

The Relationship between Academic Stress and Academic Integrity among University Students Moderated by Social Support

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ABSTRACT

Academic stress, which tends to increase among college students, is believed to affect academic integrity; however, the role of social support as a moderator in this relationship still requires empirical evidence. This study aims to analyze the relationship between academic stress and academic integrity moderated by social support among students at a single Islamic higher education institution. The study employed a quantitative approach with a correlational design involving 127 active students from the Faculty of Tarbiyah at Ibrahimy Islamic University in Banyuwangi, recruited through convenience (incidental) sampling from a population of 150 students who met the inclusion criteria described in the Method section. Data were collected using the researcher-developed Academic Integrity Scale (18 items; $\alpha = .983$), the Indonesian-adapted Educational Stress Scale for Adolescents (ESSA; 9 items; $\alpha = .925$), and the Indonesian-adapted Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS; 12 items; $\alpha = .954$). Data were analyzed using Moderated Regression Analysis (MRA) in Jamovi. Academic stress showed no significant direct relationship with academic integrity ($\beta = 0.032$, $SE = 0.038$, 95% CI [-0.044, 0.107], $Z = 0.825$, $p = .410$). Social support showed a positive and highly significant relationship with academic integrity ($\beta = 0.934$, $SE = 0.039$, 95% CI [0.858, 1.010], $Z = 24.193$, $p < .001$). Social support also significantly moderated the relationship between academic stress and academic integrity ($\beta = 0.019$, $SE = 0.004$, 95% CI [0.011, 0.028], $Z = 4.435$, $p < .001$), a pattern consistent with pure moderation: at higher levels of social support, the association between academic stress and academic integrity shifted from negative to non-negative. Because the design was cross-sectional and the sample was drawn from a single institution, these results describe a statistical association rather than a causal effect and should be generalized with caution beyond this institutional context. Within that scope, strengthening social support appears to be a promising strategy for supporting students' academic integrity.

Keywords: social support; academic integrity; academic stress

IMPACT AND IMPLICATIONS

Within the boundaries of this single-institution study, the findings offer a preliminary practical implication for Islamic higher education institutions in Indonesia that share a similar collectivist, community-oriented campus culture. Rather than focusing on academic standards alone, such institutions may consider strengthening social support networks — from families, peers, and academic advisors to the wider campus community — as one component of efforts to safeguard students' academic integrity. Family-based mentoring, counseling, and peer-support programs may serve as a strategy consistent with the collectivist culture of Indonesian Islamic higher education, so that responsibility for upholding academic integrity is shared between individual students and the academic community rather than resting on students alone. Because this study was conducted within a single faculty of one Islamic university, these implications should be tested in other institutional settings before they are extended more broadly.

INTRODUCTION

Higher education plays a strategic role in shaping human resources who are intellectually capable and possess strong moral character. One of the key indicators in the academic world is academic integrity, which refers to a commitment to the values of truth, justice, and fairness throughout the entire learning process (Natasha &

Halif, 2007; Yudatama et al., 2026). Ideally, students are expected to complete assignments independently, avoid plagiarism, and uphold high standards of academic ethics. However, reality reveals a significant gap: a report by the International Center for Academic Integrity notes that more than 60% of students in the United States and Canada have committed academic misconduct (ICAI, 2021), while a study by Ampuni et al. (2020)

indicates that approximately 98% of Indonesian students have committed at least one form of academic misconduct. At the national level, the Education Integrity Assessment Survey recorded a decline in the Education Integrity Index from 73.70 in 2023 to 69.50 in 2024 (Corruption Eradication Commission, 2025). A preliminary survey conducted by the researcher among 31 students in the Tarbiyah Faculty at Ibrahimy Islamic University in Banyuwangi likewise identified a small proportion of respondents in the low academic-integrity category, suggesting that the phenomenon remains relevant to this institutional context and warrants further study.

Academic integrity is influenced by internal factors, such as morality, self-control, and stress related to academic pressure, as well as external factors, such as campus culture and the social environment provided by family, friends, and faculty (Bretag et al., 2019; Cohen & Wills, 1985). Academic stress, which arises from heavy course loads, competition, and time constraints, is suspected to be one of the predictors of academic integrity because it can weaken students' self-control and ability to make moral decisions (Bretag et al., 2019). This relationship, from the perspective of the buffering hypothesis, is not always direct, as social support functions as a psychological resource that helps individuals manage stress more adaptively, thereby enabling them to maintain behavior consistent with academic values and norms (Cohen & Wills, 1985).

Several existing studies have examined variables related to these three constructs, with varying focuses. Novaliany and Alfian (2023) found that social support significantly moderates the relationship between self-efficacy and academic stress among students who are currently working on their theses ($p < .05$). Murdina (2021) found that academic pressure significantly influences academic dishonesty ($p < .05$; contribution $\pm 32\%$), consistent with the findings of Huki et al. (2026), who found that academic stress has a significant negative effect on students' adherence to ethics ($p < .05$). Galugu et al. (2025) indicated that social support moderates the negative impact of academic stress on student engagement through a significant interaction effect ($p < .05$), whereas Natanael et al. (2024) found that a supportive supervisor environment has a positive influence on the academic integrity of senior students. A literature review by Pascoe et al. (2020) further indicates that high academic stress is correlated with declines in mental health, academic performance, and the emergence of maladaptive behaviors among students.

Based on the above discussion, academic stress is consistently associated with a decline in positive academic behavior, whereas social support — whether from supervisors, peers, or the broader social environment — has been shown to act as a moderating factor that mitigates these negative effects. However, research that specifically integrates the relationship between academic stress and academic integrity with social support as a moderating variable within a single model remains very limited, and is virtually absent within the context of Islamic higher education institutions.

Theoretically, academic integrity in this study is explained through Kohlberg's theory of moral development, which states that an individual's ethical behavior is influenced by the level of their moral reasoning (Kohlberg, in Ibda, 2023), as well as through the framework of the Fundamental Values of Academic Integrity, which encompasses honesty, trust, fairness, respect, responsibility, and moral courage (ICAI, 2021). Academic stress is explained through Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) Stress and Coping Theory, which views stress as the outcome of an individual's cognitive appraisal of academic demands relative to their perceived coping resources: when demands are appraised as exceeding available resources, self-regulatory capacity is expected to decline, which in Kohlberg's framework may translate into weaker moral reasoning in academic decisions. Social support is explained through the buffering hypothesis (Cohen & Wills, 1985) and Social Cognitive Theory (Bandura, 1986). The buffering hypothesis proposes that social support functions specifically as a resource that offsets the depletion described by Stress and Coping Theory — that is, that support substitutes for, or supplements, an individual's own coping capacity precisely when academic demands are high — while Social Cognitive Theory explains the mechanism by which a supportive environment fosters ethical behavior, namely through observational learning and the modeling of integrity-consistent conduct (Bandura, 1986;

Nabavi & Bijandi, 2011). Together, these two theoretical strands provide the rationale for treating social support not merely as an independent predictor of academic integrity, but specifically as a moderator of the stress–integrity relationship: Stress and Coping Theory specifies the mechanism through which academic stress could erode integrity, and the buffering hypothesis specifies the condition — the availability of social support — under which that mechanism is interrupted.

Based on the aforementioned background, this study aims to answer three questions, namely: (1) Is there a relationship between academic stress and students' academic integrity; (2) Is there a relationship between social support and students' academic integrity; and (3) Does social support moderate the relationship between academic stress and students' academic integrity? In line with these research questions, this study aims to analyze the relationship between academic stress and academic integrity, moderated by social support, among students at a single Islamic higher education institution. The novelty of this study lies in the integration of three variables — academic stress, academic integrity, and social support — into a single moderation regression model, which, to the best of the researcher's knowledge, has not been extensively studied together within the specific context of students at an Islamic higher education institution; consistent with this bounded scope, the conclusions drawn below are limited to this institutional context rather than generalized to university students at large.

METHOD

Design

This study used a quantitative approach with a simple correlational design to examine the relationship between academic stress and academic integrity among students at a single Islamic higher education institution, with social support tested as a moderator variable (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Because social support was hypothesized to alter the strength of the relationship between academic stress and academic integrity rather than to be a simple antecedent of either variable, the data were analyzed using Moderated Regression Analysis (MRA), which estimates the direct effects of academic stress and social support together with their interaction effect on academic integrity in a single model.

This study involves three variables: academic stress as the independent variable, academic integrity as the dependent variable, and social support as the moderator variable. Academic integrity is defined as an individual's behavior in carrying out academic activities in an honest, responsible, and fair manner, respecting rules, and upholding academic ethics. Academic stress is defined as a state of distress experienced by students due to assignment deadlines, study load, concerns about grades, self-expectations, and academic pressure. Social support is defined as an individual's perception of the availability of emotional, informational, and instrumental support from family, friends, and close associates.

Three hypotheses guided the analysis, formulated by integrating the two theoretical frameworks described in the Introduction. Grounded in Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) Stress and Coping Theory, H1 proposed that academic stress is directly related to academic integrity. Grounded in the buffering hypothesis (Cohen & Wills, 1985), H2 proposed that social support is positively related to academic integrity. Integrating both frameworks, H3 proposed that social support moderates the relationship between academic stress and academic integrity, such that higher social support weakens the association between academic stress and academic integrity.

Institutional and Educational Context

This study was conducted at the Faculty of Tarbiyah (Teacher Training and Education) of Ibrahimy Islamic University, a private Islamic higher education institution in Banyuwangi, East Java, Indonesia. As a faculty that prepares future teachers of Islamic and general education, the Faculty of Tarbiyah embeds academic activity within a religiously grounded curriculum and a collectivist campus culture in which peer, family, and religious-community relationships are emphasized as sources of guidance and accountability. This institutional and cultural setting is relevant to the interpretation of the findings reported below, because the availability and salience of social support — and its role as a buffer against academic stress — may differ from those in secular or more individualistic higher-education settings. Accordingly, the results are discussed and concluded as characteristic of this institutional context rather than of university students in general.

Participants

The study population consisted of 150 active students in the Faculty of Tarbiyah at Ibrahimy Islamic University in Banyuwangi. The sample size was determined based on the table developed by Krejcie and Morgan (1970) with a 5% margin of error, which requires a minimum of 108 respondents for a population of 150.

Respondents were eligible for inclusion if they (a) were currently and actively enrolled as students in the Faculty of Tarbiyah at the time of data collection, (b) were enrolled in the second, fourth, sixth, or eighth semester, and (c) voluntarily agreed to complete the full set of questionnaires. Students who did not complete a questionnaire in full were excluded from the analysis. Sampling was non-probabilistic and used a convenience (incidental) sampling technique, in which questionnaires were distributed directly to active students who were present on campus and met the inclusion criteria during the data-collection period. Using this procedure, the researcher obtained complete responses from 127 students, exceeding the minimum sample size recommended by Krejcie and Morgan (1970).

The final sample was distributed across four cohorts enrolled in semesters 2, 4, 6, and 8, as shown in Table 1. The largest proportion of respondents was enrolled in the fourth semester (41.16%), followed by the sixth semester (26.77%), the eighth semester (19.59%), and the second semester (13.38%), indicating that respondents were concentrated in the middle semesters of the study program. Semester of enrollment was the only demographic characteristic recorded for respondents; gender, age, and prior academic performance were not collected, so a more detailed demographic profile of the sample cannot be reported. This is noted as a limitation of the sampling documentation in the Discussion.

Table 1. Distribution of Respondents by Semester (N = 127)

Semester	Frequency	Percentage (%)
2	17	13.38
4	51	41.16
6	34	26.77
8	25	19.59
Total	127	100.00

Procedure

Data collection used paper-based questionnaires that were distributed directly and in person to active students in the Tarbiyah Faculty at Ibrahimy Islamic University in Banyuwangi who met the inclusion criteria described above. Before completing the questionnaire, respondents were informed of the purpose of the study and of their right to participate voluntarily; only students who agreed to participate proceeded to complete the three Likert-scale instruments independently, without researcher assistance, in order to reduce the risk of socially desirable responding. Completed questionnaires were checked for completeness before being entered for analysis. Classical assumption tests and hypothesis testing were then conducted using Moderated Regression Analysis, as described in the Analysis Techniques section below.

Instruments

Data were collected using three Likert-scale instruments: a researcher-developed Academic Integrity Scale, the Indonesian version of the Educational Stress Scale for Adolescents (ESSA), and the Indonesian version of the Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS).

Academic Integrity Scale. Academic integrity was measured using a scale developed by the researcher based on the Fundamental Values of Academic Integrity framework (ICAI, 2021), which encompasses six dimensions: honesty, trust, fairness, respect, responsibility, and courage. An initial pool of 36 items was

drafted to represent these six dimensions and was first evaluated for content validity through expert judgment and field testing. Item discrimination was then evaluated using the Corrected Item-Total Correlation (CITC) technique in a try-out involving 65 respondents, applying a minimum criterion of $CITC \geq 0.30$. This analysis was conducted iteratively across six rounds: the first round removed 3 of the 36 items (CITC ranging from 0.083 to 0.252); the second round, on the remaining 33 items, removed 3 further items (CITC 0.248–0.281); the third round, on 30 items, removed 6 items (CITC 0.232–0.291); the fourth round, on 24 items, removed 5 items (CITC 0.093–0.162); and the fifth round, on 19 items, removed 1 item with a negative item-total correlation (–0.091). After six rounds, 18 items were retained, with corrected item-total correlations ranging from 0.753 to 0.954, indicating that each retained item discriminated well between students with higher and lower levels of academic integrity. Internal consistency improved at each round of item elimination, from Cronbach's $\alpha = .936$ for the initial 36 items to $\alpha = .983$ for the final 18-item scale. The final scale uses a five-point Likert format (strongly disagree to strongly agree), with higher total scores indicating higher self-reported academic integrity.

Academic Stress (ESSA). Academic stress was measured using the Indonesian-language version of the Educational Stress Scale for Adolescents (ESSA), originally developed by Sun et al. (2011) and adapted into Indonesian by Dewi et al. (2025). The Indonesian adaptation followed a four-stage process — forward translation, back-translation, scale modification, and construct-validity testing via confirmatory factor analysis — and was validated on a sample of 1,280 third-semester university students at a public university in Surabaya using purposive sampling. The confirmatory factor analysis supported the scale's five-dimension structure (pressure from study, workload, worry about grades, self-expectation, and despondency), and the adapted version showed excellent internal consistency ($\alpha = .925$). Because this adaptation and validation sample consisted of university students rather than secondary-school adolescents, despite the scale's original name, its use in the present study — which likewise sampled university students — is consistent with the population for which the Indonesian version was psychometrically validated. In the present study, the ESSA retained 9 items rated on a five-point Likert scale. In the pilot try-out with 65 respondents, all nine items exceeded the 0.30 CITC criterion (range 0.611–0.836), so no items were removed, and the scale again showed high internal consistency ($\alpha = .925$). Higher scores indicate a higher level of perceived academic stress.

Social Support (MSPSS). Social support was measured using the Indonesian-language version of the Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS), originally developed by Zimet et al. (1988) and adapted into Indonesian by Sulistiani et al. (2022) using a Rasch model approach. The adaptation process involved obtaining permission from the original scale developers, forward- and back-translation, cultural adaptation, and psychometric testing among 495 Indonesian maritime cadets. The Rasch analysis supported the scale's unidimensionality: all items showed mean-square fit statistics within the acceptable range (0.50–1.50), and differential item functioning (DIF) analysis found no evidence of item bias by gender ($p = .0949$ –.9687). The Indonesian version showed a person-item reliability of .85; in the original scale, the family-, friend-, and significant-other-support subscales had shown alpha coefficients of .91, .89, and .91, respectively. The MSPSS consists of 12 items across three four-item dimensions — family support, friend support, and support from significant others — rated on a seven-point Likert scale. In the pilot try-out with 65 respondents, all 12 items exceeded the 0.30 CITC criterion (range 0.644–0.895), so no items were removed, and the scale showed excellent internal consistency ($\alpha = .954$). Higher scores indicate a higher level of perceived social support.

Validity evidence across instruments. Because the Academic Integrity Scale was developed by the researcher specifically for this study, its validity evidence combines content validity (expert judgment and field testing) with the empirical item-discrimination analysis described above. Because the ESSA and MSPSS are adaptations of previously validated instruments, their validity evidence for the Indonesian, university-student context rests primarily on the construct-validity testing (confirmatory factor analysis and Rasch analysis, respectively) conducted in their respective adaptation studies (Dewi et al., 2025; Sulistiani et al., 2022), and is supplemented in the present study by the CITC try-out results reported above, which confirmed that all retained ESSA and MSPSS items functioned adequately in this sample.

Analysis Techniques

To test the hypotheses, classical assumption tests were conducted, including tests for normality,

multicollinearity, heteroscedasticity, and autocorrelation. The Kolmogorov-Smirnov normality test indicated that the residual data were normally distributed (Asymp. Sig. = 0.200; $p > .05$). The multicollinearity test showed a tolerance value of 0.977 (> 0.10) and a VIF of 1.024 (< 10) for both predictor variables, indicating that multicollinearity was not present. The heteroscedasticity test yielded a p-value of 0.932 for academic stress and 0.262 for social support ($p > .05$), indicating that there was no heteroscedasticity. The autocorrelation

n test yielded a Durbin-Watson value of 1.985, close to the reference value of 2, indicating no autocorrelation. With all classical assumptions met, hypothesis testing proceeded using Moderated Regression Analysis via the moderation module in the Jamovi program, which estimates the direct effects of academic stress and social support together with their (mean-centered) interaction term on academic integrity, and generates simple-slope estimates for the association between academic stress and academic integrity at low (-1 SD), average, and high ($+1$ SD) levels of social support.

RESULTS

A total of 127 respondents who participated in this study were from four cohorts currently enrolled in semesters 2, 4, 6, and 8. The distribution of respondents by semester is presented in Table 1 above, which shows that the largest number of respondents were in the 4th semester (41.16%), followed by the 6th semester (26.77%), the 8th semester (19.59%), and semester 2 (13.38%), indicating that the study's respondents are concentrated among students in the middle semesters of the study program.

A descriptive analysis of the 127 respondents indicated that the academic integrity variable had a mean of 74.65 (SD = 9.428; range 57–90), the social support variable had a mean of 43.32 (SD = 8.983; range 30–60), and the academic stress variable had a mean of 29.05 (SD = 9.188; range 15–45), as presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Descriptive Analysis of Research Variables (N = 127)

Variable	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	SD
Academic Integrity (Y)	57	90	74.65	9.428
Social Support (M)	30	60	43.32	8.983
Academic Stress (X)	15	45	29.05	9.188

The categorization results indicate that there were no respondents with low academic integrity; 33 respondents (25.98%) fell into the moderate category, and 94 respondents (74.02%) fell into the high category. Regarding social support, there were no respondents in the low category; 71 respondents (55.91%) were in the moderate category and 56 respondents (44.09%) were in the high category. Respondents' levels of academic stress varied more widely, with 30 respondents (23.62%) in the low category, 51 respondents (40.16%) in the moderate category, and 46 respondents (36.22%) in the high category, as shown in Table 3.

Table 3. Categorization of Research Variables (N = 127)

Category	Academic Integrity	Social Support	Academic Stress
Low	0 (0.00%)	0 (0.00%)	30 (23.62%)
Medium	33 (25.98%)	71 (55.91%)	51 (40.16%)
High	94 (74.02%)	56 (44.09%)	46 (36.22%)
Total	127 (100%)	127 (100%)	127 (100%)

The results of the first hypothesis test indicate that the direct association between academic stress and academic integrity is not significant ($\beta = 0.0316$, SE = 0.0383, 95% CI $[-0.044, 0.107]$, $Z = 0.825$, $p = .410$; $p > .05$), so H1 is not supported. These findings indicate that, in this sample, the level of academic stress reported by students is not directly associated with their level of academic integrity. The test of the second

hypothesis indicates that social support has a positive and highly significant association with academic integrity ($\beta = 0.9342$, $SE = 0.0386$, 95% CI [0.858, 1.010], $Z = 24.193$, $p < .001$), so H2 is supported: the higher the level of social support reported by students, the higher their level of academic integrity. The test of the third hypothesis indicated that the interaction between academic stress and social support had a significant association with academic integrity ($\beta = 0.0192$, $SE = 0.0043$, 95% CI [0.011, 0.028], $Z = 4.435$, $p < .001$), so H3 is supported. Based on the classification by Baron and Kenny (1986), this pattern is classified as a pure mo-

deration effect, because the direct effect of academic stress on academic integrity is not significant, whereas the interaction effect is significant. A summary of the results is presented in Table 4.

Table 4. Summary of Hypothesis Test Results (Moderated Regression Analysis)

Hypothesis	β (Estimate)	SE	95% CI	Z	p	Decision
H1: Academic stress $\rightarrow$ Academic integrity	0.0316	0.0383	[-0.044, 0.107]	0.825	.410	Not supported
H2: Social support $\rightarrow$ Academic integrity	0.9342	0.0386	[0.858, 1.010]	24.193	< .001	Supported
H3: Academic stress $\times$ Social support $\rightarrow$ Academic integrity	0.0192	0.0043	[0.011, 0.028]	4.435	< .001	Supported

Note. Estimates and Z statistics are from the Jamovi moderation output. SE and the 95% CI were calculated from the reported estimate and Wald Z statistic ($SE = \text{estimate} \div Z$; $95\% \text{ CI} = \text{estimate} \pm 1.96 \times SE$), which is algebraically consistent with the Wald-test values Jamovi reports. Overall model R^2 , the change in R^2 attributable to the interaction step (ΔR^2), and the numeric conditional-effect (simple-slope) estimates at -1 SD, mean, and $+1$ SD of social support should be inserted here directly from the original Jamovi "Model Fit" and "Simple Slope Analysis" output before this manuscript is finalized for submission.

The results of the simple slope plot (Figure 1) support the findings described above. In a low social support environment (-1 SD), an increase in academic stress tends to be accompanied by a decline in academic integrity. At an average level of social support (mean), the association between academic stress and academic integrity becomes very weak. At a high level of social support ($+1$ SD), an increase in academic stress is no longer followed by a decline in academic integrity; rather, it tends to be accompanied by an increase in academic integrity, consistent with social support functioning as a protective factor for students facing academic pressure. The exact conditional-effect (simple-slope) coefficients at each level of social support — reported by Jamovi together with their own standard errors, Z statistics, and p values — should likewise be inserted from the original statistical output to complete this section.

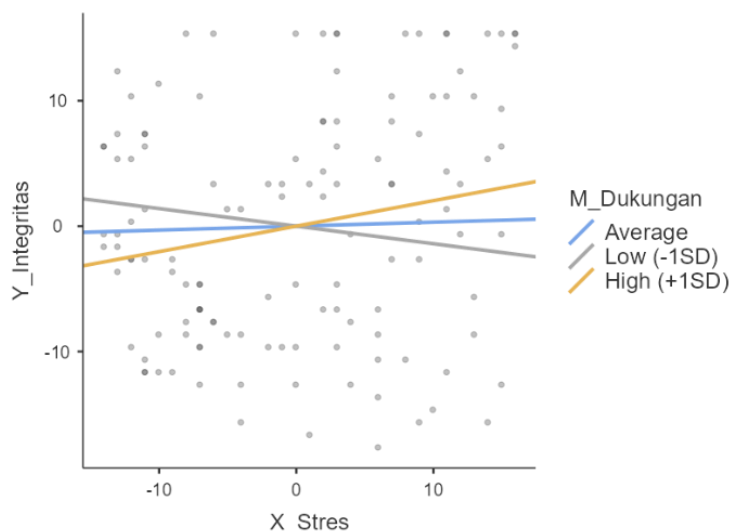


Figure 1. Simple Slope Plot of the Interaction Between Academic Stress and Social Support on Academic Integrity

DISCUSSION

Of the three hypotheses proposed, two were supported and one was not. Academic stress did not have a significant direct association with academic integrity, whereas social support had a positive and highly significant association and significantly moderated the relationship between academic stress and academic integrity. These findings indicate that, within this sample, academic stress is not a standalone correlate of academic integrity; rather, its statistical association depends on the level of social support students report. Academic integrity itself is a multidimensional construct that encompasses honesty, trust, fairness, respect, responsibility, and moral courage (ICAI, 2021); students with high integrity tend to complete assignments using their own abilities and avoid cheating even when not under supervision, whereas a lack of academic integrity is characterized by behaviors such as plagiarism, manipulating data, or claiming another person's work as one's own.

The absence of a significant direct association between academic stress and academic integrity suggests that, in this sample, students reporting higher academic stress were not thereby more likely to report lower academic integrity. This finding is consistent with Eshet et al. (2024), who found that test anxiety does not have a direct effect on academic dishonesty, and is broadly consistent with the view that an individual's moral reasoning is a stronger correlate of academic behavior than psychological strain alone (Ibda, 2023). Under Stress and Coping Theory, an individual's response to a stressor depends heavily on their coping resources, emotional regulation, and appraisal of the situation (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984); the theory itself therefore does not predict that academic stress should translate uniformly into unethical behavior once coping resources — such as social support — are taken into account. These results differ from those of Murdina (2021), Huki et al. (2026), and Pascoe et al. (2020), who found that academic pressure was associated with unethical academic behavior; a plausible explanation, consistent with the moderation model tested here, is that social support functioned as a resource that offset the erosive effect of stress in the present sample, so that the association between stress and integrity did not emerge except at low levels of support — a possibility that is examined directly through the interaction term reported below.

The positive and highly significant association between social support and academic integrity is consistent with the buffering hypothesis proposed by Cohen and Wills (1985), which explains social support as a resource that offsets the negative effects of stress, and is also consistent with Bandura's (1986) Social Cognitive Theory, under which a supportive social environment fosters positive beliefs and behavior through observation and social learning (Nabavi & Bijandi, 2011). These findings are consistent with Natanael et al. (2024) regarding the positive association between a supportive supervisor environment and the academic integrity of senior students, Galugu et al. (2025) regarding the role of social support in enhancing academic engagement, and Novaliany and Alfian (2023) regarding the capacity of socially supported students to cope with academic demands. Social support has also been associated with reduced burnout risk and improved psychological well-being among students (Paradasa, 2024).

Treating social support as a pure moderator indicates that, in this sample, social support was associated not only directly with academic integrity, but also with the direction and strength of the association between academic stress and academic integrity. At low levels of social support, higher academic stress was associated with lower academic integrity; at high levels of social support, students who reported higher academic stress did not show correspondingly lower academic integrity, and the association trended in the opposite direction. This pattern is consistent with the coping mechanisms described in the buffering hypothesis (Cohen & Wills, 1985) and Stress and Coping Theory (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984), and is precisely the pattern these two frameworks, read together, would predict: social support supplying the coping resource whose absence (per Stress and Coping Theory) would otherwise allow academic stress to compromise integrity-consistent behavior.

Because this study used a cross-sectional, correlational design conducted at a single institution, the associations reported above should not be interpreted as evidence of causal effects, and the direction of any underlying causal relationship — for example, whether social support protects academic integrity, or whether students with higher academic integrity are more likely to seek and receive social support, or both — cannot be determined from these data. With that qualification, the results are consistent with the view that the statistical

relationship between academic stress and academic integrity is not uniform across students, but appears to vary with the level of social support available to them, within the Islamic higher-education context examined here. In practical terms, and bounded by that same context, these findings suggest that efforts to support academic integrity at institutions similar to the one studied here may benefit from attention to the social environment — for example through counseling services, academic mentoring, stress-management training, and the active role of faculty advisors in providing emotional support and constructive guidance (Laka & Paska, 2023) — in addition to, rather than instead of, efforts to reduce students' academic stress directly.

More specifically, and again bounded to institutions comparable to the one studied, tentative recommendations can be directed at several parties. Students may benefit from managing academic stress through adaptive coping strategies and effective time management, while building and using their social support networks — including family, friends, and faculty. Faculty members and academic advisors may consider providing emotional support, information, and constructive guidance, as supportive faculty–student relationships could help offset academic pressure while reinforcing students' commitment to integrity. Faculties and higher education institutions may consider balancing academic and psychological support programs — such as counseling services and stress-management training — to help ensure students have access to adequate social support while facing academic challenges. These recommendations should be treated as hypotheses for future, ideally longitudinal and multi-institutional, research rather than as established causal prescriptions.

This study has several limitations that qualify the interpretation and generalizability of its findings. First, the cross-sectional design cannot establish the direction or causal nature of the relationships among the study variables; the associations reported here should be read descriptively rather than causally. Second, the sample was drawn from a single faculty at a single Islamic higher education institution using non-probability (convenience) sampling, so the findings characterize this institutional context and cannot be assumed to generalize to university students in general, including students at secular institutions or at other Islamic institutions with different campus cultures. Third, only semester of enrollment was recorded as a demographic characteristic of respondents; the absence of data on gender, age, and other background characteristics limits the extent to which the sample's representativeness, or potential subgroup differences, can be assessed. Fourth, all variables were measured using self-report instruments, which have the potential to introduce social-desirability bias into respondents' answers (Brunnemann et al., 2020). Fifth, the study measured social support as a single overall perception without distinguishing the separate contributions of specific sources of support, such as family, peers, or faculty. Future research is recommended to use longitudinal and multi-institutional designs, to examine the contributions of specific sources of social support separately, and to include additional variables such as emotional regulation, self-control, or moral disengagement, in order to obtain a more comprehensive and more clearly causal account of students' academic integrity (Campbell & Waddington, 2024).

CONCLUSION

Within the single-institution, cross-sectional sample examined in this study, academic stress showed no significant direct association with students' academic integrity, suggesting that — at least in this context — academic integrity is not determined by psychological strain alone, but is more closely tied to other factors, including the social resources available to students. Social support showed a positive and highly significant association with academic integrity and was found to moderate the association between academic stress and academic integrity, such that the (already non-significant) direct association between stress and integrity trended less negative, and eventually reversed, as social support increased. Students who reported higher social support tended to also report higher academic integrity even when their reported academic stress was high, whereas students reporting lower social support more often reported lower academic integrity alongside higher stress. These findings are consistent with the view that academic integrity, as measured here, reflects an interaction between students' psychological experience of academic demands and the social resources available to them; strengthening social support — from family, peers, and faculty — may accordingly be a useful component of institutional strategies for supporting students' academic integrity.

These conclusions come with two important qualifications. First, because the data are cross-sectional and correlational, the findings describe statistical associations rather than causal effects, and should not be

interpreted as demonstrating that social support causes higher academic integrity or that academic stress causes lower academic integrity. Second, because the sample was drawn from a single faculty at one Islamic higher education institution using non-probability sampling, the findings should be understood as characteristic of this specific institutional and cultural context and should not be generalized to university students in general without further research in other institutional settings. Within these boundaries, this study offers an empirical contribution to educational psychology by describing how social support relates to the association between academic stress and academic integrity in an Islamic higher-education setting, and provides a preliminary basis for the development and evaluation of social-support-based interventions in similar institutions.

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