



## NEGOTIATING FAITH, FUTURE, AND FOREIGN LANGUAGE: A PSYCHOLOGICAL INQUIRY INTO ENGLISH LEARNING AMONG NON-ENGLISH MAJOR STUDENTS AT AN ISLAMIC UNIVERSITY

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**Abstract:** In religious university environments, the development of English-speaking skills among non-English major students presents unique psychological and contextual challenges. Ideally, students should be able to integrate language mastery with their religious and academic identity to face global demands. However, empirical findings reveal that many students experience high anxiety, lack of confidence, and inconsistent institutional support, particularly in the informal learning environment of the Ma'had program. Through a qualitative inquiry involving in-depth interviews, this study identifies four major themes: (1) Psychological Barriers in Speaking English, (2) Contextual Gaps between Academic Programs and Dormitory Initiatives, (3) Adaptive and Maladaptive Coping Strategies, and (4) Students' Aspirations for Effective English Learning Environments. The research highlights that although formal academic programs provide structured learning, the informal settings often lack systematic reinforcement, leading to fragmented experiences in language acquisition. Students express a strong need for a more integrated, empathetic, and motivational approach in both academic and dormitory settings. This study contributes to the theoretical understanding of English learning in faith-based institutions and offers practical implications for curriculum designers, language instructors, and religious educational policymakers aiming to bridge the psychological and contextual gaps. The findings advocate for the design of supportive programs that not only build linguistic competence but also align with students' religious values and future aspirations, fostering a more holistic development of English proficiency in faith-driven academic environments.

**Keywords:** *English skills; non-English majors; psychological aspects of foreign language learning.*

### INTRODUCTION

In the context of educational globalization, English language proficiency has become an urgent need for students across various disciplines, including those studying at faith-based universities (Haryadi, & Aminuddin, 2023; Isadaud, Fikri, & Bukhari, 2022; Sholihah, Imelda, & Annas, 2024). Ideally, English instruction should not only aim to meet academic requirements but also serve as a medium to broaden intellectual horizons, strengthen intercultural communication skills, and support

socio-religious missions (Moghaddam, 2023; Molema, 2024; Pulatova, 2024). Accordingly, English is viewed as a key competence for building bridges between local academic traditions and the global world.

English language programs at faith-based universities should therefore be designed to develop the four language skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing) in a balanced manner, while taking into account the religious and local values that are central to these institutions

(Djandjuri, Gatot, Yusiya, Sahril, Mufaridah, & Pratama, 2023; Piyawason, 2024). The English curriculum needs to be integrative—connecting theoretical and practical aspects—while also providing space for the development of soft skills such as speaking confidence, critical thinking, and persuasive communication in the target language (Abdurakhmonova, 2023; Masudova, 2025; Qizi, 2024). This approach helps students to not only understand English as an academic language but also internalize it as a tool for self-actualization and for promoting universal values of goodness (Alaye, & Tegegne, 2019).

From a broader perspective, ideal English instruction also involves the cultivation of students' intrinsic motivation (Kojima, & Yashima, 2017; Kojima, 2021). English should not be learned solely to fulfill curricular demands, but rather be seen as an instrument to achieve greater personal and social goals—such as pursuing further studies abroad, contributing to international *da'wah* networks, or enriching Islamic scholarly discourse on a global stage. Thus, the integration of language skills, religious awareness, and future aspirations becomes a fundamental pillar in forming an ideal learning ecosystem (Kafi, Nurhadi, & Ilma, 2024).

However, in reality, this ideal condition has not been fully realized. At the university level, many institutions lack intensive English training programs such as the *Ma'had* model commonly implemented in State Islamic Universities (UINs) across Indonesia (Case, 1998; Powell, 2001; Szasz, 2010). At the faculty level, English learning is still dominated by theory-based approaches, with a primary focus on grammar mastery and text translation (Hira, 2018). Meanwhile, practical language use—especially speaking—often receives minimal attention, although research has shown that such approach leads to a significantly better outcomes (Gaines, 2015; Ueno, 2019; Van Le, 2024). As a result, students lack confidence in speaking English outside the classroom due to limited opportunities for structured and active practices.

On the other hand, *Ma'had*—as a boarding-based Islamic development institution—offers a different learning experience. In this setting, students are encouraged to use English in daily interactions through programs like English Days or informal discussion forums. However, these programs, like many others that are informal, are often fragmented and not fully integrated into the academic curriculum (Kulasegaram, Mylopoulos, Tonin, Bernstein, Bryden, Law, & Houston, 2018;

Lieff, 2009). This causes a misalignment between formal and informal learning environments, thus reducing the overall effectiveness of English acquisition (Coffield, 2000; Malcolm, Hodkinson, & Colley, 2003).

Additionally, many students face psychological barriers such as language anxiety when speaking English. Fear of making grammatical or pronunciation errors often hinders their willingness to speak in public. This condition is exacerbated by a lack of teaching strategies focused on boosting students' confidence and speaking courage. Consequently, the gap between theoretical understanding and practical skills continues to widen, hampering the achievement of optimal language competence.

Indications of this disparity can be traced through theoretical, empirical, and metadata evidence. Theoretically, various studies and theories in second language acquisition emphasize the importance of speaking practice in building fluency and language resilience (DeKeyser, 2020; Kim, 2023; Lyster, R., & Sato, 2013; Wang, 2021). Krashen's (1992) Input Hypothesis and Affective Filter Hypothesis, for instance, highlight that a learning environment rich in speaking opportunities and low in anxiety facilitates faster language acquisition. Similar findings were reported by Salehi, M., & Marefat (2014), who studied the impact of anxiety on foreign language performance. The studies consistently demonstrate a negative correlation between foreign language anxiety and language performance (Demirdaş, & Bozdoğan, 2013; Zheng, & Cheng, 2018). This relationship remains stable across proficiency levels, suggesting anxiety's relevance for all learners (Zhang, 2019).

Empirically, interview results analyzed in this study show that most students expressed dissatisfaction with English learning models that are overly grammar-focused and offer minimal speaking practice. They also reported high levels of anxiety when speaking English in both formal and informal settings. Some students even stated that this anxiety led them to remain silent or revert to using Indonesian, even in environments where English was expected.

Metadata from observations of English learning programs indicates that the integration between formal curriculum and informal speaking-based activities remains weak. While English Day activities are ongoing, there is no sustained evaluation system to monitor students' progress. The lack of collaboration between faculty English instructors and *Ma'had* mentors further

emphasizes that English learning is occurring in two separate tracks with little strategic synergy. These indications clearly demonstrate the need for improvement in English instruction systems at faith-based universities.

Based on the background and analysis of findings, the following research questions are formulated: (1) How do non-English major students perceive English learning in a faith-based university environment? (2) What psychological challenges do students face in acquiring English speaking skills in both formal and informal settings? (3) How do academic programs and *Ma'had* initiatives support or hinder the development of students' English language abilities? (4) What strategies do students consider effective in overcoming barriers in English learning at a religiously oriented university?

This study aims to analyze the perceptions of non-English major students toward English learning in a faith-based university context. In addition, the study seeks to identify the psychological challenges faced by students in developing their English skills both inside and outside the classroom. It also explores the dynamics of how academic programs and *Ma'had* activities contribute to or impede students' English language development. Finally, the study attempts to formulate relevant and effective strategies, based on student experiences, to overcome barriers in English learning.

This research is expected to enrich the body of knowledge in the field of English language learning in religious-based education contexts—particularly in relation to speaking skill development and the psychological dynamics that accompany the process. The findings are also anticipated to contribute to a broader understanding of how religious values and foreign language mastery can be integrated. The results of this study can serve as a reference for English lecturers, *Ma'had* program managers, and policy makers at faith-based universities in designing more effective, integrative, and student-responsive English learning programs.

## METHOD

This study employed a qualitative research design with a phenomenological approach (Padilla-Díaz, 2015) to explore the psychological dynamics experienced by non-English major students in learning English within a faith-based university setting. The phenomenological method was chosen to deeply understand the lived experiences, perceptions, and challenges faced by the participants regarding their English skill development. The participants consisted of 30 students from various non-English departments across four faculties at UIN Syhada Padangsidempuan who actively participated in both formal academic English classes and informal *Ma'had* program. Participants were selected through purposive sampling, ensuring they met the following criteria: (1) non-English major undergraduate students, (2) had completed at least two semesters of English classes, and (3) were residents of the university's dormitory-based *Ma'had* program.

The data were collected through semi-structured interviews using open-ended questions designed to elicit detailed narratives about students' psychological experiences, challenges, and coping strategies in learning English. Interviews were conducted face-to-face and recorded with participants' consent. The interview guide was developed based on preliminary observations and a review of literature on language learning anxiety and faith-based education dynamics. In the data analysis, a thematic examination was employed to analyze the interview transcripts. The analysis followed Braun & Clarke's (2006) six-phase framework: (1) familiarization with the data, (2) generating initial codes, (3) searching for themes, (4) reviewing themes, (5) defining and naming themes, and (6) producing the report. NVivo software was used to assist in data management and coding, ensuring a systematic organization of emerging patterns and themes. In the coding step, several categories emerged:

Table 1. *Categories*

Main Themes	Sub-themes
English Language Learning Environment	Theoretical Formal vs Practical Informal Learning
Psychological Factors	Motivation, anxiety, and shifts in self-confidence
Religious Values and Life Purpose	English as a Medium for Da'wah and Life Mission
Learning Challenges and Solutions	The Need for Increased Practice and Interactivity
Future Plans	English for Career and Scholarships

To ensure the credibility and trustworthiness of the study, several strategies were applied: prolonged engagement with the data, peer debriefing with fellow researchers, and member checking with selected participants. Triangulation was also conducted by cross-referencing interview data with field notes and reflective memos.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### *Student perceptions of english learning in a religious university setting*

The research findings indicate that non-English Education (non-Tadris Bahasa Inggris) students at

a faith-based university hold ambivalent perceptions toward English language learning. On one hand, English is seen as an essential instrument for career development, access to global information, and the enhancement of social status. On the other hand, there is a latent concern that excessive mastery of English may be associated with a shift in religious identity or with Western cultural influences perceived to be at odds with the traditional values of the community, as seen in the following interview excerpts:

Table 2. *Interview excerpts*

Theme	Description	Quote
English as a Necessity	English is viewed as a future asset	[I believe learning English is extremely important, especially nowadays—if you want to work at a big company or apply for a scholarship, fluency in English is almost always a requirement. Even on campus, a lot of references are in English, so whether we like it or not, we have to be able to understand it] (P04)
		[From what I've seen from my seniors' experiences, those who are good at English have more opportunities—their paths are more open, like getting the chance to pursue a master's degree abroad. That's why I'm really trying to learn, even though sometimes I feel shy because I'm not fluent yet] (P01)
		[I realize that nowadays almost every job, including those in government or NGOs, requires at least a passive understanding of English. I want to strengthen that skill from now on, even though I sometimes feel insecure when comparing myself to friends who are more fluent.] (P17)
		[For me, learning English is not just about getting good grades in class—it's an investment for the future. Especially now, when most technologies are based on English. That's why I make an extra effort to join tests or online programs, hoping that my English proficiency will improve so by the time I graduate, I'll be ready to apply for jobs or scholarships. It's still just a plan, but I really hope to make it happen.] (P08)
Identity Anxiety	Concerns about shifting values	[My lecturer once said that mastering a foreign language is like holding the key to the door of Narnia... you can explore the world. If we don't want to be left behind, we need at least the ability to read international articles—that's what motivates me.] (P22)
		[Sometimes I feel hesitant, because there's a perception in my environment that being too fond of English means glorifying western cultures. I'm afraid people might think I'm less religious, even though my intention is simply to gain more knowledge. ](P07)
		[My parents once told me not to let learning English make me lose my religion and our traditions. But I believe those two things can go hand in hand. Still, I just agreed with them, and while learning, I keep trying to preserve our culture and religious teachings]. (P03)

[Sometimes when I use English terms, my friends think I'm showing off, even though I just want to practice. This makes me hold back a bit when speaking with friends.] (P14)

[ I was once scolded by a senior for using too many English terms during a discussion. That made me realize the importance of balancing English proficiency with adherence to Islamic values.] (P18)

[Many people might disagree with this. However, for me, learning English is like a double-edged sword: it can be a valuable skill for the world, but there's also a risk of losing one's identity if our faith is not strong.](P09)

Perception of the Instrumental Function	English for Academic/Professional Needs	[I want to be able to speak English to make it easier if I want to continue to a master's degree abroad, for example through LPDP. Besides that, international journals also use English now, so it's important to be able to understand and write articles.] (P19)
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[I aspire to join a student exchange program or a summer course abroad. For that, English proficiency is a key requirement. If I don't prepare now, I will definitely fall behind. ](P11)

[ Many of my lecturers remind me that if I want to write a strong thesis, I must diligently read foreign literature, because in the field of education, many important sources are in English. ](P05)

[Besides academics, I also want to deepen my English skills so I can preach in international communities. So, there are two goals: worldly and spiritual. ] (P21)

[ Nowadays, English is like a global key. I want to work at an international NGO after graduation, so I keep working on improving my English from now.] (P06)

Students' perceptions reflect the Investment in Language Learning theory (Darvin, R., & Norton, 2018; Norton, 2015), where engagement in foreign language learning is closely related to the negotiation of social identity. Students strive to accommodate the global demand for English proficiency, while simultaneously maintaining a strong religious identity. This situation reveals a value dilemma between global orientation and loyalty to the local community. In the context of a faith-based university, the pedagogical approach must integrate the vision that mastering English does not diminish students' religious values but

rather expands global preaching and interfaith collaboration. This aligns with the integrative perspective in language learning (Gardner, R. C., Day, J. B., & MacIntyre, 1992), which emphasizes the importance of connected identities.

*Psychological challenges in speaking english*

Students face various psychological challenges that affect their English language skills in both formal (classroom) and informal (Ma'had) settings. The findings show that speaking anxiety, low self-esteem, and fear of social stigma are the main obstacles:

Table 3. Interview excerpts

Theme	Description	Quote
Speaking Anxiety	The fear of speaking English in front of others	[Every time I'm asked to speak English in front of my classmates, I immediately get nervous. Sometimes I even forget what I want to say. I know the vocabulary, but when I have to speak, it's like my tongue is tied, afraid of making grammar mistakes or being teased by friends. ](P12)

			[When practicing speaking at Ma'had, I often feel inferior, especially if my friends are more fluent. So sometimes I choose to stay quiet or speak just a little to avoid making too many mistakes. ](P02)
			[I feel my heart race every time I have to practice speaking English. It doesn't seem to be because I can't do it, but the fear of being laughed at is stronger. ](P15)
			[ In small groups, maybe I can manage, but speaking in public, like giving a presentation, feels really difficult. I get nervous, even though I've practiced in my room beforehand. ](P10)
			[ There's a fear when using English because I'm afraid of mispronouncing words or having strange sentence structures. This makes me less confident when I want to speak. ](P20)
Fear of Making Mistakes	Worry about making linguistic errors		[ Every time I speak, I'm haunted by thoughts like 'my grammar will be wrong' or 'my pronunciation will be wrong.' As a result, sometimes I choose not to speak at all to avoid embarrassment. ](P07)
			[ I often hesitate to answer questions in English because I'm unsure whether my answers are correct. If I'm wrong, I'm afraid of being embarrassed in front of my friends. ](P09)
			[ When speaking, I constantly think about sentence structure in my mind. As a result, I become slow to respond and end up making more mistakes. ](P23)
			[ Once, I made a small mistake while speaking, and the friend next to me chuckled. Since then, I've been afraid to speak English in front of many people. ](P16)
			[ I think the biggest problem is not just the lack of ability, but more the fear of making mistakes that makes us lose confidence to try. ](P05)
Social Pressure	Feeling ashamed and afraid of being judged by others		[ At Ma'had, sometimes there's a study group where all the members are smarter. I feel inferior and become afraid to speak because I'm worried they'll judge the way I talk. ](P03)
			[ Some of my friends feel that when someone speaks English, it comes across as showing off. So, I personally prefer to stay quiet so I'm not seen as a show-off. ](P13)
			[ On several occasions, I want to try speaking English, but the pressure from the environment makes me give up on that intention. ](P06)
			[ I have been reprimanded several times by seniors at the faculty, not at Ma'had, for using English too often in daily conversations; they said it is disrespectful to the local culture. ](P21)
			[ In a faith-based campus environment, there's a moral pressure that requires us to use English wisely. We can't just use it freely—there are certain boundaries. ](P01)

These findings are consistent with the concept of Foreign Language Anxiety (Horwitz, Horwitz, & Cope, 1986; Horwitz, 2001), where fear of speaking hinders language production. However, in a religious context, there is an added layer—namely, the norm of humility—which reinforces social anxiety. According to the Affective Filter theory (S. Krashen, 1992; S. D. Krashen, 1982), the higher the anxiety, the less likely English input will be internalized. Therefore, efforts to reduce anxiety must be holistic: not only by teaching speaking techniques, but also by building psychological

safety—such as through habitual speaking and non-judgemental learning environment.

*The role of academic and Ma’had programs in english learning*

The learning dynamics show that academic programs and Ma’had programs play an inconsistent role in supporting English language development. Formal classes tend to follow a fixed curriculum, while practices in Ma’had rely on individual initiative. Analysis results indicate that

both the faculty’s academic program and the Ma’had program significantly influence students’ English proficiency. However, their roles are complex and not always linear: on one hand, they provide support, but on the other hand, they may create pressure or lead to inefficient learning. There is a dynamic interplay between academic formality and spiritual-religious practices that shapes how students perceive English learning, as illustrated by the following interview excerpts:

Table 4. *Interview excerpts*

Theme	Description	Quote
Limited Academic Support	Curriculum and lecturers’ approaches do not adequately support speaking practice	[ In class, lecturers mostly explain grammar and vocabulary. But for speaking, we’re only occasionally asked to give presentations. Yet we actually need more frequent practice to speak fluently.] (P04)
		[ We studied English for two semesters, and the focus was mostly on theory. It wasn’t enough to help us speak with confidence. After that, there were no more opportunities to practice in formal settings. ](P11)
		[ Our lecturer is kind, but perhaps because many students still have low basic skills, the class ends up focusing on fundamental materials rather than practice. ](P18)
		[ I feel that I’m not adequately supported to develop my speaking skills in class. There are no regular activities to practice conversation. ](P14)
The Ambiguous Role of Ma’had	The Ma’had environment is both supportive and pressuring	[ The classroom material follows the syllabus. We are rarely asked to engage in spontaneous discussions or role plays, even though those could be helpful. ](P22)
		[ Ma’had actually has a weekly English program, but it’s sort of inconsistent. Sometimes the tutor doesn’t show up, sometimes the participants aren’t complete, so motivation decreases ](P01)
		[I like the system of enforcing foreign language use in the Ma’had area, but unfortunately, it is not seriously supervised. As a result, it becomes ineffective. People still use Indonesian or even local languages. ](P17)
		[ At first, I was enthusiastic because the speaking schedule at Ma’had was quite intensive. But after a few months, the program became less strict and my friends also became lazy to join. ](P06)
		[ Ma’had can be a good place for practice, but the atmosphere is sometimes too rigid, with fear of being scolded by the ustadz if you make a mistake while speaking. ](P09)
		[ I feel helped by the Ma’had environment because I’m often invited to speak in English. But not all ustadz support it; sometimes we are told to stop and focus on religious studies. ](P08)

The gap between wishes and reality      The inconsistency between the program's objectives and its implementation      [ We are often told that Ma'had will help us become fluent in English. But in practice, sometimes there are no activities, or they are replaced with other programs. ] (P10)

[ There is a kind of high expectation that Ma'had will make us proficient in English, but in reality, there aren't many truly consistent speaking opportunities. ] (P02)

[ Some English tutors at Ma'had are not ready. So sometimes the material taught is unclear, and time is wasted. ](P15)

[ I hope there is a clear module or syllabus for learning English at Ma'had, but the program is still inconsistent and depends on the ustadz. ] (P19)

[ Ma'had has great potential to help, but there needs to be a well-organized system. Otherwise, students get confused between their intention to learn and the reality of an unstructured program. ] (P23)

The gap between formal and informal environments shows a weakness in the concept of Communities of Practice (Lave, J., & Wenger, 1991), where effective learning should occur within a consistent community. The lack of synchronization creates fragmentation in students' learning experiences. To address this, an ecosystem-based curriculum integration is needed, where Ma'had is not just a place to live but an extension of the academic classroom, supporting the formation of a natural English-speaking habitus within an Islamic context.

Students develop various strategies to overcome learning obstacles, ranging from positive to maladaptive strategies. From the interviews conducted, several strategies chosen by students emerged in facing the challenges of learning English in a religious environment. These strategies are not only individual but also collective, reflecting efforts to adapt to the limitations of formal and informal programs on campus. Students combine internal resources (self-motivation, religiosity) and external resources (learning communities, online media, peer tutors) to build their language competence. The religious environment also encourages the emergence of distinctive strategies, such as the integration of Islamic values in learning practices:

*Student strategies for overcoming english learning barriers*

Table 5. *Interview excerpts*

Theme	Description	Quote
Independent Learning with Technology	Utilization of digital media and applications for learning	[ I often watch YouTube videos to practice listening and speaking. Sometimes I repeat them several times until I can imitate the native speaker's pronunciation. It helps a lot because there are no exercises like that in class. ] (P03)  [ Apps like Duolingo or Grammarly help me a lot. Since not all tutors at campus can correct my grammar, I feel more confident writing through these apps. ] (P12)  [ I often listen to Islamic podcasts in English. It's pretty easy to find on social media. Besides learning the language, I also feel that

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			I stay within the religious framework. That's important to me. ] (P07)
			[ I downloaded an offline dictionary and a speaking app. I practice on my own whenever I have free time, usually on weekends. During weekdays when I have classes, the environment isn't conducive. ] (P16)
			[ Learning through TikTok content is also very helpful, in my opinion. Many English educational accounts explain lessons in English in a funny and easy-to-understand way. ] (P20)
Learning Community Formation	Creating discussion groups and studying together with friends.		[ My roommates and I made a special schedule for a speaking club on Friday and Saturday nights. At first, we were shy, but as we got closer, it became relaxed and we could learn together. ](P13)
			[We often discuss in English after Isha prayer. Sometimes the topics are about lecture materials, sometimes about international news. This has become an effective practice. ](P05)
			[At Ma'had, we form small groups for speaking practice. Every week we choose a topic, and one person acts as the moderator. This helps because there is a fixed schedule. ](P17)
			[ I invite junior students who are more fluent in English to help us with discussions. We allocate 15 minutes for this after each Ma'had study session. ] (P24)
			[We formed a special WhatsApp group for practicing writing and speaking. Every day, one person posts a sentence, then others help revise or correct it. ] (P09)
Internalization of Religious Values Motivation	Using Islamic values as driving force in learning.		[I believe English is the key to conveying Islam to the world. So even though it's difficult, I intend this as an act of worship and da'wah. ] (P06)
			[When I feel lazy, I remind myself of my dream to study abroad. I see English as the way to achieve that. ] (P11)
			[ At Ma'had, the importance of global dakwah is often emphasized. That motivates

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me to seriously study English so I can reach a wider audience. ] (P22)

[I make learning English part of my academic struggle. It's not just for grades, but to enhance my capacity as a student. ] (P01)

[I write a personal journal in English about my spiritual reflections. It helps me practice writing skills while also doing self-introspection. ] (P08)

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The learning strategies adopted by students to face English learning challenges reflect the coping strategies framework developed by Folkman, S., Lazarus, R. S., Gruen, R. J., & DeLongis (1986). They distinguish between problem-focused coping—strategies aimed at directly solving learning obstacles, such as forming study communities or utilizing learning technologies—and emotion-focused coping, which alleviates emotional pressure, such as avoiding tasks or distraction. In the context of a religious-value-based university, more resilient students tend to adopt problem-focused approaches, demonstrating psychological maturity in managing learning stress arising from systemic limitations and social pressure.

Notably, the emergence of integrative strategies aligning academic goals with Islamic values is an important finding. Students develop strong learning motivation by viewing English mastery as part of worship and contribution to global da'wah. This strategy aligns with the Ideal L2 Self-concept (Dörnyei, 2009) where learners envision their ideal selves as proficient English users for meaningful purposes. In the religious context, this L2 self is not only academic or professional but also spiritual, turning learning into a form of devotion. This process strengthens intrinsic motivation and transforms learning from a requirement into a calling (Cordova, D. I., & Lepper, 1996; Malone, T. W., & Lepper, 2021).

Social interaction also plays a significant role, as explained by Vygotsky's sociocultural theory (1978) where language development occurs through social mediation. Students involved in informal learning communities or peer groups find a safe space to practice English without formal judgment pressure (Pathan, H., Memon, R. A., Memon, S., Khoso, A. R., & Bux, 2018). This collaboration creates a zone of proximal development (ZPD), allowing less confident learners to grow through peer guidance.

Conversely, limitations in formal structures and weaknesses in the Ma'had program's communication skills development trigger the emergence of these independent initiatives. Here, student agency becomes a key determinant of success.

The implications emphasize the need for religious-based universities to design English learning systems that support not only technical skills but also the religious values embraced by students. Programs should facilitate self-regulated learning and L2 identity building contextualized within the religious environment. With a meaning-making oriented approach—beyond mere academic scores—English learning can become a means for religious students to actualize themselves as globally competent individuals.

## **CONCLUSION**

The learning strategies adopted by students in facing challenges in English language learning reflect the coping strategies framework developed by Lazarus and Folkman (1984). They distinguish between problem-focused coping—strategies aimed at directly addressing learning obstacles, such as forming study communities or utilizing learning technologies—and emotion-focused coping, which aims to alleviate emotional stress, such as task avoidance or distraction. Within the context of a religious-value-based university, more resilient students tend to adopt problem-focused approaches, demonstrating psychological maturity in managing learning stress arising from systemic limitations and social pressures.

Notably, the emergence of integrative strategies aligning academic goals with Islamic values is a significant finding. Students develop strong motivation by viewing English mastery as part of worship and a contribution to global da'wah. In a religious context, this L2 self is not only academic or professional but also spiritual, turning learning into a form of devotion. This process strengthens

intrinsic motivation and transforms learning from a mere obligation into a calling. Social interaction also plays a significant role where language development occurs through social mediation. Students involved in informal learning communities or peer groups find a safe space to practice English without formal evaluation pressure. This collaboration creates a zone of proximal development (ZPD), enabling less confident learners to grow through peer guidance. On the other hand, limitations in formal structures and weaknesses in the Ma'had program's communication skills development have triggered the emergence of these independent initiatives. Here, student agency becomes a key determinant of success.

The implications of these findings emphasize the necessity for religious-based universities to design English learning systems that not only support technical skills but also embody the religious values upheld by students. Programs should be developed to facilitate self-regulated learning and L2 identity building contextualized within the religious environment. With a meaning-making oriented approach—beyond mere academic scores—English learning can serve as a means for religious students to actualize themselves as globally competent individuals.

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