

SPIRITUAL AWARENESS AND ACADEMIC COMMITMENT IN ISLAMIC RELIGIOUS EDUCATION AMONG NON-RELIGIOUS UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

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Received: April 2026. Accepted: July 2026. Online First: August 2026. Published: December 2026.

ABSTRACT

Student engagement in compulsory Islamic Religious Education (IRE) has become an important concern in higher education, particularly among students enrolled in non-religious study programs who often perceive the course as peripheral to their disciplinary interests. Although previous research has examined Islamic education from curricular, pedagogical, and institutional perspectives, limited attention has been given to how spiritual awareness shapes students' academic commitment through its interaction with self-efficacy and engagement. Consequently, this study explored these lived experiences using a qualitative phenomenological approach. Data were collected from 166 undergraduate students through open-ended questionnaires and complemented by semi-structured interviews with ten purposively selected participants. The data were analyzed using inductive thematic analysis. The findings indicate that spiritual awareness served as the primary motivational foundation for academic commitment by strengthening students' perceptions of educational value, self-efficacy, and cognitive, affective, and behavioral engagement. Moreover, three patterns of academic commitment emerged: transformative commitment, strategic commitment, and instrumental compliance, reflecting varying degrees of integration between spiritual motivation and learning engagement. Overall, the findings demonstrate that meaningful participation in compulsory IRE is shaped by the dynamic interaction of spiritual, psychological, pedagogical, and social factors. Conceptually, this study advances scholarship on IRE by reconceptualizing academic commitment through an integrated framework that positions spiritual awareness as a central motivational resource for transformative learning.

Keywords: Academic Commitment, Islamic Religious Education, Quality Education, Self-Efficacy, Spiritual Awareness, Student Engagement

INTRODUCTION

Academic commitment has become a critical issue in higher education because it influences students' engagement, persistence, academic achievement, and overall learning experience (Worku & Gita, 2024; Vogel & Human-Vogel, 2018). Furthermore, across diverse educational contexts, universities increasingly face challenges in sustaining students' motivation and meaningful participation, particularly in compulsory courses that are often perceived as peripheral to their disciplinary interests (Bowden et al., 2021; van Gijn-Grosvenor & Huisman, 2020). Research consistently demonstrates that students' commitment is shaped by multiple psychological and contextual factors, including self-efficacy, perceived learning value, coping strategies, and academic satisfaction (Bandura, 1993; Doménech-Betoret et al., 2017; Meneghel et al., 2019). Specifically, when students perceive limited relevance or personal significance in a course, their willingness to invest cognitive, emotional, and behavioral effort tends to decline,

which in turn reduces both learning quality and long-term educational outcomes (Appleton-Knapp & Krentler, 2006; Paechter et al., 2010). Consequently, understanding these underlying influences is essential for developing strategies to enhance student commitment and improve educational effectiveness.

These challenges are particularly pertinent to Islamic Religious Education (IRE) courses in Indonesian public universities, where the course is mandatory for all undergraduate students regardless of their academic discipline (Muliadi et al., 2025; Takunas et al., 2024). This universal requirement underscores the importance of understanding how IRE is delivered and received across diverse student populations. Moreover, national education policies have shaped the course not merely as a conduit for transmitting religious knowledge, but also as a tool for fostering ethical character, enhancing religious understanding, and promoting responsible citizenship among young adults (Anas et al., 2025; Indonesia, 2003, 2015, 2020). Despite these intentions, previous research highlights that many students enrolled in non-religious study programs often perceive IRE as merely an additional requirement rather than a core element of their academic and personal development. This perception can lead to varying degrees of participation, engagement, and enthusiasm, which ultimately impact the effectiveness of the instruction (Mubin, 2021; Amin, 2015; Hanafi, 2017). Consequently, this disconnect between the intended educational objectives of the IRE course and students' actual learning experiences raises critical questions about how academic commitment and meaningful engagement are cultivated within the context of compulsory IRE courses, especially in secular higher education settings that may have diverse cultural and religious perspectives.

Although academic commitment has been extensively examined in relation to self-efficacy, motivation, belonging, and academic performance (Gebresilase et al., 2026; Freire et al., 2020; Bandura, 1993, 2011; Human-Vogel & Rabe, 2015), there remains a limited understanding of how students specifically construct their commitment toward compulsory Islamic Religious Education (IRE) subjects outside of their disciplinary specialization. This gap is particularly notable given the importance of IRE in shaping students' moral and spiritual development within educational settings. Additionally, research on IRE in public universities has predominantly focused on broader issues such as curriculum reform, institutional implementation, and pedagogical innovation (Amin, 2015; Hanafi, 2017; Mubin, 2021). However, these studies tend to pay limited attention to the lived experiences of students, especially regarding their engagement and personal motivation in learning IRE. Importantly, current research rarely explores how various factors, such as spiritual awareness, perceived educational value, and self-efficacy, interact and influence students' academic commitment within Islamic learning contexts. This results in a significant gap in understanding the psychological and educational processes that underpin how compulsory Islamic education can foster meaningful student engagement and sustained commitment. Such insights are crucial for developing effective pedagogical strategies and enhancing student motivation, ultimately contributing to more effective teaching practices tailored to this specialized field.

Addressing this gap, the present study investigates the lived experiences of students from non-religious study programs in participating in compulsory IRE courses at a public university in Indonesia. Rather than conceptualizing academic commitment solely as a psychological disposition or an institutional outcome, the study examines how students construct commitment through the interaction of spiritual awareness, perceived educational value, self-efficacy, and student engagement, thereby explaining why some experience IRE as transformative. In contrast, others participate primarily to satisfy institutional requirements. To interpret these processes, the study adopts an integrated conceptual framework that combines the Islamic educational philosophy of *ta'dib* with Academic Commitment Theory, Expectancy, Value Theory, Social Cognitive Theory, and the Student Engagement framework. While *ta'dib*

provides the normative foundation by emphasizing the holistic development of intellectual, moral, and spiritual capacities (Al-Attas, 1980, 1991), the four educational theories explain how perceived educational value, self-efficacy, and cognitive, affective, and behavioral engagement collectively shape students' academic commitment. By integrating these complementary perspectives, the study offers a contextually grounded explanation of academic commitment in Islamic higher education and extends existing scholarship beyond conventional motivational approaches by positioning spiritual awareness as a central dimension of meaningful engagement in compulsory IRE.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative phenomenological design to explore how students from non-religious study programs experienced and interpreted academic commitment toward a compulsory IRE course in a public university in West Java, Indonesia. Phenomenology was selected because it enables an in-depth understanding of participants' lived experiences and the meanings they attribute to educational phenomena (Alase, 2017; Creswell, 1998). To facilitate this understanding, the study was guided by an integrated conceptual framework combining the Islamic educational philosophy of *ta'dib*, Academic Commitment Theory, Expectancy-Value Theory, Social Cognitive Theory, and the Student Engagement framework. Collectively, these perspectives informed the exploration of how spiritual awareness, perceived educational value, self-efficacy, and engagement interacted to shape students' academic commitment toward IRE. Participants were undergraduate students who had completed the compulsory IRE course and represented diverse disciplines, including Education, Social Sciences, Economics, Engineering, Mathematics and Natural Sciences, Languages, Sports, and Arts. Data were collected in two stages. First, an open-ended questionnaire consisting of 17 short-answer questions was administered through Google Forms to capture students' perceptions of IRE, learning experiences, motivational beliefs, external influences, and overall satisfaction (Kapade, 2017). A total of 166 students voluntarily participated, providing a broad range of perspectives on the subject matter. Subsequently, semi-structured interviews were conducted with ten purposively selected participants to obtain richer descriptions and clarify emerging issues identified in the questionnaire responses. This approach was consistent with phenomenological sampling principles (Jain, 2021; Starks & Trinidad, 2007), ensuring depth and relevance in the data collected. Overall, these methods aimed to yield comprehensive insights into students' experiences with the IRE course and the factors influencing their academic commitment.

The data were then analyzed using inductive thematic analysis to identify recurring patterns across participants' lived experiences. Initially, questionnaire responses and interview transcripts were repeatedly reviewed to achieve immersion in the data, which helped to familiarize the researchers thoroughly with the content before systematically coding meaningful units. This extensive familiarization process involved multiple readings and active annotation, ensuring that even subtle nuances and variations in participant perspectives were captured. Subsequently, related codes were organized into categories and refined into overarching themes through constant comparison and iterative interpretation. Although the analysis was inductive in nature, the integrated conceptual framework served as a sensitizing lens for interpreting how various factors, such as spiritual awareness, perceived educational value, self-efficacy, and engagement, contributed to students' academic commitment. Importantly, this framework did not constrain the emergence of new themes but rather guided the understanding of complex interactions. To facilitate data management, coding, and retrieval of thematic patterns, NVivo 12 software was employed, providing a systematic approach to handling large volumes of qualitative data. Furthermore, to enhance the trustworthiness of the findings, themes were continuously compared with the original data, ensuring that interpretations remained grounded

in participants' actual responses. Finally, interpretations were refined through iterative discussions among the researchers, which continued until conceptual coherence and analytical credibility were achieved, ensuring a rigorous and comprehensive analysis process.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Spiritual Awareness as the Foundation of Academic Commitment

Analysis of the open-ended questionnaire responses indicates that students generally perceived Islamic Religious Education (IRE) as more than a compulsory university subject. Most respondents described the course as an opportunity to deepen their religious understanding, reflecting a desire to connect more profoundly with their faith. They also viewed it as a means to cultivate moral character, emphasizing virtues such as honesty, compassion, and integrity that are integral to Islamic teachings. Additionally, many students highlighted that IRE helped them revisit fundamental Islamic doctrines, fostering a stronger sense of religious identity and personal belief. They believed the course encouraged ethical responsibility that could be applied in both academic pursuits and professional careers, preparing them to navigate real-world challenges with Islamic principles in mind. These responses suggest that students attached significant educational and spiritual importance to the course, perceiving it not merely as a curriculum requirement but as a vital component of their personal and moral development.

The interview findings further illuminate how students interpreted the personal meaning of IRE within their university experience. Although participants acknowledged that the course was compulsory, most explained that they regarded it as an opportunity to deepen their understanding of *aqidah*, improve religious practice, and reflect on the relevance of Islamic teachings to everyday decision-making. Several participants described IRE as a space for reconnecting their academic pursuits with their responsibilities as Muslims, particularly within learning environments dominated by secular disciplines. One participant remarked that the course reminded them that university education should strengthen not only professional competence but also their relationship with Allah (Participant 39, personal communication, November 2025). Others similarly viewed IRE as an important medium for integrating Islamic values into personal conduct, social interactions, and future professional responsibilities.

Triangulation of the questionnaire and interview data indicates that spiritual awareness served as the primary foundation of students' academic commitment. Participants who perceived IRE as spiritually meaningful reported greater willingness to engage in classroom discussions, complete reflective assignments, and connect Islamic perspectives with issues encountered in their respective disciplines. Rather than viewing learning as an external obligation, they regarded active participation as part of their broader religious responsibility. Nevertheless, a smaller group perceived IRE primarily as a compulsory requirement for graduation, focusing on attendance, assignments, and passing grades with limited personal or spiritual engagement. These contrasting perspectives suggest that students' academic commitment toward IRE exists along a continuum, ranging from transformative, spiritually grounded engagement to compliance-oriented participation, depending on how they interpreted the educational and spiritual significance of the course.

Perceived Educational Value of IRE

Analysis of the questionnaire responses indicates that most students perceived IRE as providing educational value beyond fulfilling curricular requirements. Respondents frequently reported that the course strengthened their understanding of Islamic teachings, encouraged ethical reflection, and reinforced the relevance of religious values in everyday life. Many also highlighted its substantial contribution to developing more balanced and nuanced perspectives on contemporary issues, including religious tolerance, professional ethics, and responsible

citizenship. These responses suggest that students generally regarded IRE as a meaningful component of their university education because it supported both their intellectual development and personal growth, fostering critical thinking, moral reasoning, and a deeper appreciation for diverse viewpoints.

The interview findings further explain how students constructed the educational value of IRE through their learning experiences. Most participants considered the course meaningful when lecturers connected Islamic teachings with contemporary issues and their respective academic disciplines. Rather than perceiving IRE as a repetition of prior religious instruction, they appreciated dialogical and contextual learning that encouraged critical discussion and reflection on the practical application of Islamic values. One participant explained that discussions on social media ethics, religious moderation, and professional responsibility made the course more relevant to contemporary realities (Participant 44, personal communication, November 2025). Other participants similarly reported that contextual learning helped them understand Islam not only as religious knowledge but also as an ethical framework that complemented their disciplinary studies and future professional responsibilities.

Moreover, triangulation of the questionnaire and interview data indicates that students' perceived educational value of IRE reinforced their willingness to participate actively in classroom discussions, reflective assignments, and independent learning. Participants who regarded the course as relevant to both their academic and personal lives demonstrated stronger engagement and greater appreciation of its contribution to intellectual and spiritual development. Nevertheless, a smaller group assigned lower educational value to IRE when instruction relied primarily on lecture-based delivery, repetitive content, and limited opportunities for dialogue. These students tended to participate mainly to fulfill institutional requirements rather than because they perceived the course as personally meaningful. Together, these findings suggest that students' perceptions of the educational value of IRE were shaped not only by the course content itself but also by the pedagogical approaches through which learning was experienced.

Self-Efficacy in IRE Course Learning

Cognitive Self-Efficacy

The questionnaire and interview data analysis revealed that students' cognitive self-efficacy was enhanced through IRE learning that emphasized critical thinking and linked Islamic teachings to contemporary issues and students' disciplinary backgrounds. Many respondents reported greater confidence in understanding course materials when lecturers employed dialogical, case-based, and contextual learning approaches rather than relying on memorization of religious doctrines. Interview participants similarly explained that discussions on topics such as social media ethics, religious tolerance, and professional responsibility enabled them to interpret Islamic concepts more critically and participate more actively in classroom discussions. One participant noted that relating Islamic teachings to contemporary realities made the course easier to understand and more meaningful (Participant 44, personal communication, November 2025). Others likewise indicated that interdisciplinary learning enhanced both their understanding and confidence in expressing opinions during class. In contrast, lecture-dominated instruction and repetitive presentation of familiar content reduced students' confidence to participate because they offered limited opportunities for critical engagement. Collectively, these findings suggest that students' cognitive self-efficacy was shaped largely by the relevance, contextualization, and interactive quality of the learning experience.

Affective Self-Efficacy

The analysis of the questionnaire and interview responses reveals that students' affective self-efficacy was enhanced by classroom settings that fostered interaction, openness, and

reflective learning. Many participants expressed increased motivation, interest, and a sense of personal connection to IRE when teachers facilitated dialogue, valued diverse perspectives, and highlighted the practical importance of Islamic values. Interview participants similarly explained that dialogical learning enabled them to express opinions freely, ask questions without fear of judgment, and engage more deeply with the course. One participant noted that open discussions helped them understand Islam as practical guidance for life rather than merely a collection of religious doctrines (Participant 44, personal communication, November 2025). Conversely, participants who experienced predominantly lecture-based and monotonous instruction described declining enthusiasm, reduced emotional involvement, and weaker participation. As a result, these findings suggest that students' affective self-efficacy was fostered not only by confidence in their learning abilities but also by supportive pedagogical relationships and learning environments that encouraged meaningful interaction, reflection, and emotional engagement.

Behavioral Self-Efficacy

Many respondents demonstrated self-regulated learning behaviors beyond passive attendance. They reported regularly attending classes, participating in discussions, completing assignments responsibly, independently reviewing course materials, managing study schedules, collaborating with peers, and seeking additional learning resources. These actions reflect students' behavioral self-efficacy in sustaining learning behaviors and adapting to academic challenges. When faced with demanding assignments, overlapping coursework, or Qur'anic recitation assessments, interview participants described maintaining their engagement by organizing study plans, completing tasks incrementally, consulting lecturers and classmates, and practicing consistently. Several also identified spiritual practices, including prayer, self-reflection, and viewing learning as an act of *ibadah*, as important sources of motivation and emotional stability. One participant explained that praying before resuming assignments helped restore focus when academic demands became overwhelming (Participant 39, personal communication, November 2025), while another reported that repeated practice strengthened confidence before Qur'anic recitation assessments (Participant 90, personal communication, December 2025). Together, these findings suggest that students' behavioral self-efficacy was expressed through self-regulation, perseverance, adaptive coping strategies, and the integration of social and spiritual resources, enabling them to remain actively engaged despite competing academic demands.

Student Engagement in IRE Course Learning

Cognitive Engagement

Analysis of the questionnaire and interview data indicates that students' cognitive engagement was enhanced when IRE promoted critical reflection, contextual learning, and interdisciplinary dialogue. Many respondents reported increased active involvement when classroom discussions linked Islamic teachings with contemporary social issues, ethical dilemmas, and concepts from their academic disciplines. This connection encouraged them to analyze problems, compare perspectives, and apply Islamic principles to real-life situations. Similarly, interview participants explained that lecturers adopting dialogical and problem-based approaches boosted their willingness to think critically and participate more in classroom discussions. One participant noted that learning became more intellectually engaging when Islamic teachings were related to everyday issues and their field of study (Participant 44, personal communication, November 2025). On the other hand, participants reported lower cognitive engagement when instruction relied primarily on one-way lectures or repetitive content with limited opportunities for interaction. Thus, these findings suggest that students' cognitive

engagement depended largely on pedagogical approaches that made learning relevant, interactive, and intellectually stimulating.

Affective Engagement

Analysis of the questionnaire and interview data reveals that students' affective engagement was significantly influenced by supportive classroom environments and positive interpersonal relationships. When lecturers fostered open communication, respected diverse viewpoints, and promoted collaborative and reflective learning, many students reported increased interest, enjoyment, and emotional connection to Islamic Religious Education (IRE). Interview participants similarly shared the portrayal that respectful interactions with lecturers and classmates created a psychologically safe environment that enabled them to express opinions freely and engage in constructive discussions without fear of criticism. Beyond lecturer support, peer collaboration through discussions, exchanging references, and completing assignments together also sustained students' motivation and deepened their understanding of course content. One participant noted that conversations with classmates after lectures often clarified concepts that had not been fully understood during class (Participant 18, personal communication, November 2025). These findings indicate that affective engagement is cultivated through supportive pedagogical and social relationships, which create an environment where students feel a strong sense of belonging. This sense of connection enhances their motivation and encourages them to participate more actively and meaningfully in the learning process.

Behavioral Engagement

Students demonstrated their behavioral engagement through active participation both inside and outside the classroom. According to many respondents, this included regularly attending lectures, engaging in discussions, responsibly completing assignments, independently seeking additional learning resources, collaborating with classmates, and managing their study schedules to enhance their understanding of IRE. The interview data further explained that their engagement was reinforced by supportive ecological factors, particularly lecturers who provided clear explanations, constructive feedback, and opportunities for dialogue. Peer collaboration, family encouragement, institutional resources such as libraries, internet access, and the campus IRE Tutorial Program also encouraged sustained participation. Several participants additionally emphasized that their belief in Allah motivated them to engage consistently because learning IRE was regarded as part of their religious responsibility. Together, these findings suggest that behavioral engagement extended beyond fulfilling course requirements and emerged through the interaction of individual initiative with supportive pedagogical, social, institutional, and spiritual environments.

Typologies of Academic Commitment

The thematic analysis emphasizes that students' academic commitment to Islamic Religious Education (IRE) exhibits considerable variation, particularly among those enrolled in non-religious study programs. Through triangulating data from questionnaires and interviews, three distinct patterns of commitment are identified, each characterized by varying degrees of spiritual awareness, perceived educational value, self-efficacy, and active engagement in learning activities. These patterns are described as transformative commitment, strategic commitment, and instrumental compliance. Importantly, rather than being fixed categories, these patterns exist along a continuum, reflecting the diverse and nuanced ways in which students experience, interpret, and respond to the compulsory nature of Islamic Religious Education (IRE). This variation underscores the complex, multifaceted nature of student engagement, which is shaped by an interplay of personal characteristics, educational contexts, and broader social and cultural factors. Such factors significantly influence how students relate to, internalize, and find meaningful connection within the religious education curriculum. Ultimately, these influences

affect their motivation, attitudes, and overall perspective toward learning about their faith, highlighting the importance of understanding individual differences in educational approaches.

Transformative Commitment

The first pattern represents students whose commitment was characterized by strong spiritual awareness and high perceived educational value. Questionnaire responses consistently indicated that these students regarded IRE as an important opportunity for strengthening faith, developing moral character, and integrating Islamic values into academic and professional life. Participants also clarified that they intentionally worked to comprehend the course content, engaged enthusiastically in class discussions, and critically reflected on current issues from Islamic viewpoints. They described learning as a process of personal and spiritual development rather than merely fulfilling curricular obligations. Several participants also reported maintaining consistent learning efforts despite academic challenges because they viewed studying IRE as part of their responsibility as Muslims. These findings indicate that transformative commitment is characterized by high levels of cognitive, affective, and behavioral engagement supported by intrinsic motivation and spiritual intentionality.

Strategic Commitment

The second pattern reflects students who demonstrated active participation primarily because they recognized the academic value of successfully completing the course. Responses to the questionnaire show that these students consistently attended lectures, responsibly completed assignments, and engaged in classroom activities. However, their motivation mainly centered on attaining satisfactory academic results. Interview participants also emphasized that consistent participation is important for achieving good grades, meeting course requirements, and preventing graduation delays. Although these students acknowledged the importance of IRE, they generally described its contribution in pragmatic rather than transformative terms. Spiritual awareness remained present but functioned as a complementary rather than dominant source of motivation. Consequently, their engagement was characterized by adequate confidence and consistent participation without the deeper personal reflection observed among students demonstrating transformative commitment.

Instrumental Compliance

The third pattern represents students whose participation was primarily driven by the compulsory status of IRE within the university curriculum. Questionnaire responses suggest that these students tended to perceive the course as an administrative requirement rather than a meaningful educational experience. This perspective was reinforced by interview participants who explained that their primary objective was to satisfy attendance requirements, complete assignments, and obtain passing grades. They frequently reported lower enthusiasm when learning activities relied on repetitive content or lecture-dominated instruction and described limited opportunities to connect Islamic teachings with their academic or personal lives. Although these students generally believed they could complete course requirements, they demonstrated limited confidence in engaging critically with course materials and invested minimal cognitive and emotional effort beyond procedural participation. These findings suggest that instrumental compliance reflects externally regulated participation in which academic engagement remains largely dependent on institutional expectations rather than internalized educational or spiritual values.

These three patterns illustrate that academic commitment develops through a dynamic interplay of factors such as spiritual awareness, perceived educational value, self-efficacy, and student engagement. This development is not rigid but exists along a continuum of commitment, where students' motivations and their learning experiences continuously influence the depth of their participation in the IRE course. Furthermore, understanding these typologies helps to better grasp the nuanced ways in which students become invested in their academic

journey. Table 1 provides a comprehensive overview of the key characteristics of these academic commitment typologies, offering deeper insight into their distinctive features.

Table 1. Characteristics of Academic Commitment Typologies

Dimension	Transformative Commitment	Strategic Commitment	Instrumental Compliance
Spiritual awareness	Strongly internalized; learning viewed as part of religious and moral development.	Present but secondary to academic goals	Limited; course viewed primarily as a compulsory requirement
Perceived educational value	High; IRE considered relevant for personal, ethical, and professional development.	Moderate; IRE valued mainly for academic achievement	Low; value confined to fulfilling curriculum requirements
Self-efficacy	High confidence in understanding, discussing, and applying Islamic concepts	Moderate confidence focused on completing academic tasks	Sufficient for completing minimum requirements but limited confidence in deeper engagement
Cognitive engagement	Critical reflection, contextual analysis, independent learning	Focused understanding to achieve good performance	Surface learning and memorization
Affective engagement	Strong interest, enthusiasm, and personal fulfillment	Moderate interest associated with academic success	Neutral or low emotional involvement
Behavioral engagement	Active participation, persistence, self-regulated learning, and reflective practice	Consistent attendance and task completion with performance orientation	Participation limited to attendance and assignment submission
Dominant motivational orientation	Intrinsic and spiritually grounded	Achievement-oriented and pragmatic	Extrinsic and compliance-oriented

As summarized in Table 1, the three typologies indicate that academic commitment toward the IRE course exists along a continuum rather than as a dichotomous phenomenon. They differ in the extent to which students internalize the spiritual purpose of IRE, perceive its educational value, develop self-efficacy, and engage in learning. Transformative commitment reflects the strongest integration of these dimensions, whereas instrumental compliance is characterized by participation driven primarily by institutional requirements. Strategic commitment occupies an intermediate position, combining consistent participation with achievement-oriented motivation. These findings suggest that academic commitment is shaped by the dynamic interaction of spiritual, psychological, pedagogical, and contextual factors, providing an empirical foundation for the theoretical interpretation presented in the Discussion section.

A Conceptual Model of Academic Commitment in IRE Learning

The thematic synthesis indicates that academic commitment toward the compulsory IRE course develops through the interaction of spiritual, motivational, psychological, and behavioral dimensions of learning. As illustrated in Figure 1, students' spiritual awareness, grounded in the holistic educational purpose of *ta'dib*, provides the foundation for interpreting

the meaning and relevance of IRE, shaping their perceptions of its value for intellectual growth, moral development, and future professional life. When students perceive the course as meaningful and valuable, they develop greater self-efficacy to understand, participate in, and apply Islamic knowledge, which leads to stronger engagement across cognitive, affective, and behavioral aspects. Findings show that spiritual awareness, perceived value, self-efficacy, and engagement form a continuum of academic commitment, from transformative to instrumental compliance. These typologies reflect diverse student experiences with compulsory IRE in public higher education, highlighting that commitment results from dynamic interactions among educational, psychological, and spiritual factors.

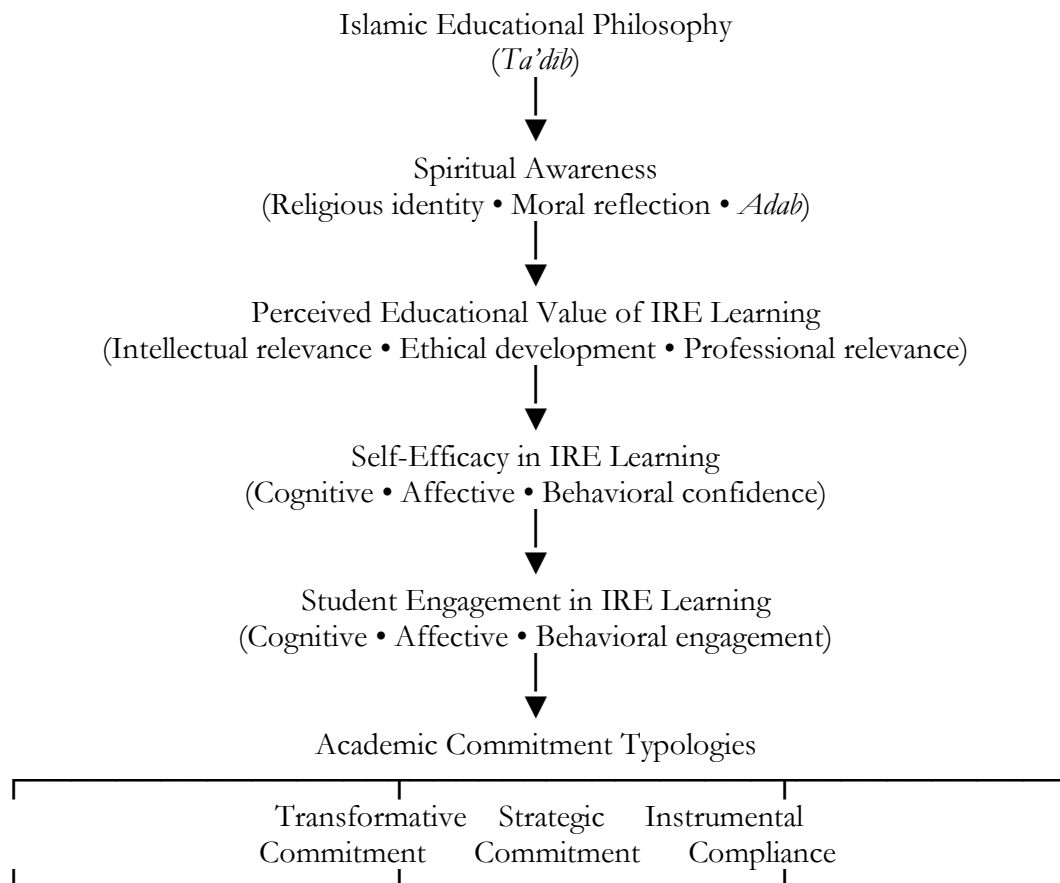


Figure 1. Conceptual Model of Academic Commitment in IRE Learning

Figure 1 summarizes the thematic relationships underlying academic commitment toward IRE. The model illustrates that spiritual awareness, grounded in *ta'dib*, shapes students' perceptions of the educational value of IRE, strengthens their self-efficacy, and promotes cognitive, affective, and behavioral engagement. Different levels of integration across these dimensions give rise to three patterns of academic commitment: transformative commitment, strategic commitment, and instrumental compliance. Rather than representing a linear sequence, the model depicts an interconnected process through which spiritual, psychological, pedagogical, and contextual factors collectively shape students' commitment to learning in Islamic higher education.

The findings demonstrate that academic commitment toward IRE among students in non-religious study programs develops through the interaction of spiritual, motivational, psychological, and educational processes rather than through institutional obligation alone. As

illustrated in Figure 1, the proposed conceptual model positions *ta'dib* as the philosophical foundation through which spiritual awareness shapes students' perceptions of the educational value of IRE, strengthens self-efficacy, promotes active engagement, and ultimately gives rise to different patterns of academic commitment. This integrated process suggests that meaningful commitment emerges from the interplay between spiritual orientation, perceived educational relevance, confidence in learning, and sustained participation, thereby extending existing understandings of academic commitment within Islamic higher education.

A central finding is that spiritual awareness serves as the foundation of students' commitment to learning IRE. Rather than viewing the course merely as a compulsory requirement, participants perceived it as a means of strengthening their relationship with Allah Almighty, cultivating moral character, and preparing for ethical responsibilities in their future lives. This finding aligns with Al-Attas' concept of *ta'dib*, which views education as the cultivation of *adab* through the integrated development of intellectual, moral, and spiritual capacities. Accordingly, students' commitment extends beyond academic persistence to reflect the internalization of Islamic values, indicating that the purpose of IRE is not only cognitive development but also the formation of ethically responsible and spiritually grounded individuals.

This interpretation aligns with earlier research emphasizing how spirituality and purpose contribute to motivating students and enhancing their engagement in education (Calaguas, 2025; Herman & Gigliotti, 2025). Students are more likely to invest sustained effort when learning is perceived as personally meaningful and connected to broader moral purposes rather than merely fulfilling curricular requirements. Similarly, Islamic education scholars argue that effective IRE should integrate intellectual development, character formation, and spiritual cultivation through reflective learning experiences. The present findings extend this literature by demonstrating that spiritual awareness is not simply an educational outcome but the starting point of academic commitment. It shapes how students perceive the significance of IRE, motivates active participation, and provides the foundation for developing educational value, self-efficacy, and engagement. In this regard, the findings reaffirm *ta'dib* as a holistic educational philosophy that integrates knowledge, character, and spirituality in fostering meaningful academic commitment (Juwaini et al., 2025).

The findings further indicate that perceived educational value serves as the mechanism through which spiritual awareness is translated into sustained academic commitment. Although participants studied in non-religious disciplines, they consistently viewed IRE as valuable for strengthening religious understanding while developing ethical reasoning, critical thinking, and professional responsibility. This finding supports Expectancy–Value Theory, which posits that students invest greater effort when learning is perceived as valuable and personally meaningful (Blockley et al., 2026; Doménech-Betoret et al., 2017). However, the present study extends this perspective by showing that the value of IRE encompasses not only utility and academic attainment but also intellectual, ethical, and spiritual development. By connecting Islamic teachings with contemporary issues and professional life, IRE enhances students' willingness to engage meaningfully in compulsory religious education (Saada, 2023).

This finding supports previous research showing that students' perceptions of the usefulness and relevance of learning influence motivation, persistence, and achievement (Alhamami, 2018; Doménech-Betoret et al., 2017). However, the present study extends this relationship by demonstrating that, within IRE, educational value is also shaped by the integration of religious knowledge with personal transformation and responsible citizenship. Students valued IRE when Islamic teachings were connected to contemporary issues through discussion, reflection, and contextual problem-solving, whereas repetitive and lecture-centered instruction diminished both perceived value and engagement. These findings highlight the

importance of contextualized and dialogical IRE pedagogy in strengthening students' motivation and academic commitment (Ahmed, 2026).

The findings further identify self-efficacy as the psychological mechanism linking perceived educational value to active learning behaviors. Students who were confident in understanding Islamic concepts and participating in classroom activities demonstrated greater persistence, emotional regulation, and consistent engagement. This finding aligns with Social Cognitive Theory, which emphasizes self-efficacy as a key determinant of motivation and performance (Bandura, 1993, 2011). Participants gained confidence by mastering content, collaborating, reflecting, receiving feedback, and applying Islamic knowledge in real contexts. This indicates that self-efficacy in IRE is built through interactions between learners' beliefs and supportive environments, not just individual ability (Carmi & Tamir, 2026).

The present findings further extend Social Cognitive Theory by showing that self-efficacy in IRE incorporates a distinctive spiritual dimension. In addition to cognitive and behavioral strategies, participants relied on prayer, *tawakkul*, self-reflection, and viewing learning as an act of *ibadah* to maintain motivation and cope with academic challenges. These forms of spiritual coping strengthened persistence and emotional regulation, consistent with studies linking self-efficacy to resilience and adaptive coping (Kustyarini, 2020; Muenks et al., 2020) and highlighting the psychological benefits of religious coping (Khenfer et al., 2017). The findings suggest that self-efficacy in IRE extends beyond confidence in one's capabilities to encompass spiritual resilience, thereby enriching conventional interpretations of Social Cognitive Theory within faith-based educational contexts.

The findings also indicate that student engagement represents the observable expression of students' motivation and self-efficacy. Participants who perceived IRE as valuable and believed in their learning capabilities demonstrated stronger cognitive, affective, and behavioral engagement through active discussion, collaboration, consistent task completion, and reflective application of Islamic values. This finding supports Student Engagement Theory, which conceptualizes engagement as the interaction of cognitive investment, emotional involvement, and active participation in learning (Bowden et al., 2021). Importantly, engagement in IRE extended beyond classroom participation to include moral reflection and the integration of Islamic values into students' academic and personal lives, illustrating how meaningful learning transforms internal motivation into sustained educational practice (Garba et al., 2026).

The findings further highlight the ecological nature of student engagement. Participants consistently identified lecturers, peers, institutional resources, and the broader learning environment as key factors influencing their participation in IRE. Dialogical pedagogy, constructive feedback, collaborative learning, and supportive academic environments fostered deeper engagement, whereas repetitive instruction and limited interaction often resulted in passive participation. These findings support previous research demonstrating that engagement depends not only on individual motivation but also on the quality of instructional practices and learning environments (Ayllón et al., 2019; Bowden et al., 2021). Extending this literature, the present study shows that supportive educational environments in Islamic higher education facilitate not only academic participation but also the internalization of Islamic values through reflective and contextual learning experiences.

The identification of three academic commitment typologies, transformative commitment, strategic commitment, and instrumental compliance, constitutes a major contribution of this study. Consistent with Academic Commitment Theory, commitment reflects students' psychological attachment to learning and their willingness to persist toward educational goals (Gilbert, 2013; Human-Vogel & Rabe, 2015). However, the findings demonstrate that commitment in IRE is not a single continuum but varies according to the integration of spiritual awareness, perceived educational value, self-efficacy, and engagement.

Transformative commitment reflects the internalization of Islamic values and intrinsic motivation, strategic commitment is primarily achievement-oriented, and instrumental compliance is driven by external requirements. These typologies suggest that academic commitment is shaped not only by educational demands but also by the personal and spiritual meanings students attribute to Islamic learning.

The proposed typology further suggests that academic commitment is a dynamic developmental process rather than a fixed individual characteristic. The three commitment patterns represent varying degrees of integration among spiritual awareness, perceived educational value, self-efficacy, and engagement, allowing students to progress from instrumental compliance toward strategic or transformative commitment through meaningful educational experiences. This perspective extends existing conceptualizations of academic commitment by emphasizing that commitment is continuously shaped through interactions between learners and their educational environments. Within IRE learning, such development is particularly significant because the objectives of the course encompass not only academic achievement but also ethical formation, spiritual maturity, and responsible citizenship.

Overall, this study advances the literature by proposing an integrated framework that explains academic commitment in IRE course through the interaction of *ta'dib*, perceived educational value, self-efficacy, and student engagement. By integrating Islamic educational philosophy with Expectancy-Value Theory, Social Cognitive Theory, Student Engagement Theory, and Academic Commitment Theory, the study demonstrates that meaningful commitment emerges through interconnected spiritual, motivational, psychological, and educational processes. Practically, the findings highlight the need for contextual, dialogical, and reflective IRE pedagogy that strengthens lecturer professionalism and connects Islamic teachings with students' disciplinary knowledge and contemporary challenges. Future studies should validate the proposed framework across diverse higher education contexts using longitudinal or mixed-methods approaches to examine how academic commitment evolves over time.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that academic commitment toward IRE course among students enrolled in non-religious study programs develops through the dynamic interaction of spiritual awareness, perceived educational value, self-efficacy, and student engagement within the educational philosophy of *ta'dib*. Rather than functioning solely as a compulsory university subject, IRE becomes a meaningful educational experience when students perceive its relevance to their spiritual growth, ethical development, and future professional responsibilities. The findings further reveal that variations in the integration of these dimensions give rise to three patterns of academic commitment, transformative commitment, strategic commitment, and instrumental compliance, highlighting that commitment extends beyond academic persistence to encompass students' internalization of Islamic values and meaningful participation in learning. Conceptually, this study contributes to the scholarship on IRE learning by proposing an integrated framework that combines *ta'dib*, Expectancy-Value Theory, Social Cognitive Theory, Student Engagement Theory, and Academic Commitment Theory to explain how academic commitment is constructed within compulsory IRE course. The findings suggest that strengthening students' commitment requires pedagogical approaches that connect Islamic teachings with contemporary issues, disciplinary knowledge, and reflective dialogue while fostering supportive learning environments that enhance educational value, self-efficacy, and engagement. Future research should validate the proposed framework across diverse higher education contexts using longitudinal and mixed-methods designs to further examine the development of academic commitment over time.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

This research is funded by the Indonesian Endowment Fund for Education (LPDP) on behalf of the Indonesian Ministry of Higher Education, Science and Technology and managed under the EQUITY Program (Contract No. 4314/B3/DT.03.08/2025 and No. 352/UN40/HK.00.10/2025).

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