



## THE ROLE OF TAWAKAL AS A SPIRITUAL REGULATION MECHANISM IN OVERCOMING FUTURE ANXIETY

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### **Abstract**

This study specifically analyzes the role of tawakal as a spiritual regulatory mechanism in helping Islamic Religious Education students at UIN Sunan Gunung Djati cope with future anxiety, which is defined as an individual's inability to face future uncertainty. The purpose of this research is to understand the dynamics of future anxiety in Islamic Religious Education students and analyzing the role of tawakal as a spiritual regulatory mechanism in managing future anxiety based on students' subjective experiences. Using a qualitative phenomenological approach, data were collected through in-depth interviews and observations with three Islamic Religious Education students and two campus religious administrators. Data were later analyzed using the Miles and Huberman model, which includes data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion. Research results show that anxiety arises in academic, career, financial, and personal maturity aspects. Triggered by internal factors such as low self-confidence and external factors such as family pressure and academic demands. Tawakal helps calm emotions, increase self-acceptance, and strengthen readiness to face uncertainty, especially regarding the future. The effectiveness of tawakal is supported by spiritual closeness, namely a condition in which an individual has a strong relationship with God and social and religious support. At the same time, obstacles stem from a mistaken understanding of tawakal and the determination of negative thoughts. This study confirms that tawakal is a spiritual strategy that can reduce anxiety about the future.

**Keywords:** Future Anxiety; Spiritual Regulation; Tawakal

### **Abstrak**

Penelitian ini menganalisis secara khusus peran tawakal sebagai mekanisme regulasi spiritual dalam membantu mahasiswa PAI UIN Sunan Gunung Djati menghadapi *future anxiety* atau kecemasan masa

depan yang dinilai berkaitan dengan ketidakmampuan individu dalam menghadapi ketidakpastian masa depan. Tujuan penelitian ini adalah memahami dinamika *future anxiety* pada mahasiswa Pendidikan Agama Islam serta menganalisis peran tawakal sebagai mekanisme regulasi spiritual dalam mengelola kecemasan masa depan berdasarkan pengalaman subjektif mahasiswa. Melalui pendekatan kualitatif fenomenologis, data dikumpulkan melalui wawancara mendalam dan observasi dengan melibatkan tiga mahasiswa Pendidikan Agama Islam dan dua pengurus keagamaan kampus. Data kemudian dianalisis menggunakan model *Miles dan Huberman* yang meliputi reduksi data, penyajian data, dan penarikan kesimpulan. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa kecemasan muncul pada aspek akademik, karier, finansial, dan kedewasaan diri yang dipicu oleh faktor internal seperti rendahnya kepercayaan diri serta faktor eksternal berupa tekanan keluarga dan tuntutan akademik. Tawakal membantu menenangkan emosi, meningkatkan penerimaan diri, dan memperkuat kesiapan dalam menghadapi ketidakpastian, khususnya terkait masa depan. Efektivitas tawakal didukung oleh kedekatan spiritual, yakni kondisi ketika individu memiliki hubungan yang kuat dengan Tuhan, serta dukungan sosial keagamaan, sementara hambatannya berasal dari pemahaman tawakal yang keliru dan dominasi pikiran negatif. Penelitian ini menegaskan tawakal sebagai strategi koping spiritual yang mampu mereduksi kecemasan terhadap masa depan.

**Kata Kunci:** Kecemasan Masa Depan; Regulasi Spiritual; Tawakal

## Introduction

College students are in the emerging adulthood stage, a developmental phase characterized by the need to make important decisions regarding education, career, financial independence, and identity formation. According to Arnett (2000), emerging adulthood is a developmental stage spanning ages 18 to 29 that marks a transition from adolescence to adulthood. At this age, individuals are also in college. (Arnett, 2000) This stage is characterized by identity exploration, instability, a focus on self-development, a sense of being between adolescence and adulthood, and an openness to various life possibilities. At this stage, the individual often faces various uncertainties that can lead to psychological stress. One common type of psychological stress experienced by students is future anxiety. This anxiety arises when someone excessively imagines negative future possibilities, particularly those related to academic achievement, job opportunities, economic conditions, and readiness to assume social roles. The American College Health

Association (ACHA) data indicate that anxiety is one of the mental health conditions most frequently experienced by students. As many as 35% of 54,000 students were diagnosed with moderate to high levels of anxiety. (Association, 2022). However, if not managed properly, this anxiety can result in decreased psychological well-being, difficulty concentrating while studying, and reduced motivation and self-confidence in students.

For Islamic Religious Education (PAI) students, future anxiety has more complex characteristics. In addition to academic demands and workplace competition, PAI students also face social and religious expectations as prospective religious educators, expected to serve as moral role models in society (Luhur Wicaksono, Andini Linarsih, 2023). This pressure often creates an inner conflict between the ideal self-image and the actual circumstances students face. In humanistic psychology, particularly Carl Rogers' theory, this condition is referred to as incongruence, a discrepancy between the actual self-concept and the desired self, which can trigger anxiety, emotional tension, and a pessimistic outlook on the future. Meanwhile, Abraham Maslow emphasized that security and certainty are basic human needs. If these needs are not met due to future uncertainty, individuals are likely to experience psychological anxiety (Hasanah & Haziz, 2021).

In this context, Islamic psychology offers a comprehensive approach by integrating cognitive, affective, behavioral, and spiritual aspects to understand and resolve psychological problems. Islamic psychology views humans as a unified whole, with integrated physical, mental, and spiritual dimensions. One of the key concepts in Islam related to anxiety management is *tawakkul* (religious trust). *Tawakal* is understood as an attitude of surrender to Allah SWT after making maximum effort, with the belief that Allah SWT predetermines all outcomes. From an Islamic psychological perspective, *tawakal* serves as a spiritual mechanism that helps individuals calm emotions, change negative thought patterns, and accept life's uncertainties (Maslachah & Chozin, 2024).

Various studies show that the value of *tawakal* plays an important role as a spiritual coping strategy, such as praying, *dhikr*, or maximum effort, but still leaving the results to Allah. Hanim and Ahlas (2020) found that *tawakal* (religious obedience) can reduce students' anxiety stemming from an unclear future orientation and pressure to enter the workforce. Similar findings were reported by Zubaidah and Ghofur (2024), who stated that *tawakal* serves as a spiritual regulatory mechanism that balances active effort with surrender, thereby helping individuals maintain emotional stability when facing psychological stress. Thus, *tawakal* is not understood as an

attitude of surrender without effort, but rather as a spiritual process that combines faith, effort, and an open-minded acceptance of outcomes.

Despite being in a religious educational environment, Islamic Religious Education students still have the potential to experience future anxiety, especially regarding career prospects, financial readiness, and academic demands in the emerging adulthood phase. A study by Maharani et al. (2021) shows that students still experience significant levels of future anxiety, particularly regarding career prospects, financial readiness, and academic demands (Maharani et al., 2021). However, based on initial observations and interviews with researchers, it was found that most students attempted to address this anxiety through a spiritual approach, including implementing the value of tawakal in their daily lives. Tawakal is understood not only as a form of surrender to Allah SWT but also as a spiritual process that helps students calm emotions, reduce overthinking, and build acceptance of future uncertainty. This practice manifests in various forms, such as making optimal efforts to complete studies, preparing for careers, increasing prayer and worship, and becoming accustomed to submitting the final results to Allah SWT after the effort is made. Nevertheless, students' experience and appreciation of tawakal exhibit distinct dynamics, warranting deeper study in the context of spiritual regulation, particularly regarding anxiety about the future.

Given this phenomenon, this study deems it important to examine the role of tawakal not only as a theological concept but also as a spiritual regulatory mechanism in students' psychological experiences. This study aims to understand the dynamics of future anxiety in Islamic Religious Education students by identifying the types and causes of anxiety experienced, as well as examining the factors that support and hinder the effectiveness of tawakal. Furthermore, this study also aims to analyze how tawakal is interpreted and applied to help students manage anxiety about the future. Using a qualitative phenomenological approach, this study helps provide a deeper understanding of students' subjective experiences in practicing tawakal as a spiritual coping strategy. In a way, it is theoretical. It is hoped that this research will broaden knowledge in Islamic psychology, particularly regarding the spiritual management and mental well-being of students. In practice, the results of this study are expected to serve as a reference for students, lecturers, and Islamic educational institutions in designing more relevant and sustainable mentoring, counseling, and spiritual development programs to help students adaptively and religiously face future anxieties.

## Method

This study uses a qualitative, phenomenological approach to understand the experiences of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) students regarding future anxiety and the application of tawakal (trust) as a form of spiritual self-regulation. PAI students were selected as participants because they are in a transitional phase into the workforce, characterized by concerns about career prospects, completing their studies, and meeting family and societal expectations. Furthermore, as students studying Islamic values, they have an understanding of the concept of tawakal, which makes it interesting to examine how this value is applied to address anxiety about the future. The research was conducted at Sunan Gunung Djati State Islamic University, Bandung, involving three Islamic Education students as primary informants and two campus religious administrators as supporting informants. Informants were selected through purposive sampling, with the criteria being students in emerging adulthood, particularly in their final year. They are considered to be in a transitional period toward the world of work and adulthood, marked by various academic, career, and financial demands, as well as future-related decision-making. This condition makes final-year students more susceptible to future anxiety. Therefore, they are considered capable of providing relevant and in-depth information regarding their experiences in interpreting and implementing tawakal as a spiritual regulation mechanism. Furthermore, the selection of informants was based on students who have experienced anxiety about the future and have applied the value of tawakal in their daily lives. Meanwhile, supporting informants were selected because they are involved in student religious development activities and understand the psychological dynamics of Islamic Religious Education students. The selection of the number of informants was based on the need for data depth in phenomenological research, so that the data obtained could describe informants' subjective experiences in depth. Data were collected through in-depth interviews and observations to explore the subjective experiences, behaviors, and religious practices of informants in natural contexts, and supported by secondary data in the form of books, scientific articles, and relevant research (Moleong, 2019). Through interviews, researchers explored the process of forming tawakal in informants, starting with experiences that trigger anxiety about the future, the interpretation of religious teachings, the worship practices they engage in, and how the attitude of tawakal develops and is applied in the face of various uncertainties. Data analysis was carried out simultaneously using the Miles and Huberman model, which includes data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions or verification (Huberman, 1994). Data validity was maintained through the application of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability criteria, along with source and technique

triangulation and member checking, to ensure the researcher's interpretation aligned with the informant's experience.

## Results

### Forms of Future Anxiety Experienced by Islamic Education Students

The results of the interview study indicate that future anxiety among Islamic Religious Education students at UIN Sunan Gunung Djati Bandung is predominantly related to job prospects, career uncertainty, financial preparedness, and readiness to build a future. This anxiety manifests itself in the form of emotional fear of being unable to compete in the workforce, feelings of not meeting professional standards as Islamic Religious Education teachers, and personal concerns about the risk of disappointing family expectations. This psychological condition is reinforced by field observations that show indications of real behavior in students, such as emotional exhaustion, a tendency to procrastinate on completing academic assignments (procrastination), and a decreased level of focus in participating in daily lecture activities. Cumulatively, future anxiety in Islamic Religious Education students manifests in three main aspects: academic, financial, and career, which are triggered by internal and external factors.

### Causes of Future Anxiety in Islamic Education Students

Based on field data analysis, future anxiety factors in Islamic Education students are classified into two main dimensions, namely:

#### 1. Internal Factors

The primary source of anxiety stems from low self-confidence in academic competence and a tendency to compare the achievements of peers socially. Students often feel anxious because they are unable to fully appreciate their potential, harbor feelings of envy toward others' achievements, and have not yet found a positive social network to enhance their abilities. These recurring negative thought patterns ultimately distort students' confidence in their readiness to face the post-college reality.

#### 2. External Factors

From an external perspective, student anxiety is exacerbated by psychological pressure from family members regarding demands for future success, intense competition in the workplace, and perceived high academic burdens. Furthermore, exposure to social media content depicting a loss of direction after entering college further reinforces this perceived threat.

Observational results reinforce these findings, showing that students under high environmental pressure exhibited more anxious behavior, a tendency to overthink, and difficulties in regulating their emotions. Therefore, it can be concluded that a synergy between internal and external factors forms future anxiety in Islamic Religious Education students.

### **The Process of Implementing Tawakal in Daily Life and Its Effectiveness in Minimizing Future Anxiety**

Based on field research, it was found that Islamic Religious Education students at UIN Sunan Gunung Djati Bandung apply the values of tawakal (trust) as an active cognitive and spiritual mechanism to overcome anxiety about the future. When students face academic fears such as increased course load, concerns about the objectivity of lecturers' assessments, and anxiety about the postgraduate career world, tawakal offers an effective psychological-theological solution to alleviate these anxieties.

The process of implementing tawakal in the daily lives of Islamic Education students can be seen through the following concrete stages:

#### **1. Mindset Refarming and Focus Allocation**

Trust in God (Tawakal) in the daily lives of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) students begins with reconstructing their perspective on a problem. Students who effectively manage anxiety about the future do not get caught up in negative thoughts (overthinking) but instead shift their focus to what they can control. Students realize that dwelling on fears drains emotional energy and disrupts academic focus. Through trust in God, they train themselves to recognize their personal strengths, be grateful for the gifts they have, and cleanse their hearts of psychological ailments such as envy, jealousy, and insecurity when comparing financial or academic achievements with those of their peers.

According to informants, awareness of Allah SWT's greatness and justice leads students to believe that every sincere effort will yield strong results. On the other hand, if their hopes are not met, students can view this positively as a form of Allah SWT's protection from future harm, because they believe that Allah SWT will only grant a request if the servant is deemed mentally and spiritually ready.

#### **2. Actualizing Efforts Through Positive Circles and Islamic Organizations**

The correct manifestation of tawakal (trust) does not foster a passive attitude, but rather encourages students to proactively enhance their capacity as a form of preparation for the future. Students use on-campus Islamic organizations to foster positive friendships that support the effectiveness of tawakal. Within this environment, students find a space to expand their knowledge and hone their soft and hard skills. This increased competence directly fosters self-confidence in facing future challenges. Furthermore, a supportive organizational environment fosters a sense of mutual protection and strengthens their piety, helping students feel less lost in their academic life.

### 3. Total Surrender (Tafwidh) and Husnuzan When Facing a Dead End

In the final stage, when external pressures feel beyond human control, Islamic Religious Education students take the step of completely surrendering themselves to the will of Allah SWT. When students reach a point where they no longer know what to do due to the limitations of human reason, surrendering the outcome to Allah SWT becomes a rational religious choice. Field data shows that this total surrender triggers significant inner peace. When students feel anxious about lecturers' assessments, teaching pressures, and structural concerns due to the absence of family networks in the workplace, a surrender attitude can serve as a stress reliever. The belief that honest effort will not betray the results, combined with the principle of husnuzan (having good intentions), that Allah SWT will grant what His servants think, can empirically stabilize students' emotional regulation.

Through the integration of mindset management, measurable efforts through organizational channels, and surrender in accordance with Husnuzan, Islamic Religious Education students have proven capable of managing their emotions stably. Based on the emotional regulation model proposed by Gross (in Shita, 2024), changes in emotional responses begin with the antecedent-focused emotion regulation stage, namely the process of reassessing (cognitive reappraisal) of situations perceived as threatening, then continue with response-focused regulation related to the adaptive management of emotional expression and intensity, so that in the context of Islamic Religious Education, students.(Maheswari & Chusniyah, 2024)Values such as tawakal (tafwidh), husnuzan, and strengthening endeavor function as spiritual coping mechanisms that play a role in intervening in the cognitive-affective process from the initial stage of assessing the situation(Tsarwah et al., 2024). So, symptoms of future anxiety, which previously had the potential to disrupt mental health and break focus, can be suppressed to a relatively minimal level.

## Discussion

Based on the findings of this study, Islamic Religious Education students experience future anxiety in four distinct forms, ranging from anxiety about academics, financial conditions, career prospects, and even readiness to become adults. This anxiety is not always easily recognized, but it often manifests as persistent overthinking, emotional instability, a lack of confidence in one's abilities, and even a compulsion to avoid challenging situations. This condition is not uncommon among students. Maharani et al. (2021) found that the roots of this anxiety are closely related to job uncertainty, academic demands, and students' negative self-esteem, which ultimately lead to excessive worry about the future. This picture was confirmed by administrators of campus religious activities, who observed that many students appeared overwhelmed by academic expectations and unsure of their life direction, particularly regarding employment and readiness to live as adults.

However, an important note in this study is that the anxiety experienced by Islamic Religious Education students cannot be equated with that experienced by students from other study programs. Students are generally more haunted by intense job competition and economic turmoil. Mutia and Hargiana (2021) also noted a similar trend, stating that concerns about unemployment and the difficulty of finding employment after graduation are among the main triggers for high levels of future anxiety in students (Mutia & Hargiana, 2021), indicating that a person's academic background influences how anxiety is felt and expressed. However, Islamic Religious Education students face multiple layers of pressure. Beyond academic and financial burdens, they also face high moral, religious, and social expectations to serve as role models in their communities. One informant revealed that his concerns extended beyond career opportunities to his ability to be an individual capable of upholding Islamic values in society. Another informant added that the greatest pressure he felt came from family and community expectations that he should be a role model in his behavior and religious practice. This makes the anxiety they feel not only concern practical matters, but also touch on who they are and the values they hold.

Interestingly, the differences extend beyond the form of anxiety to how Islamic Religious Education students cope. Rather than relying solely on psychological techniques, Islamic Religious Education students tend to seek peace through avenues more relevant to their daily lives, such as attending religious studies, undergoing spiritual mentoring, or consulting with religious counselors. They also strive to draw closer to God by strengthening their trust in God, praying, improving the quality of their worship, and believing that the outcome is God's will after their efforts. This approach appears quite effective in providing Islamic Religious Education students with a sense of calm, emotional support, and confidence amid the uncertain future they face. This contrasts

with students in general study programs, who rely more on mindfulness and efforts to build psychological well-being as a way to escape the grip of anxiety (Zakia Salma Deva et al., 2024). Hanim & Ahlas (2020) also confirmed that religious activities have a real power in providing a sense of security and emotional support for students (Lailatul Muarofah Hanim & Sa'adatul Ahlas, 2020). Moreover, Callista & Basaria's research on final-year students showed that future anxiety and psychological well-being move in opposite directions: the greater the anxiety, the thinner the sense of well-being remaining in students (Callista & Basaria, nd).

In the study of future anxiety, anxiety arises when individuals perceive the future as uncertain and threatening, particularly in career, economic, and academic aspects. This aligns with humanistic theory, particularly the concept of incongruence, a discrepancy between the current state of self and the desired ideal self-image. According to Rogers, this disharmony creates inner tension, doubts about one's own competence, and a tendency to view the future pessimistically. The practice of *tawakal* (religious obedience) has been shown to play a significant role in calming students' emotions. Internally, *tawakal* helps students reconstruct negative thoughts with positive ones (*husnuzan*). This process contributes to more adaptive emotional regulation, so that anxiety is no longer perceived as a threat to be avoided, but rather as a challenge to be faced with confidence and effort. Rahmadhanty also explained that *tawakal* functions as a spiritual regulation mechanism that can help individuals correct negative thought patterns, reduce excessive fear, and increase mental readiness to face uncertainty (Rahmadhanty et al., 2023). For Islamic Religious Education students, the practice of *tawakal* provides a sense of calm because they believe the outcome is entirely in God's will, even after they have made optimal efforts. Thus, *tawakal* is not only an expression of faith but also a form of spiritual coping that strengthens psychological resilience and maintains emotional stability. In addition to internal aspects, family support, involvement in organizations, the academic environment, and religious communities, external aspects also contribute to strengthening this internal process through the provision of emotional support, opportunities to develop competencies, and strengthening religious values. This is supported by research by Ahfadh, Ghifarix, and Hanif (2025), who found that social acceptance, organizational experience, and emotional support from the campus environment significantly influenced the clarity of student identity ( $\beta = 0.64$ ;  $p < 0.01$ ). Thus, the self-change of Islamic Religious Education students in facing future anxiety results from the interaction between inner strength derived from Sufi values and external reinforcement facilitated by the campus socio-religious environment. (Wildan Ahfadh et al., 2025).

This research provides an important contribution to expanding the study of future anxiety, particularly for Islamic Religious Education students who face not only academic demands but

also moral responsibilities as prospective religious educators (Lailatul Muarofah Hanim & Sa'adatul Ahlas, 2020). Theoretically, the results of this study strengthen the understanding that tawakal is not merely a theological concept, but rather part of spiritual regulation that functions as a psychological coping mechanism. This value helps reorganize perceptions of future uncertainty while maintaining stability (Rahmadhanty et al., 2023). From a practical perspective, the research findings confirm that strengthening tawakal can serve as a preventive measure to reduce academic anxiety, build inner peace, and foster students' self-confidence in navigating the unpredictable dynamics of life. At the institutional level, universities need to consider developing religious guidance that focuses not only on ritual aspects but also on strengthening mental resilience, understanding the meaning of life, and preparing students for careers (Lailatul Muarofah Hanim & Sa'adatul Ahlas, 2020).

Based on these findings and implications, future research can expand to include students from non-Islamic religious studies programs or other educational institutions to identify possible differences in future anxiety patterns across disciplines (Maharani et al., 2021). Furthermore, future studies could develop interventions grounded in spiritual regulation and the principle of tawakal (trust) to empirically test their effectiveness in reducing future anxiety (Rahmadhanty et al., 2023). From a practical perspective, universities are expected to design development programs that are not only oriented towards religious rituals but also strengthen students' psychological resilience and self-management skills. For students themselves, developing self-regulation, deepening their understanding of tawakal values, and enhancing career literacy can serve as preventive measures to face future uncertainty better. Furthermore, lecturers or academic advisors can play a more active role in providing support, providing light counseling, and integrating spiritual values into the learning process to help students develop a more stable emotional and religious foundation.

## Conclusion

This study shows that Islamic Religious Education students still experience future anxiety despite being in a religious educational environment. This anxiety primarily arises in the academic, career, financial, and self-maturity domains, influenced by internal factors such as low self-confidence and a tendency to think negatively, as well as external factors such as academic demands, family expectations, and future uncertainty. However, tawakal is considered capable of overcoming these conditions, in which students apply it as a spiritual regulatory mechanism through various practices, such as making optimal effort, improving the quality of worship, prayer, and self-reflection, and submitting the final results to Allah SWT. After the effort is made.

The practice of tawakal also helps students calm emotions, reduce overthinking, build acceptance of uncertainty, and increase readiness to face the future. The effectiveness of tawakal is supported by spiritual closeness, a religious social environment, and a clear understanding of its meaning. At the same time, obstacles stem from the dominance of negative thoughts and an inaccurate understanding of the concept. This finding confirms that tawakal, which in Islamic scholarship falls under the domain of faith and morals, serves not only as a normative-religious concept but also as a spiritual coping strategy that helps students manage anxiety about the future.

### **Recommendation**

Based on the research findings, study programs and campus religious institutions need to strengthen spiritual development through religious studies, mentoring, and counseling that instill the concept of tawakal (religious obligation), balancing effort and surrender. Lecturers are expected to create a learning environment that supports the development of students' spiritual regulation through reflection on Islamic values, so that the tawakal practices they already possess can be further internalized in facing various academic challenges and life after graduation. Students are also encouraged to enhance spiritual practices that have helped them cope with future anxiety, such as improving the quality of worship, managing time, reducing social comparison, and using campus counseling services when needed. Future research can be expanded by involving students outside the Islamic Religious Education Study Program and adding variables such as resilience, social support, or spiritual intelligence to enrich the study of the relationship between tawakal and future anxiety.

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