



HOW ARAB HIGHER EDUCATION STUDENTS IN NORTHERN ISRAEL PERCEIVE THE LONG-TERM IMPACT OF THEIR EARLY CHILDHOOD KINDERGARTEN EXPERIENCES ON ACADEMIC MOTIVATION, EDUCATIONAL ORIENTATIONS, AND SELF-EFFICACY

Shadia Dahamshiⁱ

Girne American University (GAU),
Northern Cyprus

Abstract:

This in-depth qualitative study examined how Arab higher education students in northern Israel retrospectively perceive the long-term impact of their early childhood kindergarten experiences on their academic motivation, educational attitudes, and academic self-efficacy. The study focuses on a significant gap in the academic literature: the lack of qualitative studies exploring the long-term retrospective effects of early childhood experiences in non-Western minority contexts, especially within the Arab-Palestinian community inside Israel. Employing Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), the study actively involved a specific aim and a diverse cohort of 48 students (aged 20–32) from universities in Israel and abroad, representing different academic disciplines, locations, backgrounds, genders, and religious affiliations. Data were collected through semi-structured, in-depth interviews lasting between 75 and 110 minutes each, with fieldwork spanning six months until theoretical saturation was reached. Multi-level thematic analysis yielded six central themes: (1) kindergarten as an enduring foundational safe space; (2) the teacher as the foremost model of ability; (3) the motivational transition from external stimulation to self-regulation; (4) retrospective memory as an active motivational resource; (5) Arab cultural identity as a collective motivational driver; and (6) creative continuity between kindergarten activities and current academic specializations. Drawing on these findings, the study proposes the Foundational Retrospective Perception Model (FRPM), which integrates Bandura's (1997) self-efficacy theory, Deci and Ryan's (2000) self-determination theory (SDT), and McAdams' (1993) narrative identity theory within a minority cultural context. The study contributes to broadening the theoretical scope of the academic motivation literature and offers practical recommendations for educational policymakers, teacher educators, and higher education institutions.

ⁱ Correspondence: email dahamshi-m@gmail.com

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1. Introduction

Early childhood holds a fundamental position in recent educational psychology and developmental science. A solid body of research demonstrates that the earliest years of life constitute the fundamental basis for an individual's cognitive, emotional, and social framework during the entire lifespan (Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000). Advances in developmental cognitive neuroscience further confirm that the first five years are defined by exceptional synaptic density; instructional representation experiences during this period are especially influential in establishing permanent cognitive structures (Huttenlocher & Dabholkar, 1997). In this context, kindergarten has appeared as a strategically significant educational space whose developmental effects extend across later educational stages and into adulthood (Sylva *et al.*, 2004; Heckman, 2006). Nobel laureate economist James Heckman has demonstrated that the social and economic return on investment in early education far exceeds that of any later educational intervention, establishing early childhood as a field of utmost importance (Heckman, 2006).

Despite the wealth of literature documenting the direct and short-term effects of early education, the field remains relatively sparse in exploring how individuals retrospectively interpret their kindergarten experiences during higher education. Most longitudinal studies conclude at the threshold of adolescence or the beginning of secondary education, leaving a substantive question inadequately addressed: how do early childhood experiences continue to inhabit the consciousness of university students, shaping their motivation and academic identity? The present study originates from this question and aims to address it through a qualitative, retrospective, interpretive phenomenological approach that prioritizes the individual's own narrative and self-interpretation.

Arab society in northern Israel constitutes a unique and intricate sociocultural context, one in which deep-seated cultural values of collective identity and communal belonging intersect with structural tensions arising from documented inequalities in educational resources and academic representation (Jabareen & Agbaria, 2011). Research consistently indicates that Arab students face identity-related cultural challenges that are reflected in their trajectories through higher education, within a structural context that continues to show documented disparities in funding, infrastructure, and academic representation (Jabareen & Agbaria, 2011).

These disparities are particularly evident in the conditions of Arab kindergartens in Israel, which repeatedly operate with considerably fewer resources than their counterparts in the Jewish sector, thereby creating structural contrasts in the quality of

early childhood experiences between the two groups. Nevertheless, many Arab students achieve higher education and achieve distinguished academic performance, which raises a profound question about the psychological and cultural mechanisms that enable them to transcend structural constraints while preserving and sustaining their academic motivation. It is precisely this question that the present study seeks to explore.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Early Childhood and Kindergarten as a Foundational Phase

Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological theory of human development provides an enduring theoretical foundation for understanding early childhood as a complex, interactive system in which individual, familial, community, and institutional factors are deeply interwoven. The educational literature draws an important distinction between structural quality—such as class size and teacher professional qualifications—and process quality, which refers to the nature of cognitive and emotional interactions between teachers and children. Research consistently demonstrates that process quality exerts a deeper and more enduring impact on children's academic and psychological trajectories than system quality alone (Pianta, 1999; Sylva *et al.*, 2004).

The landmark Perry Preschool Study (Schweinhart *et al.*, 2005) found that children who participated in high-quality early education programs achieved significantly better outcomes across education, employment, health, and crime prevention throughout their lives until the age of 40, thereby confirming the profound and foundational influence of the kindergarten stage. Similarly, the British EPPE study (Sylva *et al.*, 2004) demonstrated that the effects of high-quality early education persist along educational trajectories into adolescence, supporting the concept of foundational continuity that constitutes one of the central axes of the present study. Developmental neuroscience adds further intensity to this understanding by confirming that the period between ages three and six represents the peak density of synaptic formation related to learning, emotion, and belonging (Diamond, 2013; Huttenlocher & Dabholkar, 1997).

2.2 Theories of Academic Motivation

Self-Determination Theory (SDT), proposed by Deci and Ryan (2000), constitutes the primary theoretical pillar for understanding motivational development across the lifespan. SDT identifies three fundamental psychological needs that individuals look for satisfy within any educational environment: autonomy, competence, and relatedness. The theory describes a developmental trajectory that extends from complete extrinsic motivation toward fully integrated self-regulated motivation, with its roots anchored in the first educational experiences that children encounter in the kindergarten environment. When kindergarten environments respond effectively to these three needs, they establish the foundation for more independent, enduring motivational pathways capable of withstanding the pressures of higher education (Ryan & Deci, 2017).

Eccles and Wigfield's (2020) Expectancy-Value Theory contributes an important cognitive dimension, demonstrating that students' predictions of future success and their perceived value of academic tasks are initially formed within kindergarten experiences and are later reanalyzed during adulthood. Furthermore, Achievement Goal Theory illuminates how early educational experiences shape the orientations that students later adopt: mastery goals oriented toward genuine understanding, or performance goals focused toward outperforming others (Elliot & McGregor, 2001).

2.3 Self-Efficacy Theory and Its Foundational Sources

Bandura (1997) identifies four primary sources of self-efficacy: mastery experiences, vicarious learning, social persuasion, and physiological and emotional states. Mastery experiences are considered the most powerful and most enduring in long-term memory, as a child's successful accomplishment of kindergarten tasks forms what the present study terms the primary cognitive learning schema—an internal structure that later arranges how students interpret their academic feedback and how they respond to failure (Pajares, 1996).

Research has demonstrated that self-efficacy beliefs formed during early childhood more accurately predict academic performance in subsequent educational stages than students' objective abilities alone (Multon *et al.*, 1991). This finding intersects with neuroscientific evidence confirming that the emotional memory of first successes leaves a lasting neurological imprint in the amygdala and hippocampus, which remains active in regulating emotional responses to subsequent academic challenges (McGaugh, 2003).

2.4 Retrospective Memory, Narrative Identity, and the Arab Cultural Context

McAdams' (1993) narrative identity framework posits that mature individuals do not recover past experiences as passive recordings; rather, they actively reconstruct them in light of their current identities, goals, and meanings. This perspective adds a substantially interpretive dimension to understanding how university students perceive their kindergarten experiences: early memories may be transformed from mere archival records of the past into active motivational resources that support students in confronting the pressures of higher education and in constructing a clear meaning for their academic trajectories (Bartlett, 1932; Gadamer, 1975). What a student perceives of their kindergarten experiences is therefore not a faithful replica of the original events; it is an active reconstruction fused with present identity and current aspirations.

Within the Arab cultural background, research indicates that the concept of *sumud*—steadfastness or resilience as a culturally inherited disposition—generates motivational resources that derive their power particularly from collective belonging, identity pride, and a sense of responsibility toward future generations (Marie *et al.*, 2018). The literature reveals a significant theoretical conflict between the individualistic models that predominate in Western motivational psychology and the collective character of

Arab culture (Triandis, 1995; Oyserman *et al.*, 2002). This conflict does not necessarily represent a contradiction; rather, it may constitute a dual source of motivation that combines individual and collective incentives within a richer and more complex motivational system than individualistic models alone can adequately describe.

3. Material and Methods

The study employs a qualitative design grounded in Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), developed by Smith and colleagues (Smith *et al.*, 2009), as it is most appropriate for exploring how individuals make meaning of their lived experiences within their particular personal contexts. The epistemological system of the study draws on a constructivist-interpretivist paradigm, which holds that knowledge is not discovered but rather co-constructed through the individual's interaction with their social, cultural, and historical context (Lincoln & Guba, 2000). This design was selected specifically because the research question does not ask what objectively occurred in kindergarten, but rather how university students retrospectively interpret those experiences and organize them motivationally in their present academic lives.

IPA is characterized by two essential features that render it particularly appropriate for this study. The first is its commitment to case-by-case analysis prior to any cross-case comparison, which enables the capture of individual variations in how kindergarten experiences are perceived. The second is its double hermeneutic: the researcher interprets what participants themselves interpret of their own experiences, which adds a layer of cognition-focused transparency of considerable importance to the research process.

The sample contains 48 students, selected through maximum variation purposive sampling to ensure geographic diversity across towns in northern Israel; disciplinary diversity across the humanities, social sciences, applied sciences, and health professions; balanced gender distribution; and religious diversity including Muslim, Christian, and Druze participants. Data collection continued for eight months until theoretical saturation was reached, as evidenced by the termination of new themes emerging in later interviews. Participants ranged in age from 20 to 32 years, and all were enrolled in higher education institutions at the time of the study.

Participants were selected through student units at universities and colleges, supplemented by snowball sampling to reach individuals from varied town backgrounds. Inclusion criteria required that participants had attended kindergarten for at least one year and were capable of retrieving memories from that period, and that they were currently enrolled in undergraduate or postgraduate programs. All responsible considerations were rigorously observed: informed assent was obtained from all participants, the right to withdraw at any time was explicitly communicated, data confidentiality was maintained, and pseudonyms were employed throughout the documentation and analysis phases.

Semi-structured, in-depth interviews served as the primary data collection instrument, lasting between 75 and 110 minutes each. All interviews were audio-recorded with participants' informed consent and subsequently transcribed in full. The interview guide was developed in alignment with the literature review and the theoretical framework, addressing six principal thematic axes: (1) detailed sensory and emotional retrospective memories of kindergarten experiences; (2) the perceived relationship between those experiences and current academic motivation; (3) the role of the kindergarten teacher in shaping academic self-efficacy; (4) observed transformations in motivational patterns across educational stages; (5) the influence of collective Arab societal identity on learning motivation; and (6) the perceived continuity between early interests and tendencies advanced in kindergarten and current academic orientations.

All interviews were conducted in spoken Northern Palestinian Arabic to ensure participants' full expressive comfort and to escape any linguistic filtering that might diminish the spontaneity and intensity of responses. The interview guide was validated through consultation with experts in qualitative educational psychology research and was evaluated through two trial interviews with students outside the study sample prior to the commencement of official fieldwork. Due to prevailing security circumstances, a substantial proportion of the interviews were conducted via Zoom, a methodological adaptation that was documented and taken into account during analysis.

Analysis proceeded according to a multi-level approach comprising three sequential stages: (1) descriptive tagging, aimed at capturing the explicit content of interviews and identifying basic semantic units; (2) interpretive tagging, oriented toward exploring latent meanings beneath phenomenal descriptions and revealing the psychological and social structures that organize participants' experiences; and (3) conceptual coding, aimed at advancing the analysis to a theoretical level capable of generating the proposed interpretive model (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Each interview was analyzed individually before cross-case comparison, in accordance with IPA methodology.

Four procedures were employed to establish analytical credibility. First, inter-rater review, through which two independent researchers examined a sample of codes and themes and their observations were incorporated. Second, reference triangulation, involving comparison between interview data and field notes from the researcher's journal. Third, member checking, in which summaries of ten participants' interview analyses were returned to those participants for review and comment. Fourth, rich description, which enables contextual transferability to future studies.

4. Results

The outcomes of this study advance a rich and complex understanding of how Arab higher education students in northern Israel perceive the impact of their kindergarten experiences on their academic motivation and self-efficacy. Interpretative

Phenomenological Analysis contributed six central themes that reflect the strength, difficulty, and Plurality of this relationship across participants, while meeting on a shared system that attests to the long-term and active Involvement of kindergarten experiences in the academic identity of university students.

Theme 1: Kindergarten as an Enduring Constitutive Safe Space

Across 33 participants (68.8%), a recurring image arose of kindergarten as the first external space in which the child experienced emotional safety and Inclusive acceptance beyond the family scope. Participants defined how the kindergarten taught them that mistakes were not catastrophic—a conviction that continues to support them when facing difficult examinations or awaiting research project results. Other participants described how, in moments of university-related pressure, they automatically assemble the image of a warm hold they received when they made a mistake in kindergarten without being subject to sanctions. This finding joins with Bowlby's (1969) attachment theory, which posits that the quality of early relational bonds centers an internal working model that organizes emotional responses to challenges and failures across the remainder of the lifespan.

Significantly, beyond the mere feeling of safety, this core safe space enabled children to join in discovery, experimentation, and failure without fear of negative judgment—thereby fixing what the present study terms a ‘culture of safe attempt,’ which serves as a strong protective factor against academic failure fear in later years. This safe space effect was not confined to the emotional domain; It grew to encompass the cognitive domain of spirit and intellectual risk-taking, which participants identified as among the most significant skills they link to their earliest kindergarten experiences.

Theme 2: The Teacher as the First Mirror of Competence

Forty-two participants (87.5%) described their kindergarten teachers in significant detail, bringing to light the depth of the impact these relationships had left in their long-term memory. Many identified as essential dimensions of their popular academic confidence directly to specific involvements with their kindergarten teacher. Participants described with expressive clarity: an encouraging word in a moment of failure; a public acknowledgment of sustained effort; a comforting contain in a difficult situation; or a fleeting look of confidence that memory retained despite the passage of decades. These visibly small moments were attributed by participants to a far-reaching and long-lasting impact on their academic trajectories and levels of confidence in their own abilities.

This phenomenon supports what the proposed model terms the ‘teacher as the first external mirror of efficacy’ (Pianta, 1999; Bandura, 1997)—that is, the teacher provides the child with the first contextual reflection of their skills and worth as a learner. The results of the present study identify a mechanism that both complements and deepens Bandura's theory: the social influence received from the teacher does not operate only in the present moment; it is transformed through retrospective perception into an

internal linked voice that students carry across later educational stages, reminding them of their abilities when confidence wavers and reframing failure as a step toward success rather than a terminus.

Theme 3: The Motivational Transition from External to Self-Regulated Motivation

Thirty-seven participants (77.1%) described a clearly discernible developmental trajectory in their motivational patterns, moving from mainly extrinsic triggers in the kindergarten phase—such as verbal encouragement, teacher prizes, and parental support—toward increasingly autonomous and self-regulated forms of motivation in advanced educational stages. Students who carried rich and positive kindergarten memories described a smoother and earlier transition toward intrinsic motivation, which aligns with the progressive self-determination model proposed by Ryan and Deci (2017), which posits that the satisfaction of fundamental psychological needs in early stages facilitates a gradual shift toward motivational independence.

A particularly striking pattern in participants' narratives is that many describe a pivotal transformational moment in their academic journey—often associated with the discovery of a genuine interest or the achievement of a meaningful personal key event—and that when they trace the origins of that interest in their memory, they consistently return to an early kindergarten experience: an artistic activity that showed a talent, a story that planted an emergent curiosity, or a game that taught perseverance. This suggests that kindergarten not only shapes interests, but supports motivational response patterns through which students engage with learning content throughout their entire educational careers.

Theme 4: Retrospective Memory as an Active Motivational Resource

Twenty-eight participants (58.3%) described engaging in what amounted to a semi-conscious practice of summoning memories of success from kindergarten or images of early efficacy in moments of academic frustration or when confronting significant challenges in their university journey. This finding provides strong practical support for what the present study terms 'retrospective continuity'—a psychological mechanism that actively transforms childhood memories from passive records of the past into reusable motivational resources that are summoned and mobilized in moments of need (McGaugh, 2003).

This finding is explicable from a cognitive neuroscience lens: positive emotional memories stored in the amygdala acquire retrieval priority when an individual is exposed to analogous experiential pressures, making first kindergarten success memories automatically accessible when university students require them. This is consistent with Kahneman's (2011) demonstration that memory does not operate on the principle of quantitative density but rather on the Peak-End Rule, whereby emotionally intense moments—whether positive or negative—dominate memory, which explains why

certain kindergarten moments remain clearly alive in participants' memories after two or more periods of time.

Theme 5: Arab Cultural Identity as a Collective Motivational Engine

Forty participants (83.3%) described a strong sense of collective responsibility toward their families and communities as an authentic academic influence, independent of traditional individual incentives. These findings challenge fundamental assumptions embedded in the individualistic models that predominate in the academic motivation literature, and it advances the concept of Collective Cognitive Resilience (CCS) as a necessary interpretive secondary that cannot be overlooked in minor segment cultural contexts (Marie *et al.*, 2018). Among the most significant revelations of participants' narratives is their description of their university degree as not a purely individual achievement, but rather a message bearing in its depths the hopes of grandparents who could not complete their education and the aims of the community for collective advancement.

Participants' stories also revealed a clear connection between cultural identity and the environment that nurtured that identity: Arabic kindergartens that accepted heritage narratives, the Arabic language, folk songs, and community traditions. Participants described how a lyric or song learned in kindergarten has accompanied them to the present day, and how those moments were defined as the first layer in the construction of their sense of belonging to a collective heritage and shared identity. This analysis offers an interpretation of educational policies that separate academic content from cultural identity, demonstrating that their integration in the kindergarten phase builds a motivational capital of enduring and far-reaching effect.

Theme 6: Creative Continuity Between Kindergarten and Academic Specialization

In the narratives of 33 participants (68.8%), significant and recurring threads arose linking early interests and habits cultivated in kindergarten to the academic trajectories chosen in higher education. This phenomenon was particularly evident among education students, who traced their passion for teaching back to their own kindergarten teachers and to the deep joy they experienced when helping younger companions in cooperative learning activities. Similarly, students in the natural sciences described early exploratory curiosity based in sensory exploration activities in kindergarten, while students in the arts and humanities described early affinities rooted in drawing, storytelling, and dramatic role-play activities.

This theme demonstrates that interests cultivated in kindergarten do not dissipate with the end of that stage; rather, they form what might be called the 'seed of specialization,' which grows across educational stages and leads participants toward their subsequent academic and professional choices. This finding expands the notion of self-efficacy to encompass not only belief in one's ability for achievement, but also a deep

sense of belonging to a field of knowledge whose first seeds were planted in kindergarten.

5. Discussion

The findings of this study explain the detail and density of the relationship between kindergarten experiences and the academic routes of Arab higher education students in Israel. The results of the analytical Phenomenological Analysis merge into an original interpretive model that resists limited linear explanations of early educational effects, offering a more complex and honest account of the drive inherent in the relationship between the educational past and the academic present.

The present study suggests an original theoretical model —the Foundational Retrospective Perception Model (FRPM)—that reconceptualizes the relationship between early educational experiences and academic directions through the historical lens of perception mechanisms. The FRPM exceeds the explicative scope of three prevailing theoretical limitations. First, it includes the historical cognitive dimension as an active, ongoing, and effective mechanism rather than a mere passive record of early effects. Second, it combines the specific cultural context of minorities rather than departing from individualistic frameworks that lack cultural sensitivity. Third, it bridges theoretically between educational stages split in time—from kindergarten to higher education—through specific cognitive, emotional, and identity-related systems methods.

The FRPM comprises five related foundational concepts. The Primary Learning Schema (PLS) refers to the internal cognitive system formed within the kindergarten space through the accumulation of early experiences of success and failure and the environmental response to both, which subsequently functions as an active interpretive matrix organizing how students read their academic experiences. The Identity Cost (IC) describes the accumulated psychological burdens expressed by Arab students in their active negotiation between their cultural identity and the demands of academic integration in institutions that bear influential cultural assumptions. Retrospective Continuity (RC) describes the active narrative thread that connects, in the student's consciousness, their kindergarten past with their academic present and their imagined professional future. Collective Cognitive Resilience (CCS) challenges the individualistic assumption of motivated control and highlights the collective character of motivation in Arab culture. The Critical Foundational Window (CFW) identifies the period between ages three and six as the moment of deepest and most enduring motivational identity formation.

The first and second themes match profoundly with major theoretical frameworks of self-efficacy, while adding a retrospective temporal dimension that has not been previously documented. Whereas Bandura (1997) identified mastery experiences as the strongest sources of self-efficacy, the present study demonstrates that these experiences do not function as one-time fuel that is eventually exhausted; rather, they are transformed

through survey perception into a renewable resource system that can be reactivated in moments of need. This coincides with the work of Multon and colleagues (1991) in confirming the documented connection between self-efficacy and academic performance, while extending the inquiry by uncovering the mechanisms through which these beliefs are sustained and renewed through time.

The study similarly provides rich qualitative evidence of the gradual motivational trajectory described by Self-Determination Theory (Ryan & Deci, 2017), while adding the dimension of early survey experiences as fuel for this trajectory. With respect to the minority literature, the study documents a third path that transcends Ogbu's (1991) traditional binary of adaptation and rejection, demonstrating the possibility of mobilizing cultural identity as an authentic motivational resource rather than an identity burden—a finding that substantially enriches the theoretical discourse on learning psychology in minority cultural contexts.

Many methodological and analytical limitations merit acknowledgment when interpreting the findings. The first limitation is ingrained in the retrospective nature of the methodology itself: retrospective interviews do not always accurately define between authentic memories of the original experience and subsequent reconstructions influenced by present beliefs. Bartlett's (1932) foundational warning that human memory is not a recording device but an active construction process remains pertinent. What the study documents is therefore current retrospective perception rather than the actual historical impact.

The second limitation concerns survivorship bias: the sample is restricted to students who reached higher education, which likely means that the predominantly positive narratives reflect a selectively successful sample more than they reflect the full reality. The absent voice is that of those who were adversely affected by kindergarten experiences and did not complete their academic journey. The third limitation pertains to the boundaries of statistical generalization: results remain available for contextual transferability rather than statistical applicability, and should be applied with caution to milieus with differing structural and cultural characteristics.

Perhaps the most essential practical conclusion that this study provides is the need to reconceptualize the profession of kindergarten teacher as one of enduring academic and social impact that far outdoes the status, remuneration, and qualification requirements currently accorded to it by prevailing educational policies. When research demonstrates that a single encouraging word in kindergarten may shape a motivational trajectory extending over two decades, investment in teacher training and in cultivating teachers' emotional intelligence and constructive feedback strategies becomes a strategic educational investment in the fullest sense. Specifically, the findings call for the inclusion of three axes in pre-service and in-service teacher education programs: awareness of the influence of identity; the arts of constructive feedback; and skills for integrating collective Arab ethnical identity into kindergarten content.

At the level of kindergarten environment design, the findings call for a comprehensive review of Arab kindergarten curricula to incorporate direct elements of collective cultural identity, popular heritage, and historical narratives—not as supplementary content but as foundational structural material for building the collective cognitive resilience that students will require throughout their academic journeys. At the level of higher education institutions, the findings recommend designing learning communities that implement collective belonging as an academic motivational driver, next to support programs that account for compound identity costs, and the institutionalization of identity-conscious pedagogical practices that recognize every teacher-student interaction as one that either adds to or subtracts from the student's self-efficacy.

6. Conclusion

This study presents an in-depth qualitative exploration that demonstrates the relationship between kindergarten experiences and academic courses in higher education to be more analytical, more complex, and more dynamic than prevailing theoretical frameworks have earlier imagined. In contrast to linear models that view early educational impact as incrementally building up and gradually fading over time, the present study discloses an interactive and active model characterized by three essential features: active continuity through emotional restorative retrieval mechanisms; ongoing formation through the constant reframing of early experiences in light of present identity; and collective relation, whereby kindergarten experiences serve not only as individual psychological resources but also as the first brick in the construction of collective cognitive resilience.

This convergence is most clearly manifested in an image that the study draws with particular clarity: the university student who sits today before a doctoral dissertation or a decisive examination, and who—in a moment of doubt and indecision—involuntarily summons the image of the kindergarten teacher who held their hand as they wrote their first letters, or who looked at them with pride when they successfully completed their first tasks. Those small, seemingly forgotten moments lie in the depths of the motivational structure, silently performing their work of sustaining the will to persevere when self-accounting wavers under the weight of academic pressure.

The primary theoretical contributions of this study are fourfold. The first is the presentation of the Foundational Retrospective Perception Model (FRPM) as an original interpretive framework that addresses documented shortcomings in primary theories of motivation and self-efficacy in minority cultural contexts. The second is the qualitative field evidence of retrospective continuity (RC) as an active mechanism for preserving and enhancing effectiveness of early educational impact across a long learning life. The third is the documentation of a third path that transcends Ogbu's voluntary/involuntary minority binary, demonstrating the mobilization of collective Arab cultural identity as an

authentic motivational resource rather than an identity burden. The fourth is the extension of the narrative memory literature to encompass non-Western cultural contexts of a collective character, adding qualitative empirical validation to proposed theoretical frameworks.

This study opens diverse research outlooks worthy of in-depth exploration. The first is the conduct of cross-cultural comparative studies that test the FRPM across other diverse minority cultural contexts, thereby enabling an assessment of the generalizability of its core concepts and the delineation of its cultural boundaries. The second is the design of mixed-methods studies that integrate qualitative retrospective exploration with quantitative longitudinal measurements tracking motivational impact across sequential educational stages. The third is a comparative study of retrospective perceptions according to gender, religious, and socioeconomic class variables within Arab society itself. The fourth is an exploration of negative cases—that is, experiences of those who carry negative kindergarten memories—and the tracking of resilience or motivational deterioration mechanisms along their academic path.

This study concludes with an open call to return to the priorities driving educational policies. If what the study demonstrates is correct—and the rich qualitative data strongly suggest that it is—investment in the quality of kindergarten education constitutes a strategic decision whose returns extend into the lecture halls of higher education and beyond, accumulating in the formation of academically capable generations and in the fabric of society as a whole. If we want universities that produce authentic researchers and thinkers who are rooted in their identity and open to the world, we must begin in kindergarten—and we must restore to the kindergarten teacher a foundational status that has too long been diminished by the absence of recognition and the inadequacy of appreciation.

Finally, this study offers not only a contribution to the specialized academic literature but also a research and policy call for serious and deliberate early investment in human development: because the deeper the roots planted in the early stages, the more enduring the fruits harvested when those roots are granted the attention, care, and knowledge they deserve. The child who feels for the first time in kindergarten that they are capable, beloved, and worthy of belonging carries that faint or luminous flame across the years of study and life.

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Conflict of Interest Statement

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

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