: Comparison of Religiosity Scores Between STA111 and STA210 Courses using Mann-Whitney Utest

Variables	n	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks	Test statistic	p-value
Religiosity Scores					
STA111	84	76.22	6747.50	2291.50	0.277
STA210	61	68.57	4427.50		

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study contribute to a growing body of literature examining the relationship between religiosity and academic motivation among university students. The results revealed a statistically significant, albeit modest, positive correlation between religiosity and academic motivation, indicating that students with higher levels of religious belief and commitment also tend to report stronger motivation in their academic pursuits. This aligns with prior studies (Heydari et al., 2020; Fatima et al., 2017) that suggest religiosity may serve as a motivational force, offering students a sense of direction, discipline, and purpose in their educational journey.

An analysis of the motivation subscales showed that students scored particularly high on control beliefs about learning and extrinsic goal orientation, followed by task value and self-efficacy. These findings suggest that while students believe their efforts can influence academic outcomes, they are also driven by external incentives such as grades or recognition. Notably, intrinsic goal orientation was moderately high, indicating that a portion of students are also motivated by personal interest and the desire for mastery. In contrast, test anxiety showed the lowest mean score, which—given that it was reversed—points to relatively high anxiety levels. This factor may undermine academic performance and deserves further investigation in future research.

On the religiosity scale, students reported strong belief-based religiosity, with high scores on items relating to Islamic teachings, belief in divine judgment, and the relevance of the Prophet's Sunnah. However, practical dimensions of religiosity, such as zikr (remembrance of Allah), following Sunnah in daily life, and daily self-reflection (muhasabah), received slightly lower scores. This suggests that while students hold strong religious convictions, their day-to-day engagement in religious practices varies.

When comparing students from the two courses (STA111 and STA210), significant differences were found in motivation levels, with STA111 students demonstrating higher motivation than those taking STA210. Several factors may explain this, including differences in course difficulty, teaching methods, or students' academic year. As the majority of STA111 students were in their first semester, their higher motivation might reflect a "fresh start" enthusiasm that often declines over time. Students taking STA210, on the other hand, may experience lower motivation due to the subject's increased complexity. STA210 is a more advanced course with a broader syllabus, numerous statistical formulas, and more challenging content, which may contribute to students feeling overwhelmed or less motivated. Despite these differences in motivation, no significant difference was observed in religiosity scores between the two groups, suggesting that religious commitment remains stable regardless of academic standing or course level.

These findings emphasize the importance of considering students' spiritual dimensions in academic settings. Religiosity may serve as a protective factor that enhances resilience, especially in challenging subjects like statistics. The modest correlation found in this study also highlights that religiosity is one of several factors influencing academic motivation, alongside other psychological, social, and contextual variables.

CONCLUSION

This study provides empirical evidence of a positive relationship between religiosity and academic motivation among university students enrolled in statistics courses. While the correlation is not strong, it is statistically significant and suggests that students who demonstrate higher religious belief and commitment also tend to report stronger academic motivation. These findings highlight the potential role of religiosity as a source of internal strength and purpose, which may help students navigate academic challenges and maintain engagement with their studies.

The results also show that students generally hold strong religious beliefs, particularly in relation to core Islamic teachings. However, their level of engagement in daily religious practices varies, indicating that belief and practice may not always align uniformly. Although religiosity does not differ significantly between students in different statistics courses, the difference in academic motivation underscores the need to explore how factors like teaching style, semester level, or course content impact student motivation.

In conclusion, this study emphasizes the importance of taking a holistic view of student development, where spiritual and psychological factors are considered alongside cognitive and academic factors. Educators and institutions may benefit from recognizing the motivational potential of religiosity and integrating supportive practices that acknowledge students' values and belief systems. Future research should further explore which specific dimensions of religiosity—such as spiritual coping or communal support—most strongly influence learning outcomes, and how these interact with other psychological or environmental variables.

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