

ARTICLE

## **Bridging Cultural Gaps: Enhancing Student Motivation and Academic Integrity in Oman's Universities**

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### **ABSTRACT**

This study explores the cultural and motivational factors influencing student behaviors and academic performance in Oman's higher education system. Drawing on the frameworks of Cultural Relativism and Self-Determination Theory, and employing a descriptive analytical approach based on quantitative methods, the research surveys 409 students in the Sultanate of Oman. It examines the impact of cultural norms and reward systems on student motivation, academic integrity, and skill development. The findings reveal that cultural values, such as collectivism and a focus on harmony, significantly shape students' approach to academics. These values often lead to weak motivation and a tendency to view behaviors like procrastination and academic dishonesty as socially acceptable. Additionally, many Omani students, particularly those from rural and Bedouin communities, enter higher education with gaps in foundational skills such as English, Mathematics, and Computer Science, which further hinder their academic success and employability. Despite earning academic qualifications, students often struggle to meet labor market demands due to a lack of practical skills. The study calls for reforms in teaching methodologies and foundational programs, advocating for culturally relevant strategies that balance academic rigor with cultural sensitivity. It also recommends fostering intrinsic motivation and promoting academic integrity to better prepare students for the workforce. By integrating Cultural Relativism, the study offers a comprehensive approach to addressing the challenges in Oman's higher education system and provides valuable insights for policymakers, educators, and institutional leaders. These findings align with Oman Vision 2040, emphasizing the need for an educational system that is both academically rigorous and culturally responsive.

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## 1. Introduction

Education is the cornerstone of progress, but cultural dynamics profoundly influence its outcomes. Nevertheless, cultural challenges in higher education, especially among unmotivated students, require adaptation to modern educational demands. In particular, cultural factors in Oman – particularly among students from nomadic and rural communities and those with low secondary school grades – significantly impact academic performance and workforce readiness. To delve deeper into these issues, it is necessary to examine how cultural dynamics, such as the culture of courtesy and the relaxed pace of life in Oman, influence student behavior and academic performance in higher education. Additionally, there is a need to explore how core programs can be improved to address gaps in students' skills, particularly in English, mathematics, and information technology, thereby better preparing them for the workforce.

Moreover, the culture of courtesy and the relaxed pace of life in Oman significantly shape academic attitudes. For example, the prevailing “everything is fine” mentality influences perceptions of time and responsibility, leading to delays in completing assignments and a tendency to downplay serious issues to maintain harmony. Consequently, this cultural outlook in private universities often leads to behaviors such as cooperation during exams being viewed as acceptable. These tendencies, however, create significant obstacles for faculty and administrators seeking to maintain academic standards<sup>[1]</sup>. To address these issues effectively, this study focuses on reconciling cultural norms with the demands of modern education. In doing so, it emphasizes the importance of acknowledging and addressing these cultural underpinnings to foster discipline, accountability, and academic excellence. Furthermore, the research explores how these cultural dynamics can be transformed into opportunities for growth and innovation within Oman's higher education system<sup>[2]</sup>.

Additionally, many Omani students, despite earning diplomas or degrees, struggle to compete in local and regional job markets due to a mismatch between their quali-

fications and their actual competencies<sup>[3]</sup>. This disconnect underscores the urgent need for reforms in teaching methodologies and institutional support systems to better equip students with the skills needed for personal and professional success<sup>[4]</sup>. Moreover, foundation programs designed to bridge gaps between high school and higher education, focusing on English, mathematics, and IT, often fail due to students' weak educational backgrounds and limited motivation<sup>[5]</sup>. As such, this study is significant because it addresses the pressing need to align cultural dynamics with academic expectations in Oman's higher education system. By identifying and addressing these challenges, the research highlights areas where faculty and institutional leadership can implement targeted interventions. In particular, these findings are relevant for private universities, where cultural norms often conflict with academic requirements, creating challenges for educators and administrators. Understanding and addressing these dynamics is vital to fostering an environment that promotes discipline, accountability, and excellence<sup>[6]</sup>.

Building on these considerations, the study aims to enhance the quality and relevance of higher education in Oman by addressing gaps in foundational programs and exploring strategies to improve teaching methodologies. In doing so, it seeks to equip students with the skills to thrive in local and regional job markets. Moreover, the study offers potential solutions to transform cultural perceptions—such as the acceptance of academic dishonesty—into opportunities for growth and innovation within academic institutions<sup>[7]</sup>. In addition to these educational reforms, this study provides critical insights for policymakers, educators, and institutional leaders into bridging the divide between cultural traditions and modern educational demands. By restructuring foundational programs and aligning academic practices with cultural norms, the research supports the development of a higher education system that is both culturally sensitive and academically rigorous. Ultimately, it aligns with Oman Vision 2040's emphasis on education as a driver of economic and social progress, offering practical solutions to prepare students for an increasingly competitive global workforce.

## 2. Theoretical Framework and Literature Review

Many Omani students, despite earning degrees, struggle to compete in local and regional job markets due to a mismatch between their qualifications and actual skills<sup>[3]</sup>. This highlights the urgent need for reforms in both teaching and institutional support to better prepare students for the workforce. Foundation programs, designed to bridge the gap between high school and university, often fall short because of weak educational backgrounds and a lack of motivation, leaving students underprepared<sup>[5]</sup>. Additionally, private universities face challenges related to grade inflation and concerns about academic integrity.

Oman's higher education system, expanding under the framework of Oman Vision 2040, aims to equip graduates with the skills needed for the global workforce<sup>[8]</sup>. However, significant disparities in educational quality and foundational skills persist, particularly in subjects like English, Mathematics, and IT. These gaps exacerbate the mismatch between graduate qualifications and labor market demands, emphasizing the need for reforms that align education with global standards<sup>[1]</sup>. To address this, reforms should focus on skill-building, integrity, and accountability to ensure that Omani graduates are better prepared to thrive in a competitive, innovation-driven economy.

This study integrates Cultural Relativism and Self-Determination Theory (SDT) to explore the influence of cultural dynamics on student behaviors within Oman's higher education system. Cultural Relativism emphasizes understanding academic behaviors in their cultural context, where values such as harmony and flexibility shape students' perceptions of collaboration and procrastination<sup>[3]</sup>. In contrast, SDT emphasizes the role of extrinsic motivation, with students often prioritizing grades over intrinsic interest and relying on external support rather than self-driven learning. By combining these theories, this study provides a balanced approach to addressing cultural challenges while enhancing student engagement<sup>[9]</sup>. This integration offers recommendations for aligning local cultural values with global academic expectations, fostering academic success while respecting societal norms in Oman.

Education is a cornerstone of personal and societal progress; however, its outcomes are shaped by various fac-

tors, including cultural dynamics that significantly influence student behavior, engagement, and success<sup>[10]</sup>. In Oman, these cultural influences play a critical role in higher education, where cultural norms impact student motivation, performance, and faculty challenges<sup>[11]</sup>. This review explores the interplay between cultural values and academic expectations while examining relevant theories and studies addressing these issues<sup>[12]</sup>.

Cultural influences on education are well-documented, particularly in societies like Oman, where communal harmony and relationship-building are highly valued. According to Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions Theory, collectivist cultures, which prioritize cohesion and avoid confrontation, often place more emphasis on interpersonal relationships than on strict adherence to rules<sup>[13]</sup>. In educational settings, this can create challenges, as academic integrity and individual accountability are essential. For instance, while cultural norms may encourage harmony, they can hinder discipline and motivation in academic environments, leading to behaviors such as procrastination, avoidance of confrontation with faculty, or limited engagement. These behaviors complicate efforts to instill responsibility and time management skills<sup>[14]</sup>.

Motivation theories, particularly SDT, offer valuable insights into student engagement. SDT posits that autonomy, competence, and relatedness drive intrinsic motivation<sup>[15]</sup>. However, in cultures like Oman, where conformity and societal expectations dominate, students often seek external validation—such as grades or teacher approval—rather than developing a passion for learning. This external focus, combined with strong family and societal pressures, can diminish intrinsic motivation and negatively impact long-term academic performance<sup>[15]</sup>.

The challenges faced by Omani higher education are further compounded by gaps in foundational skills. Many students, particularly those from rural or disadvantaged backgrounds, enter university with limited proficiency in essential areas like English and mathematics. While foundation programs are designed to bridge these gaps, their effectiveness is often limited by students' lack of engagement and motivation<sup>[16]</sup>. Moreover, the disconnect between academic qualifications and workplace competencies highlights the need for a stronger focus on practical skills. Studies show that despite earning degrees, many graduates remain unpre-

pared for labor market demands, particularly in technical fields<sup>[17]</sup>. Private universities, experiencing rapid growth in Oman, face additional challenges in maintaining academic standards. The pressure to retain students often leads to compromises in rigor, with passing rates prioritized over educational quality. This reflects broader regional challenges and underscores the need for strategies that balance cultural expectations with academic excellence<sup>[1]</sup>.

Cultural Relativism provides a framework for understanding these dynamics. By viewing academic behaviors within their cultural context, educators can develop strategies that respect societal norms while promoting academic integrity<sup>[17]</sup>. For instance, behaviors such as collaboration during exams or procrastination may reflect cultural values rather than deliberate misconduct. However, Cultural Relativism also emphasizes the need for a balanced approach—adapting educational practices to cultural realities without excusing unproductive behaviors<sup>[2]</sup>. To address these challenges, universities can adopt culturally relevant teaching practices that align with students' values while emphasizing accountability. Fostering collaborative environments that respect relationships while encouraging individual responsibility can help bridge cultural and academic expectations<sup>[4]</sup>. Additionally, enhancing student motivation through supportive learning environments that promote autonomy, competence, and relatedness is essential. Addressing foundational skill gaps through improved foundation programs, revised curricula, and interactive learning tools can significantly improve outcomes<sup>[18]</sup>. In short, the interplay between cultural norms and academic expectations poses unique challenges in Omani higher education. By integrating Cultural Relativism and SDT, institutions can develop strategies that respect local values while fostering the skills necessary for academic and professional success<sup>[19]</sup>. These efforts will not only enhance educational outcomes but also better prepare graduates to meet the demands of the modern workforce.

Cultural relativism and Self-Determination Theory (SDT) both address challenges in higher education in Oman, offering insights into how culture and motivation influence academic behavior. Both theories emphasize the cultural context and its impact on student motivation and behavior. Cultural relativism highlights the role of cultural values like harmony and flexibility in shaping behaviors such as collaboration and procrastination as cultural norms, rather than in-

dividual misconduct<sup>[3]</sup>. In contrast, SDT focuses on intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, noting that students in collectivist cultures like Oman often seek external validation instead of developing educational autonomy<sup>[15]</sup>.

While both theories share a cultural focus, they differ in priorities. Cultural relativism advocates respecting cultural values and adapting educational practices to align with them without compromising quality, such as fostering collaboration without undermining academic integrity. SDT, however, stresses the importance of promoting autonomy, competence, and relatedness to motivate students<sup>[9, 15]</sup>.

### 3. Methodology

The methods section outlines the research design, sampling, data collection, and analysis techniques employed in the study. A key component of the research design is the use of a quantitative tool—the survey—which was specifically crafted to address key issues related to culture, the university environment, and student motivation. The survey was designed to capture comprehensive insights into these phenomena, enabling a thorough exploration of the topic. The participant profile is also a critical element, providing demographic information that helps contextualize the responses. This section further explains the sampling strategy used to select participants, ensuring a representative sample that can provide valuable data. Finally, the data analysis approach is discussed, detailing the methods used to interpret and draw conclusions from the collected data, which will help inform the broader implications of the research. This structured approach ensures that the study is robust, reliable, and relevant to the research objectives.

#### 3.1. Research Design

The study adopted an analytical descriptive approach, primarily focusing on quantitative methods, with a survey as the main data collection tool. The survey was designed to address issues related to culture and the university environment, including student motivation, in order to explore these phenomena comprehensively. Addressing these issues is crucial for improvement<sup>[20]</sup>. This methodology was chosen due to limited resources, as it allows for easier and faster data collection, with the added benefit that data can be gathered from participants outside the country, making it a cost-effective

approach.

### 3.2. Study Sample

The population considered for the study was extensive, encompassing 29 academic institutions operating in Oman, with thousands of students. The researcher initially aimed for a sample size of 400 students but ultimately collected responses from 409 participants goes with Ahmad recommendations<sup>[21]</sup>. The survey was designed using Google Forms and conducted in Arabic, the native language of the Omani community. It was distributed through email and WhatsApp using a shared Google link. To enhance distribution and engagement, the researchers enlisted the help of their students. Over an eight-week period in July and August, data was successfully collected and verified to ensure the required responses were gathered. The collected data was subsequently reviewed and analyzed in November and December 2024.

### 3.3. Survey Overview

The survey consisted of 17 questions designed to gather insights into students' profiles, experiences, and perceptions regarding cultural influences and university environments. The first six questions focused on the demographic and academic characteristics of the respondents, such as their type of university, discipline, and academic level. The remaining 11 questions explored students' experiences and perspectives on cultural issues and how these intersect with their academic environment. These questions addressed topics such as the

influence of cultural norms on academic behavior, motivation, and engagement, as well as the adequacy of university resources in supporting students' development and career readiness. The responses aimed to provide a comprehensive understanding of the interplay between cultural values, academic responsibilities, and the university environment, shedding light on areas for improvement in student support and engagement.

### 3.4. Respondent Profiles

The study targeted students enrolled in universities across Oman, including both private and government institutions. To avoid any potential criticism from university administrations, specific universities were not mentioned. Instead, the focus was on the type of university (private or government), the students' field of study, and their current academic level (foundation, undergraduate, or graduate programs). The respondent sample consisted of 409 students, the majority of whom were studying at private universities, while 96 were from public universities. Of these respondents, 178 were from Bedouin communities, 70 from rural areas, and 160 from urban communities. This indicates that the majority of the students came from urban and Bedouin communities. **Table 1** presents more characteristics of the respondents' profiles.

When checking the reliability and validity of the study, **Table 2** shows the study data and factors and reliable and valid which means can depend on it.

**Table 1.** More characteristics of the respondents' profiles.

		Frequency	Percent %
Sex	Male	176	43
	Female	233	57
	Total	409	100%
Age	18–23 years	64	15.6
	24–30	216	52.8
	31–40	80	19.6
	41–more	48	11.7
	Total	409	100%
Education level	Foundation	72	17.6
	Undergraduate	223	54.5
	Graduate (Masters)	114	27.9
	Total	409	100%
Scope of Study	Humanitarian -Art-Law	59	14.5
	Sciences-Eng-Tech	131	32.0
	Buss-Eco	219	53.5
	Total	409	100%

**Table 2.** Reliability and validity.

Factor/Variable	Construct Validity (Mean Difference, 95% CI)	Significance (p-Value)
Maintaining Harmony and Avoiding Conflict	Mean Difference: 4.154 (95% CI: 4.10–4.21)	p < 0.000
Delay in Completing Academic Tasks	Mean Difference: 3.311 (95% CI: 3.21–3.41)	p < 0.000
Cheating in Exams (Acceptable)	Mean Difference: 3.208 (95% CI: 3.12–3.30)	p < 0.000
“Everything is Fine” Impacting Academic Performance	Mean Difference: 3.061 (95% CI: 2.99–3.13)	p < 0.000
Cultural Values Influence on Academic Work	Mean Difference: 2.252 (95% CI: 2.18–2.33)	p < 0.000
Motivation to Do Best in Studies	Mean Difference: 2.723 (95% CI: 2.63–2.81)	p < 0.000
Motivated by Marks	Mean Difference: 3.745 (95% CI: 3.66–3.83)	p < 0.000
Academic Environment Supporting Autonomy and Responsibility	Mean Difference: 3.642 (95% CI: 3.56–3.73)	p < 0.000
Resources to Develop Career Skills	Mean Difference: 2.975 (95% CI: 2.90–3.05)	p < 0.000
Foundation Programs Bridging Knowledge Gaps	Mean Difference: 2.725 (95% CI: 2.65–2.81)	p < 0.000
Motivation Increased with Alignment of Academic Environment to Cultural Values	Mean Difference: 3.267 (95% CI: 3.18–3.36)	p < 0.000

## 4. Results

The findings section provides the results of the analysis, including descriptive analysis, independent tests, and ANOVA, to show any significant differences among the groups. The descriptive analysis as in **Table 3** reveals varying

cultural and academic influences. High agreement (94.2%) highlights harmony’s importance in culture, while motivation and alignment with cultural values show mixed responses. Cheating (41.1%) and delayed tasks (48.8% neutral) indicate ethical and time-management challenges.

**Table 3.** Descriptive analysis.

Elements/Statement	Disagree %	Neutral %	Agree %	Mean Out of 5
In my culture, it is important to maintain harmony and avoid conflict, among themselves in academic settings.	0.7	5.1	94.2	4.15
Often delay completing academic tasks because I feel that things will be fine eventually.	29.4	48.8	21.8	3.31
Cheating exams is sometimes acceptable in my culture	17.2	41.7	41.1	3.21
cultural norm of “everything is fine” negatively impacts my academic	18.6	57.8	23.6	3.06
my cultural values influence the way I approach academic work and time management.	71.3	23	5.7	2.25
motivated by external Grades	9.1	25.5	65.4	3.75
Academic environment (faculty, peers) helps me become more autonomous and responsible	10.5	31.1	58.4	3.64
feel motivated to do my best in my studies	40.9	40.7	18.4	2.72
my university provides sufficient resources to help me develop the skills I need to succeed in my future career.	28.4	50.5	21.6	2.98
foundation programs at my university (e.g., English, Math, Computer Skills) have been helpful in bridging my knowledge gaps.	51.0	25.5	23.5	2.73
my motivation would increase if my academic environment better aligned with my cultural values	52	24.5	23.5	3.27

To compare means among the three communicates as shown in **Table 4**, students among their communities Urban, Bedwin, and Rural agrees on maintain harmony and reject any conflict among students in univariates. Also, the majority of students delay an issue in delaying handling homework, doing tasks, and same to they do not see any problems in teaching at exams, this because Omani students

sees all or “overnighting’s are fine.” And the majority of students regardless of their community get motivated by marks and grades. Saw the grades are their goals not the skills or knowledge’s.

When running INOVA, the significant differences among communities in the following elements/statements: In my culture, it is important to maintain harmony and avoid

conflict, among themselves in academic settings. Also, In often delay completing academic tasks because I feel that things will be fine eventually. In addition, motivated by ex-

ternal Grades. Furthermore, my motivation would increase if my academic environment better aligned with my cultural values.

**Table 4.** Means among communities.

Elements/Statement	Urban	Bedwin	Rural	Total
In my culture, it is important to maintain harmony and avoid conflict, among themselves in academic settings.	4.22	4.17	3.94	4.15
Often delay completing academic tasks because I feel that things will be fine eventually.	3.27	3.23	3.61	3.31
Cheating exams is sometimes acceptable in my culture	3.19	3.15	3.40	3.21
cultural norm of “everything is fine” negatively impacts my academic	3.11	3.07	2.91	3.06
my cultural values influence the way I approach academic work and time management.	2.13	2.24	2.59	2.25
feel motivated to do my best in my studies	2.83	2.54	2.93	2.72
motivated by external Grades	3.58	3.89	3.76	3.75
Academic environment (faculty, peers) helps me become more autonomous and responsible	3.75	3.65	3.37	3.64
my university provides sufficient resources to help me develop the skills I need to succeed in my future career.	3.01	2.98	2.87	2.98
foundation programs at my university (e.g., English, Math, Computer Skills) have been helpful in bridging my knowledge gaps.	2.72	2.72	2.74	2.73
my motivation would increase if my academic environment better aligned with my cultural values	3.12	3.49	3.03	3.27

In terms of education level (foundation, undergraduate, graduate students) and scope of education (humanities, business, and sciences), there is significant differences were found in:

It is important to maintain harmony and avoid conflict, among themselves in academic settings. Also, In often delay completing academic tasks because I feel that things will be fine eventually. In addition, motivated by external Grades. Furthermore, my motivation would increase if my academic environment better aligned with my cultural. For **Table 5**, the results reflect a One-Sample t-Test analysis of various

elements related to students’ academic and cultural attitudes. Each row corresponds to a specific item being examined, evaluating whether its mean response significantly differs from the test value of 0. The p-value for all elements is 0.000, confirming statistically significant deviations from 0. This indicates that these attitudes and perceptions are strong and non-neutral in the studied context. The analysis also shows 95% confidence that the true mean difference lies within the provided intervals, highlighting the precision of the estimates. In summary, all items exhibit statistically significant differences, with their average values exceeding 0.

**Table 5.** One-sample test.

	Test Value = 0					
	T	df	Sig. (2-Tailed)	Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
					Lower	Upper
maintain harmony and avoid conflict	159.065	407	0.000	4.154	4.10	4.21
OK delay academic tasks	64.075	407	0.000	3.311	3.21	3.41
Cheating in exams acceptable	70.563	407	0.000	3.208	3.12	3.30
“Everything is fine” negatively impacts my academic	81.642	407	0.000	3.061	2.99	3.13
cultural values influence	58.641	407	0.000	2.252	2.18	2.33
motivated to do best in studies	59.169	407	0.000	2.723	2.63	2.81
Motivated by Makrs	88.186	407	0.000	3.745	3.66	3.83
academic environment helps	83.790	407	0.000	3.642	3.56	3.73
sufficient resources to develop	74.378	407	0.000	2.975	2.90	3.05
foundation programs helpful	67.187	407	0.000	2.725	2.65	2.81
Motivation Academic Environment aligned	71.381	407	0.000	3.267	3.18	3.36

**(1) Regression analysis**

For the cultural norm “everything is fine” (referred to as “things are fine” or “AlAmout Taybeh”), the analysis re-

veals significant relationships between cultural values and academic behaviors, particularly in how students manage academic tasks and collaborate during exams. The coeffi-

cients and ANOVA results presented below offer insights into the predictive relationships between students' perceptions of their academic environment and cultural influences, such as the "everything is fine" cultural norm.

**(2) Analysis 1: Delay in Completing Academic Tasks (delay homework/tasks is ok)**

The first regression model explores the relationship between the cultural norm "everything is fine" and the tendency to delay academic tasks. The coefficients table shows that both the cultural norm (everything is fine) and academic environment (Academic Environment) are significant predictors of delaying academic tasks (delay is ok). Specifically, the variable "everything is Fine" (cultural norm) has a positive standardized coefficient (Beta = 0.148), indicating that students who hold the belief that "everything is fine" are more likely to delay their academic tasks. The academic environment also significantly influences this behavior, with a Beta of 0.314, suggesting that a supportive academic environment can mitigate delays in task completion.

The model shows a significant overall fit ( $F = 28.328$ ,  $p < 0.000$ ), indicating that the combined predictors of the cultural norm and academic environment explain a significant portion of the variance in students' tendency to delay tasks.

**(3) Analysis 2: Collaboration During Exams (Cheating in Exams)**

The second regression model examines the relationship between the cultural norm "everything is fine" and students' attitudes toward collaboration during exams. The results indicate that both the cultural norm and the academic environment significantly influence students' views on collaboration during exams. The positive coefficient for "everything is fine" ( $B = 0.148$ ,  $p = 0.012$ ) suggests that students who believe in the cultural norm of "everything is fine" are more likely to view collaboration during exams as acceptable. Similarly, the academic environment plays a role in shaping this attitude, with a Beta of 0.181. The overall model is significant ( $F = 10.369$ ,  $p < 0.000$ ), suggesting that the combined predictors of cultural norms and academic environment explain a significant portion of the variance in students' views on collaboration during exams.

**(4) Report on Regression Analysis Results**

The regression analysis for various models has provided valuable insights into the factors influencing different dependent variables. Each model examined two predictors:

"everything is fine" and "academic environment." The findings show varying degrees of significance for these predictors. For instance, when examining cheating in exams as the dependent variable, both "everything is fine" and "academic environment" are significant predictors. However, "academic environment" has a slightly stronger effect, with a coefficient of 0.181 compared to 0.122 for "everything is fine." The model's significance is confirmed with an F-value of 10.369 and a p-value less than 0.001.

Similarly, when analyzing the delay in completing homework and tasks, both "everything is fine" and "academic environment" are statistically significant predictors. However, "academic environment" exerts a stronger influence, with a higher standardized coefficient of 0.314 compared to "everything is fine," which has a coefficient of 0.148. The overall model is significant, with an F-value of 28.328 and a p-value less than 0.001, indicating a strong effect of the predictors on the delay in homework and tasks. Additionally, the cultural norm of "everything is fine" shows a statistically significant effect on motivating students in their studies, similar to the academic environment. The model has an F-value of 18.143 and a p-value less than 0.001, indicating that both predictors play an important role in shaping students' motivation. Furthermore, the current resources provided by the university have a significant negative effect (-0.205) on the academic environment, meaning that limited resources hinder the development of a positive academic environment. Increasing resources could enhance the academic environment, as confirmed by an F-value of 18.245 and a p-value less than 0.001.

When examining the effect of foundation programs, it also shows a negative and significant impact (-0.285), with an F-value of 4.692 and a p-value of 0.010. Similarly, examining students' grades in relation to the academic environment reveals a significant negative impact (-0.266). This suggests that continuing to provide students with marks and grades they do not deserve could damage the academic environment, including organizational culture and university policies.

Overall, the "academic environment" consistently proves to be a significant predictor across all models, either positively or negatively influencing the dependent variables. On the other hand, the cultural norm of "everything is fine" has a more mixed impact on academic responsibility, being



significant in some cases but not in others. These findings suggest that while the academic environment plays a key role in shaping outcomes across various factors, the influence of “everything is fine” is more variable.

### **(5) One Sample Test**

When running a one-sample test, the result of a bootstrap test is used to check the reliability of the mean differences for each factor. The “Mean Difference” indicates how much each factor differs from the test value (0). The “Bias” shows small adjustments for accuracy, while the “Std. Error” measures variability. Additionally, the “Sig. (2-tailed)” value indicates whether the results are statistically significant ( $p < 0.05$ ). The “95% Confidence Interval” shows the range where the true mean difference is likely to fall. Importantly, all factors have significant results, with intervals confirming the reliability of the findings.

The table presents the results of the one-sample test for various factors, comparing their means against the value of 0. The results demonstrate that all factors were statistically significant ( $p$ -value less than 0.05). For instance, “harmony” had a mean of 4.154, while “academic environment” had a mean of 3.642. Moreover, the confidence intervals validate the reliability of the results for all factors, ensuring the consistency and accuracy of the findings.

## **5. Discussion of Main Results**

The findings of this study illuminate the complex relationship between cultural dynamics, student behavior, and academic performance in Oman’s higher education system. The analysis highlights significant challenges arising from cultural influences, particularly in the context of student motivation, academic integrity, and foundational skills. These challenges, coupled with the misalignment between educational outcomes and labor market demands, underscore the need for a cultural shift that fosters discipline, responsibility, and academic excellence.

### **5.1. Cultural Dynamics and Student Motivation**

The literature on Cultural Relativism helps contextualize the behaviors<sup>[22]</sup> observed among Omani students, particularly those from Bedouin and rural communities. These students often enter higher education with a significant gap in foundational skills, including proficiency in English, Math-

ematics, and Computer Science<sup>[5, 23]</sup>. The findings of this study confirm that cultural values, such as the emphasis on harmony and the “everything is fine” mindset, influence students’ approach to academics. This perspective shapes how students perceive time management, responsibility, and collaboration during exams. In many cases, students view behaviors like procrastination and academic dishonesty as acceptable within their cultural framework, leading to a diminished sense of personal accountability.

The impact of these cultural norms on academic integrity is particularly evident in private universities, where students’ perception of collaboration during exams as socially acceptable complicates efforts to uphold academic standards. This finding aligns with Hofstede’s Cultural Dimensions Theory<sup>[13]</sup>, which argues that in collectivist societies, individuals prioritize group harmony over individual responsibility. This cultural framework may inadvertently support behaviors that conflict with the academic values of integrity and discipline, thereby exacerbating the challenges faced by educators in Oman’s private institutions<sup>[1]</sup>. The findings from previous research by Al Musawi et al.<sup>[24]</sup> and Al Barwani et al.<sup>[25]</sup> highlight similar challenges faced by Omani students, particularly those from Bedouin and rural areas, who enter higher education with gaps in foundational skills such as English, Mathematics, and Computer Science. These studies emphasize the impact of cultural issues on students’ learning experiences, with a focus on the separation between national and expatriate populations in Oman. The research also underscores the importance of cross-cultural understanding in education, as seen in the service-learning project at Sultan Qaboos University. As Lo noted, cultural differences in motivation and learning strategies are a global phenomenon, further highlighting the need for inclusive pedagogy to address these diverse needs<sup>[26]</sup>.

### **5.2. Role of Self-Determination Theory in Shaping Motivation**

The integration of Self-Determination Theory (SDT) into the study provides valuable insights into student motivation, particularly in terms of the extrinsic motivation that drives academic performance in Oman. The literature suggests that SDT emphasizes the importance of autonomy, competence, and relatedness in fostering intrinsic motivation<sup>[15]</sup>. However, the findings of this study indicate that many Omani

students are primarily motivated by extra grades and teacher approval of their work, rather than a genuine passion for learning. This extrinsic orientation, compounded by societal pressures to conform to familial and communal expectations, further diminishes students' intrinsic motivation.

Moreover, the study confirms that students' weak educational backgrounds, coupled with limited engagement in foundation programs, contribute to the ongoing mismatch between academic qualifications and labor market competencies<sup>[5]</sup>. Despite completing diplomas or degrees, many students struggle to compete in local and regional job markets, as they lack the practical skills required in professional environments<sup>[3]</sup>. This gap between academic qualifications and actual competencies highlights the limitations of existing education systems in Oman and calls for reform in both teaching methodologies and institutional support.

The results of this research align with previous studies such as Al-Issa and Al-Bulushi<sup>[27]</sup>, Al-Alawi<sup>[28]</sup>, and Al-Ani<sup>[29]</sup>, highlighting the gap between educational outcomes in Oman and labor market demands. The study underscores the need for educational reform, particularly in leadership training, to bridge this gap. It emphasizes the importance of adapting educational methodologies to local contexts, proposing changes in leadership development models to better prepare school leaders. The findings confirm the necessity for policy and practice alignment, supporting Oman's Vision 2040 goals of educational transformation and workforce readiness. A unique aspect of this study is its emphasis on the need for greater attention from faculty members and university administration, focusing on the importance of knowledge, abilities, and skills as incentives, rather than grades. The study argues that grading systems can foster dependency, weakening students academically.

### **5.3. Bridging the Gap: Reforms in Teaching and Institutional Support**

Addressing the issues identified in this study requires a multifaceted approach that combines cultural sensitivity with rigorous academic standards. As highlighted in the literature, foundation programs in Omani universities are designed to bridge gaps between high school education and higher education. However, their effectiveness is often undermined by students' lack of motivation and weak academic preparation, a finding that aligns with Adbah and Jaiarmi's research<sup>[16]</sup>.

While these programs aim to improve skills in English, Mathematics, and Computer Science, they frequently fall short due to students' disengagement. This disengagement reflects a broader cultural trend, where academic achievement is often viewed as secondary to external rewards such as grades.

Incorporating cultural relativism can help understand the cultural influences that shape student behavior, such as the tendency to prioritize social harmony and familial expectations over academic rigor. Self-Determination Theory (SDT) can also provide a lens to enhance student engagement by fostering intrinsic motivation through autonomy, competence, and relatedness in the learning environment. The study advocates for the development of culturally relevant teaching strategies that resonate with Omani values while promoting academic discipline. Educators can leverage cultural norms, such as the importance of relationships and community, to create a collaborative learning environment. However, this must be carefully balanced with a strong emphasis on individual responsibility and accountability, which are crucial for academic success, as emphasized by Alam and Mohanty<sup>[4]</sup>. For instance, shifting the focus from grade-driven outcomes to skill development and practical applications could help bridge the gap between academic qualifications and workplace competencies. Many graduates, despite possessing academic credentials, still fail to meet labor market demands, a challenge addressed in Awashreh's study<sup>[1]</sup>. The findings highlight the urgent need for teaching reform that is not merely cosmetic but substantive. University management must prioritize quality over quantity in educational offerings, ensuring that teaching methodologies and curriculum designs foster genuine learning and better align with both students' developmental needs and the demands of the labor market.

### **5.4. Integrating Cultural Relativism and SDT for Sustainable Change**

The integration of Cultural Relativism and Self-Determination Theory (SDT) offers a nuanced and comprehensive framework for addressing the cultural and motivational challenges faced by students in Omani higher education. As Ramalie suggests, cultural relativism provides valuable insights into student behaviors by situating them within their cultural context, such as the tendency to avoid confrontation and prioritize interpersonal harmony<sup>[17]</sup>. However, this framework must also accommodate the necessity

of aligning academic practices with global standards of academic integrity and rigor. The findings of this study support this dual approach, emphasizing that while cultural values should be respected, they should not serve as an excuse for behaviors that undermine academic success, such as procrastination and dishonesty, which Ramalie also highlights in his research<sup>[17]</sup>. Furthermore, incorporating SDT principles into higher education practices can significantly enhance student engagement by fostering autonomy, competence, and relatedness in the learning process. This approach, as Rayan and Deci explain<sup>[15]</sup>, has the potential to increase intrinsic motivation, making students more invested in their education and better equipped to navigate the professional world. By promoting these principles, institutions can create an environment where students take ownership of their learning while still respecting cultural norms.

The study further emphasizes the importance of maintaining scientific and academic integrity, ensuring that instructors reflect the true academic capabilities of students. It highlights the need for university administrations to navigate delicate interpersonal dynamics, avoiding clashes with faculty members and students, as Omani students tend to avoid direct conflict. Nevertheless, the study stresses the importance of upholding educational values and academic integrity to foster an environment conducive to genuine learning and academic excellence. This balanced approach would ensure that cultural respect does not compromise the academic standards necessary for student success.

### **5.5. Implications for Policymakers and Educational Leaders**

This study also carries significant implications for policymakers, educators, and institutional leaders in Oman. The findings emphasize the urgent need for reforms in teaching methodologies, especially within foundation programs, to better address the gaps in student preparedness. These gaps often hinder students' ability to transition effectively into higher education, resulting in a mismatch between their academic qualifications and the skills required in the workforce. Furthermore, the study highlights the critical need to prioritize academic integrity and skill development over grade inflation, which has become an increasing concern in Omani private universities, as noted by Awashreh. This shift would help ensure that academic achievements are truly reflective

of students' abilities and competencies, thus improving both the quality of education and its relevance to the labor market. Such reforms are essential for cultivating a generation of graduates who are not only academically proficient but also equipped with the practical skills and ethical standards necessary for success in a competitive global economy<sup>[11]</sup>.

Policymakers must collaborate closely with educational institutions to develop a comprehensive framework that effectively balances cultural traditions with the evolving demands of a modern, competitive economy. It is essential for policymakers to consider not only the needs of the current generation but also the future generations, ensuring that educational reforms are sustainable and forward-thinking. By aligning education systems with both cultural values and global economic trends, policymakers can prepare students with the skills and knowledge necessary to thrive in a rapidly changing world, fostering long-term societal and economic growth.

By restructuring foundation programs and aligning academic practices with cultural norms, universities can better equip students with the skills necessary for success in the global workforce. These reforms should aim to create an educational system that is both academically rigorous and culturally sensitive, ultimately contributing to the long-term success of students in both the local and regional job markets. In short, the challenges facing higher education in Oman are deeply intertwined with cultural dynamics that shape student motivation, academic behaviors, and performance. By integrating Cultural Relativism and Self-Determination Theory, this study offers a comprehensive approach to understanding these challenges and proposing solutions. The findings highlight the need for educational reforms that address both the cultural context, as Al Musawi also explained the matter<sup>[24]</sup> and the academic demands of Omani students. Through culturally relevant teaching strategies, increased motivation, and a focus on practical skills, Oman's higher education system can better prepare students for the evolving demands of the global workforce, while also aligning with the aspirations of Oman Vision 2040.

Reform is crucial in teaching curricula, particularly in foundation programs, before students' progress to core university courses. This necessitates close collaboration between policymakers and educational institutions to establish a framework that balances cultural traditions with the demands of a modern, competitive economy. The quality of

programs and the development of skills should be prioritized over the level of the degree. In some cases, bachelor's degree graduates possess stronger abilities and skills than master's and doctoral graduates, whose capabilities may be comparatively weaker.

## 6. Conclusions

This study explored the cultural and motivational factors influencing student behaviors and academic performance in Oman's higher education system. The findings highlight the significant role of cultural norms, such as collectivism and harmony, in shaping students' approach to academics. These cultural influences often lead to weak motivation and a misalignment between academic outcomes and real-world job market demands. The study also emphasizes the need for educational reforms that bridge these gaps by integrating cultural sensitivity with rigorous academic standards. Ultimately, fostering an environment where students are both culturally aware and academically responsible can improve both their educational outcomes and future career prospects.

This study integrates Cultural Relativism and Self-Determination Theory (SDT), offering new insights into the interplay between cultural values and academic motivation in higher education. The application of Cultural Relativism helps explain how societal norms influence students' academic behaviors, while SDT provides a framework for understanding motivation and student engagement. Theoretical contributions of this study lie in highlighting the need for an integrated approach to student motivation that considers both cultural influences and the intrinsic value of education. The study suggests that education systems should embrace a more holistic view that incorporates cultural norms alongside modern educational theories to foster more effective learning environments.

The findings of this study have several implications for Omani society. First, academic success is closely linked to the development of key competencies that students require to enter the workforce. As many students face challenges in translating academic knowledge into practical skills, societal expectations of graduate employability may not be met. The study highlights the need for a cultural shift that prioritizes academic integrity, responsibility, and the pursuit of knowledge for its intrinsic value. Societal changes that emphasize

the importance of education beyond more marks as rewards can help cultivate a workforce better equipped to meet the demands of a globalized economy. Additionally, addressing academic dishonesty and procrastination within the cultural context can improve societal trust in the education system.

In universities, the study calls for comprehensive reforms in the structure and delivery of foundation programs. Many students entering higher education struggle with essential skills like English proficiency, mathematics, and computer science, often due to inadequate preparatory education. These gaps need to be addressed through culturally sensitive teaching methods and academic support systems. Universities should also focus on enhancing student engagement by fostering intrinsic motivation, offering programs that connect classroom learning to real-world skills. Faculty should play an active role in setting high academic standards while encouraging personal responsibility. Universities can also collaborate with industry partners to ensure that curricula align with current labor market requirements, thus improving students' employment prospects.

The study highlights that Omani student, particularly those from rural or Bedouin backgrounds, often view education as a means to gain external marks rather than as an opportunity for personal growth or intellectual development. This external motivation contributes to procrastination, academic dishonesty, and lack of engagement with the curriculum. The findings suggest that students would benefit from a shift in mindset towards intrinsic motivation, where academic achievement is valued not just for grades but for skill acquisition and personal development. Educational reforms that prioritize practical skills and intrinsic motivation can help students become more autonomous and engaged learners, better prepared for the workforce. Based on the findings of this study, several policy recommendations are proposed:

- **Curriculum Reforms:** Policymakers should encourage universities to update curricula, integrating practical skills like critical thinking and problem-solving, and aligning them with labor market needs. Additionally, curricula should include cultural awareness to respect student backgrounds and foster academic integrity.
- **Foundation Programs:** Strengthen foundation programs to bridge the gap between secondary and higher education. This includes tailored support like additional tutoring, peer mentoring, and digital resources to help students transition

effectively.

- **Promote Intrinsic Motivation:** Implement mentorship programs, project-based learning, and real-world problem-solving activities. Recognize student achievements beyond grades, such as leadership, community involvement, and teamwork, to encourage deeper engagement.
- **Faculty Development:** Provide professional development workshops for faculty on culturally responsive teaching methods, student engagement, and fostering academic growth. This will help create an inclusive classroom environment where diverse cultural backgrounds are respected.
- **Strengthen Academic Integrity Policies:** Develop clear academic integrity policies and actively educate students about ethical conduct. Implement accessible reporting systems for dishonest behavior and transparent penalties to uphold academic excellence.
- **Public-Private Collaboration:** Foster partnerships between universities and private industries to create internship programs, workshops, and job-shadowing opportunities. This ensures academic programs align with labor market demands and enhances students' employability.
- **Cultural Awareness Initiatives:** Promote cultural awareness through activities that celebrate diversity and emphasize its importance in a globalized education system. Offer cultural sensitivity training for students and educators to reduce stereotypes and improve interactions.

By implementing these recommendations and straggles, Oman's higher education system can better prepare students for both academic success and career readiness, ultimately contributing to the nation's long-term social and economic development. There are several limitations to this study that must be acknowledged. First, the study is geographically limited to Oman and focuses primarily on private universities. Additionally, the research relied on self-reported data from students, which may be subject to biases such as social desirability or recall bias. Furthermore, the study did not consider the impact of socio-economic status in-depth, which may play a significant role in shaping academic behaviors and motivations. Therefore, further research could expand the scope to include different types of institutions and a broader demographic of students to validate and generalize the findings.

In light of these limitations, the study suggests several avenues for further research. One potential direction

is exploring the impact of cultural norms on students' career choices and employability in Oman's higher education system. This study could investigate how cultural values and societal expectations influence Omani students' career aspirations, choices, and overall employability. Given the cultural emphasis on stability, family values, and societal roles, it would be valuable to explore how these factors shape students' perceptions of different professions, the role of education in career development, and their preparedness for the workforce. A mixed-methods approach involving surveys and interviews with students and employers could provide deeper insights into how cultural influences impact job market integration and career trajectories in Oman. Additionally, another research suggestion focuses on the role of academic motivation and self-determination in reducing procrastination and academic dishonesty among Omani university students. Building on the findings regarding procrastination and academic dishonesty, this research could further examine the role of motivation theories, specifically Self-Determination Theory, in addressing these issues. The study could explore how intrinsic and extrinsic motivation relate to students' academic behaviors, including procrastination and cheating. Furthermore, it could evaluate the effectiveness of various interventions, such as mindfulness training, academic counseling, or motivation-enhancing programs, in improving students' time management, reducing procrastination, and encouraging academic honesty.

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R.A. contributed to the research by leading its development and implementation, including planning, data collection, data analysis, writing, and drafting the article. H.A.G. contributed by assisting with data collection and reviewing the article.

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## Informed Consent Statement

Participants were adults above 18 years old who voluntarily participated in the study. No personal data were collected, and they were informed that they could withdraw

from the study at any stage if they wished.

## Data Availability Statement

Data are stored on researcher's computer and its available upon reasonable request.

## Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest of any type associated with this article.

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