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Ikhtiar and *Tawakal* in the Academic Success Narratives of High-Achieving Muslim Students

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ABSTRACT: *This study explores the meanings of ikhtiar (effort) and tawakal (reliance upon Allah) in the academic success narratives of high-achieving students at Muhammadiyah University of Gombong. Using a qualitative phenomenological approach, five high-achieving students from different academic programs were selected through purposive sampling. Primary data were collected through semi-structured in-depth interviews and non-participant observation of participants' academic and religious routines, while secondary data comprised private institutional documentation accessed with participants' consent. Data were analysed using Colaizzi's method, with credibility strengthened through bracketing, member checking, source triangulation, and peer debriefing. Findings reveal that ikhtiar is understood as devotion to Allah and maximum effort that fosters intrinsic motivation and perseverance, while tawakal represents entrusting outcomes to Allah after optimal effort, reducing academic anxiety and strengthening resilience. Spiritual practices, such as du'a, salah, Qur'anic recitation, and dhikr, further support focus and constructive interpretation of success and failure. The study concludes that academic success is shaped by the integration of effort, reliance upon Allah, and spirituality, though findings are limited to five students at a single institution and are therefore not intended to be generalised beyond this context. These findings imply that Islamic higher education institutions can strengthen student development by embedding ikhtiar, tawakal, and spiritual practice into academic mentoring and character-building programs.*

Penelitian ini mengeksplorasi makna *ikhtiar* (usaha) dan *tawakal* (penyerahan diri kepada Allah) dalam narasi keberhasilan akademik mahasiswa berprestasi di Universitas Muhammadiyah Gombong. Dengan menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif fenomenologis, lima mahasiswa berprestasi dari program studi yang berbeda dipilih melalui *purposive sampling.* Data primer dikumpulkan melalui wawancara mendalam semi-terstruktur dan observasi non-partisipan terhadap rutinitas akademik dan keagamaan partisipan, sedangkan data sekunder berupa dokumentasi institusional bersifat privat yang diakses atas persetujuan partisipan. Data dianalisis menggunakan metode Colaizzi, dengan kredibilitas data diperkuat melalui *bracketing*, *member checking*, triangulasi sumber, dan *peer debriefing.* Temuan menunjukkan bahwa *ikhtiar* dipahami sebagai bentuk pengabdian kepada Allah dan usaha maksimal yang menumbuhkan motivasi intrinsik serta ketekunan, sedangkan *tawakal* dimaknai sebagai penyerahan

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hasil kepada Allah setelah usaha optimal dilakukan, yang menurunkan kecemasan akademik dan memperkuat resiliensi. Praktik spiritual seperti du'a, salat, tadarus Al-Qur'an, dan dzikir turut mendukung fokus serta pemaknaan yang konstruktif terhadap keberhasilan maupun kegagalan. Penelitian ini menyimpulkan bahwa keberhasilan akademik dibentuk oleh integrasi antara usaha, penyerahan diri kepada Allah, dan spiritualitas, meskipun temuan ini terbatas pada lima mahasiswa di satu institusi sehingga tidak dimaksudkan untuk digeneralisasi di luar konteks tersebut. Temuan ini mengimplikasikan bahwa perguruan tinggi Islam dapat memperkuat pengembangan mahasiswa dengan mengintegrasikan *ikhtiar*, *tawakal*, dan praktik spiritual ke dalam program pembimbingan akademik dan pembentukan karakter.

Keywords: *Ikhtiar, Tawakal, Academic Success, Academic Resilience, Islamic Spirituality, Muslim Students.*

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I. INTRODUCTION

Academic success among university students has traditionally been associated with intellectual ability, learning motivation, and effective study strategies. Beyond these cognitive and behavioural factors, empirical evidence indicates that religiosity contributes directly to students' capacity to sustain academic performance: a study among Muslim university students in Indonesia found a positive relationship between religiosity and academic resilience, in which stronger religious internalisation was associated with greater persistence when facing academic setbacks (Nadhifah & Karimulloh, 2021). Similarly, spiritual intelligence has been shown to strengthen psychological resilience among Muslim students confronted with academic pressure, while religiosity has also been found to lower academic anxiety among students preparing for high-stakes evaluations (Nisa & Zatrahadi, 2026)**.** Taken together, these findings suggest that religiosity and spirituality function not merely as personal beliefs but as active psychological resources that shape how students respond to the demands of higher education. Further quantitative evidence corroborates this pattern, showing that tawakal contributes directly to the reduction of academic stress among students (Wulandari et al., 2023), reinforcing the assumption that spiritual values function not merely as psychological complements but as empirically validated coping mechanisms.

From an Islamic perspective, academic success is not understood solely as the outcome of human effort but as the integration of *ikhtiar* (striving through maximum effort) and *tawakal* (trust and reliance upon Allah after that effort has been exhausted) (Dalimuthe & Rambe, 2025). *Ikhtiar* encourages students to exert their utmost effort in pursuing academic goals, while *tawakal* provides psychological composure by situating the outcome within Allah's decree (Tamimi et al., 2024). Empirical support for the protective role of *tawakal* specifically has been documented outside the academic domain as well. Among survivors of a natural disaster, higher *tawakal* was associated with greater resilience and more adaptive emotional regulation under prolonged pressure (Habibah et al., 2018), evidence that reinforces its plausibility as a coping resource under the sustained pressures of academic life**.**

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This dual emphasis on effort and surrender is likewise consonant with classical Islamic education theory. Al-Syaibani (1975) argues that the ultimate aim of Islamic education is to perfect the human being in the twin roles of *'abd* (servant of Allah) and *khalifah* (a responsible steward on earth), a formulation that binds submission to the divine will together with active, purposeful effort in fulfilling worldly responsibility. Al-Attas, (1980) advances a compatible account through the concept of *ta'dib* (the cultivation of adab), describing the ideal person (*insan adabi*) as one who is sincerely conscious of his or her responsibility toward God while continuously striving to perfect every aspect of the self Read together, these three accounts of Islamic education theory indicate that *ikhtiar* and *tawakal* are not merely psychological coping resources but are rooted in a longstanding philosophical account of what it means to be an educated Muslim: one who strives precisely because he or she is answerable to God, and who surrenders the outcome precisely because that striving is undertaken in fulfillment of a sacred trust rather than for its own sake. This theoretical grounding strengthens the conceptual contribution of the present study by situating the *ikhtiar-tawakal* mechanism identified among high-achieving students within an established tradition of Islamic educational thought, rather than treating it as an isolated empirical finding.

Despite this evidence, the existing literature on academic achievement remains dominated by educational-psychology frameworks emphasising motivation, self-efficacy, and self-regulated learning, while the Islamic-spiritual dimension of achievement is comparatively underexamined. Most of these studies also rely on quantitative, variable-relationship designs, which can establish that religiosity correlates with resilience or motivation but cannot capture how students themselves interpret and enact *ikhtiar* and *tawakal* in their lived academic experience (Fitriani et al., 2024). This methodological gap is consequential: a phenomenological study of high-achieving secondary students demonstrated that achievement-related behaviour is inseparable from students' own subjective meaning-making about their effort and circumstances, a dimension that variable-based designs are not built to reach (Widianto et al., 2016). The research problem this study addresses, therefore, is that the subjective, first-person meaning of *ikhtiar* and *tawakal* in the academic success of high-achieving Muslim students has not yet been empirically documented, leaving a gap between normative Islamic accounts of these concepts and how they are actually experienced in university life.

The conceptual contribution of this study lies in proposing that *ikhtiar* and *tawakal* operate not as parallel or sequential stages but as a single, mutually reinforcing psychospiritual mechanism, in which sustained effort is made psychologically sustainable precisely because it is coupled with surrender of the outcome. This reframes academic resilience within Islamic higher education not simply as a psychological trait to be measured, but as a lived spiritual practice to be understood, offering a conceptual bridge between Islamic educational thought and contemporary discourse on student resilience and motivation. This positions the present study's contribution as conceptual and empirical rather than merely methodological: it is not the use of a phenomenological approach itself that constitutes the novelty, but the resulting account of how two normatively distinct Islamic values converge into one lived academic disposition.

This phenomenon is likewise observable among high-achieving students at Muhammadiyah University of Gombong, who, despite facing the same academic demands as their peers, consistently demonstrate outstanding achievement—a condition that raises the preliminary question of what psychospiritual resources they draw upon

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to sustain such performance, and one that makes this group of students particularly relevant for in-depth examination.

Accordingly, this study aims to uncover the meanings of *ikhtiar* and *tawakal* in the lived experiences of high-achieving students and to understand how these values shape their narratives of academic success, particularly among outstanding students at Muhammadiyah University of Gombong. Specifically, the study seeks to describe the practices of *ikhtiar* and *tawakal* employed in achieving academic excellence and to explain the role of spiritual experience in fostering motivation, academic resilience, and achievement orientation. In doing so, the study offers conceptual, empirical, and methodological contributions to the study of Islamic higher education by moving beyond quantitative religiosity achievement correlations toward a grounded account of how these values are enacted in practice.

II. METHOD

This study employed a qualitative phenomenological approach to explore the subjective meanings that high-achieving students attach to *ikhtiar* and *tawakal* throughout their academic journeys. The research was conducted at Universitas Muhammadiyah Gombong, which was selected because of its institutional commitment to integrating Islamic values with academic excellence, providing an ideal environment to observe students' spiritual and academic practices. The study involved five high-achieving students from five different academic programs selected through purposive sampling based on their demonstrated academic achievement and relevance to the research phenomenon.

Primary data were obtained from semi-structured, in-depth interviews and non-participant observations of participants' academic and religious routines (Creswell & Creswell, 2023). Each interview lasted approximately 60–90 minutes and focused on participants' experiences of academic effort, reliance on Allah, spiritual practices, responses to academic challenges, and interpretations of success and failure. Non-participant observations were conducted during two to three sessions per participant over four weeks to complement the interview data and examine the practices described by participants in their academic and spiritual contexts. Secondary data were obtained from documentary materials relevant to the participants' academic experiences and achievements. The documents were used as supporting evidence to contextualise and triangulate the interview and observation findings. The specific types and access status of the documents were determined according to the participants' consent and the availability of relevant institutional records.

Data were analysed using Colaizzi's phenomenological method, involving the identification of significant statements, formulation of meanings, clustering of themes, and development of an integrated description of the phenomenon (Morrow et al., 2015). Data credibility was strengthened through bracketing, member checking, source triangulation, and peer debriefing (Yin, 2017). The combination of interviews, observations, and documentary materials enabled the researchers to develop a more comprehensive understanding of how *ikhtiar*, *tawakal*, and spiritual practices were experienced and interpreted within students' academic lives.

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III. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Ikhtiar as a Spiritual Foundation for Academic Achievement

Ikhtiar is a central concept in Islam that emphasises human responsibility and active engagement in striving toward desired outcomes (A'ini et al., 2025). Among high-achieving students, *ikhtiar* is not merely understood as an academic effort aimed at attaining high grades; rather, it is perceived as an act of worship through the optimal use of the intellectual capacities bestowed by Allah (Indrioko, 2018). The awareness that seeking knowledge constitutes a form of worship encourages students to regard their academic pursuits as an *amanah* that must be fulfilled with sincerity, diligence, and commitment (Aiyub et al., 2024). These findings suggest that a spiritual orientation transforms learning from a purely academic obligation into a process of embodying and actualising Islamic values in everyday life (Hidayah et al., 2021). Furthermore, the findings reinforce the notion that religiously grounded motivation fosters stronger and more sustainable academic commitment than motivation driven primarily by external rewards.

Self-reflection and continuous self-evaluation emerged as essential components of *ikhtiar*, as they enable students to identify their shortcomings and formulate strategies for academic improvement (Firdaus et al., 2025). Participants reported that their academic efforts were inseparable from the Islamic values they embraced. They perceived learning as both an act of worship and a responsibility entrusted to them by Allah. This understanding fostered intrinsic motivation, encouraging them to continuously improve their academic abilities without relying exclusively on external incentives (Nova & Darmawanti, 2026). For these students, the belief that every effort carries spiritual value served as a source of inspiration that sustained consistency and perseverance in pursuing academic excellence. Motivation rooted in religious consciousness tended to be more stable because it was not dependent upon external factors such as praise, awards, or academic competition (Salsabila et al., 2025). High-achieving students emphasised that their motivation to learn originated from the conviction that every effort performed for the sake of Allah possesses spiritual merit and will ultimately be rewarded. Such an orientation nurtured perseverance, diligence, and *istiqāmah* (steadfastness) when confronting academic challenges. Consequently, *ikhtiar* functions not only as a strategy for achieving academic goals but also as an internal mechanism that sustains long-term learning motivation (Rachmat et al., 2025).

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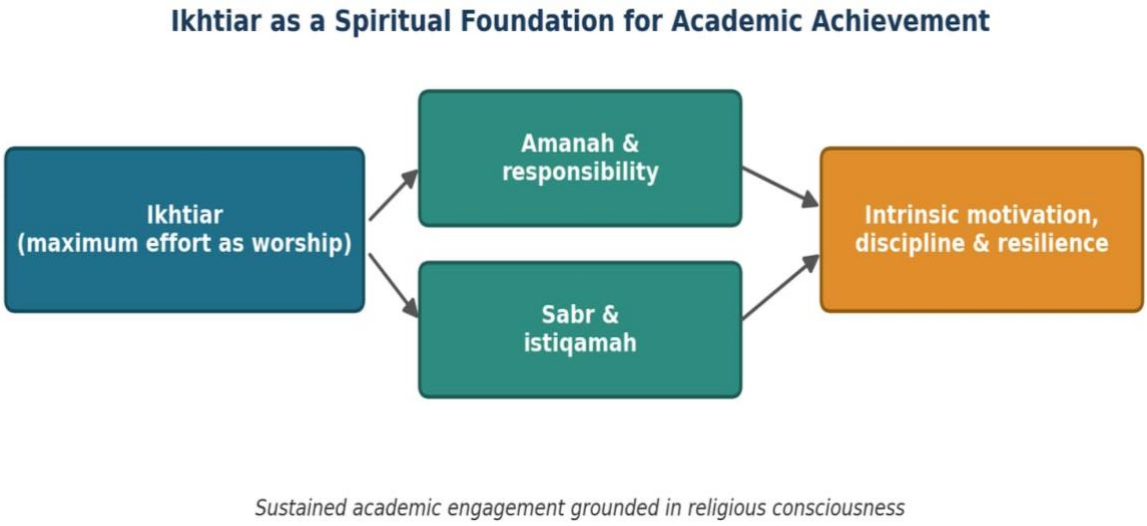


Figure 1. *Conceptual Pathway of Ikhtiar as a Spiritual Foundation for Academic Achievement*

The findings further reveal that *ikhtiar* among high-achieving students is manifested not only through structured academic efforts and continuous self-improvement but also through Islamic values that frame learning as both worship and responsibility. This interpretation generates intrinsic motivation that encourages persistence, discipline, and consistency in academic pursuits (Lutfiwati, 2020). Therefore, *ikhtiar* serves not only as a means of academic attainment but also as a foundation for sustaining lifelong learning motivation.

The study also indicates that *ikhtiar* is perceived not merely as an effort to attain academic success but as a source of psychological resilience in dealing with the pressures of university life. Interviews with a high-achieving Diploma III Nursing student (P1) who graduated with *cum laude* honours revealed that academic success was closely linked to the ability to maintain consistent effort despite numerous challenges. The participant explained:

> "Throughout my studies, there were many pressures, especially during clinical practice and when assignments accumulated. Sometimes I felt exhausted and wanted to give up, but I always reminded myself that my responsibility was to keep striving. I remained disciplined, completed tasks one at a time, and avoided procrastination. As long as I continued making an effort, I felt stronger in facing the pressures around me."

This statement illustrates that the participant viewed *ikhtiar* as a continuous process that must be maintained even under conditions of physical and emotional exhaustion. Consistent effort fostered confidence that challenges could be overcome gradually. This experience suggests that *ikhtiar* extends beyond the pursuit of academic outcomes and functions as an internal mechanism that helps individuals maintain determination in the face of adversity (Ardi et al., 2024). Dedication to studying, completing assignments, and engaging in clinical practice strengthened students' belief that difficulties could be overcome through persistent and purposeful effort.

The analysis further revealed that Islamic values embedded within the concept of *ikhtiar*, including *ṣabr* (patience), *istiqāmah* (steadfastness), and *amanah* (responsibility), serve as psychological foundations that reinforce students' resilience in responding to academic

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demands. Patience enables students to endure lengthy and challenging processes, while steadfastness encourages consistency in fulfilling academic responsibilities despite obstacles.

These findings are consistent with the perspective of Islamic educational psychology, which suggests that *ikhtiar* grounded in religious belief enhances individuals' capacity to adapt to academic stress. According to Al-Mustaqim (2023), the belief that every effort carries spiritual significance enables individuals to perceive challenges as opportunities for personal growth and self-development. As a result, students focus not merely on outcomes but on the quality of the effort invested. This orientation reduces anxiety regarding potential failure and helps maintain motivation toward achieving academic goals.

Based on these findings, *ikhtiar* can be understood as a significant contributor to the psychological resilience of high-achieving students. It not only facilitates academic success through optimal effort but also cultivates the capacity to endure, adapt, and recover when confronted with academic pressures. In this context, *ikhtiar*, supported by religious values, becomes a source of internal strength that enables students to remain process-oriented, sustain learning motivation, and approach academic challenges with greater optimism and resilience. Islamic virtues such as patience, steadfastness, and responsibility emerge as powerful resources that encourage students to persist despite difficulties (Indrioko, 2018). From the perspective of Islamic educational psychology, *ikhtiar*, grounded in religious conviction, enhances adaptation to academic stress while fostering a stronger focus on the learning process rather than solely on outcomes (Ismail et al., 2016).

Overall, the findings suggest that *ikhtiar* serves as a foundational spiritual principle that plays a significant role in promoting academic achievement. It not only fosters productive learning behaviours but also provides a meaningful framework that connects academic activities with broader spiritual purposes. The integration of worship, moral responsibility, academic discipline, and intrinsic motivation cultivates a strong and sustainable academic ethos. Consequently, the academic success of high-achieving students can be understood as the result of the internalisation of Islamic values through purposeful, disciplined, and optimal effort directed toward seeking the pleasure (riḍā) of Allah.

Furthermore, these findings underscore the importance of spirituality as a significant dimension that should be incorporated into both theoretical and practical approaches to student development within Islamic higher education institutions. By highlighting the interconnectedness of spiritual commitment and academic engagement, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of how Islamic values shape students' academic experiences and achievements.

Tawakal as a Spiritual Mechanism and Academic Resilience

Tawakal is one of the fundamental concepts in Islam that refers to the act of entrusting oneself to Allah after exerting maximum effort (*ikhtiar*) (Faizah & Arifin, 2023). From an Islamic perspective, *tawakal* is not synonymous with passive resignation; rather, it reflects a balance between human agency and trust in divine providence (Astuti & Bashori, 2025). This concept is highly relevant within the context of higher education, where students are frequently confronted with academic demands, uncertainty, and challenges that may generate considerable psychological pressure (Husnar et al., 2017). Consequently, spiritual values, including *tawakal*, contribute significantly to individuals'

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ability to manage stress, sustain learning motivation, and develop psychological resilience when facing academic difficulties.

Within the fields of educational psychology and Islamic psychology, *tawakal* is often conceptualised as a form of religious coping that enables individuals to manage life stressors through trust in Allah (Suhantoro et al., 2025). This mechanism operates through cognitive and affective processes that assist individuals in interpreting experiences positively, particularly when confronting failure or outcomes beyond their control. Previous studies have shown that students with higher levels of religiosity and spirituality tend to demonstrate greater academic resilience than those who rely solely on personal capabilities (Rodhiah et al., 2026). These findings suggest that spirituality functions as a protective factor that strengthens students' capacity to endure, adapt, and recover from academic setbacks.

The findings of this study indicate that high-achieving students interpret *tawakal* as surrendering outcomes to Allah after making optimal academic efforts (Mulyana, 2015). Rather than being perceived as passive reliance on destiny, *tawakal* is understood as the conviction that ultimate outcomes rest in Allah's hands after individuals have fulfilled their responsibilities to the best of their abilities (Husnar et al., 2017). This interpretation is consistent with contemporary research highlighting *tawakal* as a spiritual construct positively associated with academic resilience, self-efficacy, and adaptability in higher education settings. Fitriani et al. (2024), for example, found that *tawakal* significantly predicts academic resilience in online learning environments, particularly through dimensions of trust in Allah and consistency in religious worship. A participant from the Bachelor of Nursing program (P2) identified clinical placements and professional competency examinations as particularly challenging stages of the academic journey. These experiences were characterised by substantial academic demands and professional responsibilities, which frequently evoked feelings of anxiety and uncertainty about future outcomes. Despite these pressures, the participant emphasised the importance of combining diligent preparation with tawakal, ultimately entrusting the results to Allah after making every possible effort:

> "Before competency examinations, I usually study more intensively, prepare summaries of the material, and practice examination questions every day. After doing everything I can, I spend more time praying and try to remain calm because I believe that my responsibility is to make the effort. At the same time, Allah determines the final outcome."

This experience illustrates that *tawakal* is understood as an expression of trust in Allah following the completion of optimal effort. Within Islamic thought, *tawakal* does not imply surrender without action; rather, it represents reliance upon Allah after all available means have been pursued. This interpretation aligns with Al-Ghazali's conception of *tawakal* as a state of the heart that depends upon Allah after human beings have undertaken the necessary causes for achieving their objectives (Tammar et al., 2023). From the perspective of educational psychology, the participant's experience also reflects a self-regulation mechanism that reduces anxiety concerning outcomes while redirecting attention toward the learning process itself (Sindy et al., 2025). Thus, *tawakal* functions as a source of psychological tranquillity that enhances students' readiness to face high-pressure academic situations. A participant from the Bachelor of Midwifery program (P3) similarly reported that clinical placements and academic responsibilities frequently generated emotional exhaustion and psychological strain. During such situations, the

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participant intensified acts of worship and strengthened reliance upon Allah to maintain academic performance:

> "Field practice schedules were extremely demanding and often left me exhausted. Whenever I felt overwhelmed, I would perform prayer, supplicate to Allah, and recite the Qur'an. Afterwards, I felt calmer and more prepared to complete my responsibilities."

This statement demonstrates that spiritual practices and *tawakal* serve as important sources of strength when confronting academic stress. From a phenomenological perspective, the participant's experience suggests that the tranquillity derived from spiritual activities facilitates a more positive interpretation of academic challenges (Dwitami & Selian, 2025). These findings are consistent with Pargament's theory of religious coping, which posits that individuals frequently employ religious beliefs and practices as strategies for dealing with stressful circumstances (Fania & Kholil, 2025). Through such mechanisms, students develop psychological resilience and maintain emotional balance amid demanding academic environments. Therefore, *tawakal* and spiritual practices can be understood as adaptive mechanisms that support both psychological well-being and academic performance. A participant from the Bachelor of Management program (P4) described experiences of participating in academic competitions and achievement-based selection programs, which often involved considerable uncertainty regarding outcomes. Despite this uncertainty, the participant viewed each experience as a learning opportunity:

> "I have participated in several competitions, and not all of them ended successfully. At first, I felt disappointed, but I tried to accept that there were probably areas I needed to improve. I believe that outcomes that fall short of expectations do not mean my efforts were wasted; rather, they are part of Allah's plan to help me become a better person."

This narrative demonstrates that *tawakal* remains relevant not only in moments of success but also in experiences of failure. The participant interpreted unfavourable outcomes as opportunities for reflection and personal growth. Such interpretations align with the concept of academic resilience, which refers to an individual's capacity to recover from setbacks and challenges (Laila & Rista, 2026). Within the Islamic worldview, this attitude reflects the belief that every divine decree contains wisdom and serves as a means of learning and self-improvement (Farhan & Hasanah, 2024). Consequently, *tawakal* contributes to the development of adaptive, optimistic, and growth-oriented mindsets that enable students to sustain motivation despite uncertainty and adversity.

Furthermore, the findings reveal that *tawakal* plays an important role in reducing academic anxiety. High-achieving students did not become overwhelmed by excessive fear of failure because they believed that final outcomes ultimately form part of Allah's wisdom and decree. This finding is consistent with previous studies demonstrating that religiosity and academic resilience significantly contribute to lower levels of academic anxiety (Lating et al., 2025). Individuals with strong spiritual orientations tend to possess greater capacities for stress management, maintaining academic focus, and employing adaptive coping strategies. Within Islamic psychology, *tawakal* functions as a form of religious coping that allows individuals to transfer psychological burdens to Allah without relinquishing their responsibility to continue striving (Rahmah et al., 2025). Therefore, *tawakal* exerts influence not only on spiritual well-being but also on students' mental health and academic performance.

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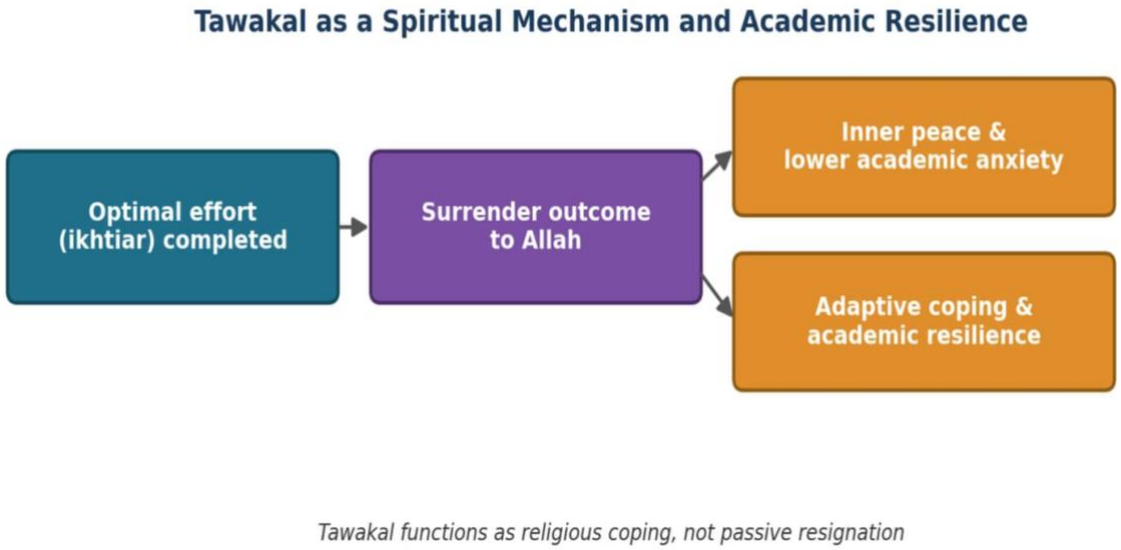


Figure 2. *Tawakal as a Spiritual Mechanism Supporting Academic Resilience*

Another important finding concerns the role of *tawakal* in fostering academic resilience (Ana, 2024). Students who demonstrated higher levels of *tawakal* exhibited greater capacity to cope with failure, academic criticism, assignment revisions, and various obstacles encountered throughout the learning process (Azzizah & Nashori, 2025). When confronted with unsatisfactory grades, they did not interpret such outcomes as the end of their efforts but rather as part of a learning process requiring reflection and improvement. These findings are consistent with previous research indicating that *tawakal* is positively associated with academic resilience because it strengthens optimism, patience, and adaptability. Recent studies further suggest that the contribution of *tawakal* to academic resilience may be explained through its ability to foster positive expectations regarding the future while reducing catastrophic thinking patterns when facing setbacks. Accordingly, *tawakal* functions as a psychospiritual resource that enhances students' capacity to withstand and overcome academic challenges.

From a phenomenological perspective, high-achieving students perceive *tawakal* as a bridge between *ikhtiar* and the acceptance of Allah's decree. Academic success is not understood solely as the result of individual competence; rather, it is viewed as the outcome of a harmonious interaction between human effort and divine assistance. Success is received with gratitude, whereas setbacks are interpreted as opportunities for reflection, learning, and personal growth. This understanding reflects the integration of spiritual and academic dimensions that contribute to the development of psychological resilience among students. These findings are consistent with previous studies suggesting that religiosity, spirituality, and *tawakal* function as protective factors that enhance students' capacity to cope with academic challenges and adversity. In this context, *tawakal* emerges as a significant spiritual resource that enables students to sustain motivation, manage academic pressures effectively, and remain committed to their pursuit of academic excellence despite uncertainty and obstacles.

Integration of *Ikhtiar*, *Tawakal*, and Spiritual Practices in Academic Success

The phenomenon of academic success within the framework of Islamic education cannot be understood solely through cognitive abilities and learning behaviours. Rather, it also involves spiritual dimensions that shape how individuals interpret and experience the educational process. Studies in Islamic education and educational psychology have

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consistently demonstrated that spirituality functions as a source of intrinsic motivation, strengthens self-regulation, and fosters psychological resilience in responding to academic demands (Tsalitsah, 2026). For high-achieving students, academic success is not perceived merely as the outcome of intellectual competence; instead, it is viewed as a manifestation of a transcendental relationship with Allah, expressed through *ikhtiar*, *tawakal*, and various spiritual practices (Sabrianti & Setiyawan, 2025). This perspective suggests that academic achievement is a holistic process involving the simultaneous integration of intellectual, emotional, and spiritual dimensions (Khoirunnisa & Suparman, 2025). Consequently, students with strong religious orientations tend to demonstrate higher levels of learning motivation, psychological well-being, and academic endurance than those who do not integrate spiritual values into their academic lives.

The findings of this study reveal that high-achieving students perceive *ikhtiar* and *tawakal* as complementary dimensions in the pursuit of academic excellence. For the participants, sincere and persistent effort represents a fundamental obligation that must precede surrendering outcomes to Allah. This perspective is reflected in the experience of a participant from the Bachelor of Nursing program (P2):

> "I always set weekly study targets and try to follow them consistently. When preparing for examinations, I study as thoroughly as possible, but afterwards I try to remain calm because I believe that Allah ultimately determines the outcome."

This statement indicates that the participant understood learning as a responsibility that must be fulfilled with maximum commitment. Academic success was not regarded as an independent goal but rather as a consequence of faithfully carrying out the trust and responsibilities associated with being a student. From a phenomenological perspective, this experience suggests that *ikhtiar* and *tawakal* together form a framework of meaning that shapes academic behaviour. Such spiritual awareness fosters intrinsic motivation, enabling students to remain committed to their studies despite encountering various challenges (Abu & Susetyarini, 2025). Therefore, the integration of *ikhtiar* and *tawakal* appears to contribute significantly to the development of strong and sustainable academic commitment. Spiritual practices also emerged as a vital component of the participants' academic journeys. A participant from the Bachelor of Midwifery program (P3) explained that acts of worship provided a sense of tranquility when facing academic demands:

> "Whenever I have many assignments or examinations approaching, I increase my prayers and spend more time reciting the Qur'an. Afterwards, I feel calmer and find it easier to concentrate on my studies."

This experience demonstrates that spiritual practices serve functions that extend beyond the fulfillment of religious obligations. For the participant, prayer and Qur'anic recitation became means of attaining inner peace and managing academic pressure. The analysis suggests that spirituality functions as a mechanism of emotional regulation, helping students maintain concentration, reduce anxiety, and sustain learning motivation. In other words, spiritual practices provide psychological support that enables students to remain productive despite demanding academic circumstances (Dwitami & Selian, 2025). Consequently, spirituality can be understood as an internal source of strength that reinforces the continuity of academic *ikhtiar*.

Consistent with the experiences of other participants, a student from the Bachelor of Management program (P4) reported that completing an undergraduate thesis represented one of the most demanding stages of the academic journey. Feelings of self-doubt and uncertainty regarding the successful completion of the research frequently accompanied

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the process. In response to these challenges, the participant combined sustained academic effort with spiritual practices, drawing upon both as sources of strength, motivation, and reassurance:

> "While working on my thesis, I went through several major revisions. During that period, I tried to stay focused on correcting my mistakes while increasing my night prayers and supplications. Through these practices, I felt stronger and more capable of continuing the process."

This narrative illustrates that spiritual practices did not diminish the participant's academic effort; rather, they strengthened perseverance in the face of obstacles. The analysis indicates that night prayers (*qiyām al-layl*) and supplication were interpreted as sources of psychological energy that fostered optimism and confidence that every difficulty could eventually be overcome. This experience suggests that academic resilience is not shaped solely by intellectual capability but also by individuals' capacity to interpret challenges through a spiritual lens (Sabrianti & Setiyawan, 2025). Thus, spirituality contributes substantially to the development of academic resilience, enabling students to persist and grow despite academic pressures.

The findings further suggest that spirituality shapes how students interpret both success and failure. All participants consistently emphasised that their academic achievements were not solely the result of intelligence or personal effort. Rather, success was perceived as a manifestation of Allah's assistance and blessings, revealed through the various efforts, opportunities, and experiences encountered throughout their academic journeys. Conversely, failure was not perceived as a final outcome but as an opportunity for reflection, learning, and self-improvement. This perspective enabled students to maintain a positive outlook when facing setbacks and to view challenges as part of a meaningful process of personal and spiritual growth. As one participant (P1) explained:

> "When the results I achieved did not meet my expectations, I tried to see them as lessons. Perhaps there was something in my effort that needed improvement, or there was wisdom that I had not yet understood at the time."

Analysis of this narrative reveals a pattern of religious meaning-making that helps students develop adaptive responses to academic experiences. Success generates gratitude, while failure stimulates reflection and motivation for improvement (Pratama, 2025). Such interpretations protect students from both despair and academic arrogance (Fania & Kholil, 2025). Therefore, spirituality functions as an interpretive framework through which students perceive academic experiences in a more constructive and positive manner.

Overall, the findings suggest that the academic success of high-achieving students emerges from the mutually reinforcing relationship among *ikhtiar*, *tawakal*, and spiritual practices. *Ikhtiar* provides direction and motivation for pursuing academic goals, spiritual practices offer psychological strength and inner tranquillity, while *tawakal* enables students to navigate uncertainty with confidence and optimism. The phenomenological analysis indicates that these three dimensions form an integrated spiritual experience that is deeply embedded within students' academic lives. Consequently, academic success should not be understood merely as the attainment of grades or formal recognition, but also as the outcome of character formation, psychological resilience, and spiritual maturity. These findings imply that initiatives aimed at enhancing student achievement in higher education should incorporate spiritual dimensions as an integral component of a holistic and sustainable educational process.

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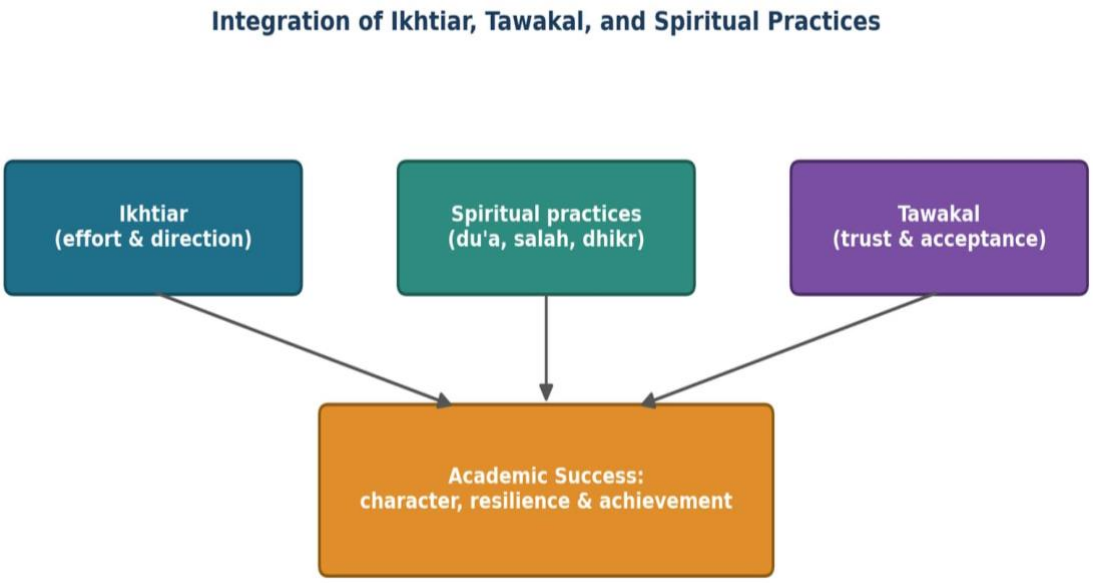


Figure 3. *Integration of Ikhtiar, Tawakal, and Spiritual Practices in Academic Success*

Taken together, these findings offer practical contributions to learning development, character formation, and educational practice within Islamic higher education. Pedagogically, the integration of *ikhtiar* and *tawakal* can be embedded into academic advising, mentoring, and student development programs so that lecturers cultivate not only cognitive competence but also spiritual resilience and moral character. Structured opportunities for reflection and spiritual practice, such as guided du'a, communal dhikr, or reflective journaling, may be incorporated into academic support services to help students sustain motivation, manage academic pressure, and interpret setbacks constructively. More broadly, these findings suggest that Islamic universities can distinctively contribute to the wider discourse on holistic student development by demonstrating how character formation, psychological resilience, and academic achievement can be intentionally cultivated through faith-based educational practice.

IV. CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the academic success of high-achieving students is shaped by the integration of *ikhtiar, tawakal*, and spiritual practices within their academic lives. *Ikhtiar* functions as an expression of responsibility and devotion to Allah, fostering intrinsic motivation, discipline, perseverance, and sustained commitment to learning. Meanwhile, *tawakal* serves as a spiritual mechanism that promotes inner peace, alleviates anxiety related to academic outcomes, and strengthens students' resilience in facing challenges and uncertainty. In addition, spiritual practices such as du'a, salah, and Qur'anic recitation provide psychological resources that help students maintain focus, cope with academic pressures, and interpret both success and failure in a constructive manner. The findings suggest that academic achievement is not solely determined by intellectual ability and academic effort but is also influenced by the internalisation of Islamic spiritual values, which contribute to character development, psychological resilience, and a life orientation centred on worship and the pursuit of Allah's pleasure (riḍā Allāh). The primary contribution of this study lies in its phenomenological explanation of how spirituality is experienced, interpreted, and integrated into students' academic success within the context of Islamic higher education. Nevertheless, this study

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has several limitations. The small sample size and the focus on five high-achieving students from a single Islamic university may limit the transferability of the findings to other educational contexts. Despite these limitations, the study offers practical implications for educators and higher education institutions by highlighting the importance of integrating spiritual development into student support services and learning programs. Future research is encouraged to involve larger and more diverse samples across different universities and to employ mixed-methods or quantitative approaches further to examine the relationship between spirituality and academic achievement.

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