Islamic college students' gratitude model:
The role of social support in mediating spiritual well-being

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Article Info	ABSTRACT
	Islamic college students are individuals who simultaneously study at a university and an Islamic boarding school (pesantren), thus facing complex academic, social, and religious pressures. This study tested a gratitude model by examining the role of social support in gratitude through the mediation of spiritual well-being. A total of 233 Islamic college students from various Islamic boarding schools in Indonesia participated through an online survey using a purposive sampling technique. Structural Equation Modeling (AMOS 26) analysis showed that social support had a positive effect on spiritual well-being ($\beta = 0.314$; $p < 0.001$), but did not have a direct effect on gratitude ($\beta = –0.010$; $p = 0.815$). In contrast, spiritual well-being had a strong influence on gratitude ($\beta = 0.713$; $p < 0.001$) and fully mediated the relationship between the two ($\beta = 0.224$; $p < 0.001$), with a marginal model fit (χ^2/df = 2.98; RMSEA = 0.094). These results indicated that gratitude is not formed directly from social support, but instead through spiritual well-being, which transforms external influences into inner well-being and grateful behavior. These findings extended the broaden-and-build theory (Fredrickson, 2004) from an Islamic psychology perspective and provide a practical basis for developing spiritual interventions to strengthen the psychological resilience of Islamic college students.

INTRODUCTION

In the dynamic digital era, students face multidimensional pressures that impact psychological well-being and academic achievement. Research by Nabila et al. (2025) showed that 55% of students experience high academic anxiety, while a WHO collaborative study in 20 countries found that 47-65% of students experience moderate to high academic stress (Karyotaki et al., 2020). In addition to academic pressure, the phenomenon of social comparison on social media also worsens psychological conditions. Research by Tungol & Enad (2025) reported that 78.44% of students frequently compare themselves to others, which triggers anxiety, depression, and self-dissatisfaction. This condition is exacerbated by the increasing cases of quarter-life crisis, a period of identity confusion and uncertainty about life direction in early adulthood (Pamungkas & Hendrastomo, 2024; Robinson, 2016).

A similar phenomenon is seen in Indonesian students, where research showed that 64.3% of students experience academic stress that impacts their academic performance (Saifudin et al., 2023). Another study reported that 27.26% - 46.2% of Indonesian students experience low psychological well-being due to academic pressure, social demands, and emotional regulation failure (Norhidayah et al., 2025). The combination of academic, social and existential pressures makes it difficult for many

students to adjust to the demands of life, which has implications for a decline in general psychological well-being (Febziantini et al., 2025; Pinasti & Hertinjung, 2025).

In the context of Islamic higher education, some students live in Islamic boarding schools (ma'had) or pesantren who lead dual lives as both students and santri are commonly referred to as Islamic college students because they face additional demands in the form of religious obligations, religious studies, and strict social discipline. Compared to regular students, santri experience higher psychological stress due to their busy schedules, limited personal space, and intense social interactions (Ikromi, 2025; Rizqullah & Ansyah, 2024). Research showed that this stress is often accompanied by role conflict between academic and religious demands, potentially reducing life satisfaction and increasing the risk of burnout and psychological stress (Radisti et al., 2023; Salmela-Aro et al., 2022). This condition confirms that the dynamics of stress in Islamic college students are unique and complex in various regions of Indonesia, so that adaptive psychological mechanisms are needed to be able to maintain academic, social, and spiritual balance as a basis for the formation of psychological well-being (Mudzkiyyah et al., 2022; Zahra & Sukirno., 2022).

One positive mechanism that plays a crucial role in maintaining individual well-being is gratitude. According to Emmons & Shelton (2002), gratitude is a feeling of awe, thankfulness, and appreciation for something an individual receives. From an Islamic perspective, gratitude is the awareness that all blessings come from Allah SWT, accompanied by verbal acknowledgment and the use of blessings for good (Al-Jauziyah, 2005; Rachmadi et al., 2019). In this study, both concepts are positioned integratively, because both emphasize the importance of appreciation and positive awareness, but the concept of gratitude in Islam deepens its meaning by linking gratitude directly to God, while Western psychology emphasizes interpersonal relationships as a source of gratitude (Chalmiers et al., 2023; McCullough et al., 2002). This integrative approach allows for a more complete understanding of gratitude in Islamic boarding school students who live in a religious environment and carry out daily spiritual practices (Harun & Taib, 2025). Research shows that gratitude is positively related to happiness and psychological well-being and negatively related to stress and depression (Anabella, 2022; Wood et al., 2009). Based on the broaden-and-build theory (Fredrickson, 2004), positive emotions such as gratitude can broaden mindsets, build psychological resources, and increase resilience to stress, making it an important variable in understanding student well-being.

In addition to internal factors, social support plays a crucial role as an external factor in maintaining individual well-being. Social support is an individual's perception of the extent to which they feel cared for and accepted in meaningful social relationships (Zimet et al., 1988). Social support has been shown to buffer the effects of stress and enhance positive coping (Cohen & Wills, 1985). Research shows that social support consistently correlates positively with students' psychological well-being, gratitude, resilience, and academic adaptation (Fatiq & Nasrullah, 2024; Lakey & Orehek, 2011). Furthermore, social support also strengthens the spiritual dimension through a sense of acceptance and togetherness that fosters gratitude (Rochmawati & Laili, 2024). From an Islamic perspective, harmonious social relations are a manifestation of spiritual balance (Q.S. Al-Hujarat: 10). Thus, social support serves as an external foundation that protects individuals from stress while strengthening their spiritual aspects.

As a psychological mechanism that bridges the influence of external factors on an individual's emotional state, spiritual well-being plays a central role in this model. Spiritual well-being is a state of inner balance that arises from an individual's harmonious relationship with themselves, their

environment, and God (Fisher, 1998). This concept encompasses personal, communal, environmental, and transcendental dimensions that mutually reinforce psychological resilience (Gomez & Fisher, 2003). In the context of positive psychology, spiritual well-being serves as a source of meaning and a coping mechanism that helps individuals interpret life experiences reflectively and gratefully (Pargament, 1997). Research showed that spiritual well-being acts as a mediator between social support and psychological well-being (Bali et al., 2022; Sari et al., 2025), and is positively related to gratitude and happiness (Ajoudani et al., 2019). Therefore, spiritual well-being can be seen as a link connecting social support and gratitude.

Various studies have shown that social support, spiritual well-being, and gratitude are interrelated, although most have been studied separately. Social support has been shown to enhance spiritual well-being, which in turn strengthens psychological well-being (Feng et al., 2024; Li et al., 2022). In the context of college students, social support and spiritual well-being contribute to life satisfaction and emotional regulation (Alorani & Alradaydeh, 2018; Sari et al., 2025). Furthermore, spiritual well-being also strengthens gratitude, as found in trauma survivors and medical personnel who receive high social support (Feng & Yin, 2021). These findings confirmed that spiritual well-being acts as a mediating mechanism that enables individuals to transform social support into positive emotional experiences of gratitude and meaning in life. However, integrative studies examining the mediating role of spiritual well-being in the relationship between social support and gratitude are still very limited, especially in the context of Islamic college students facing "academic, social, and existential pressures.

Figure 1

Hypotheses and Conceptual Framework
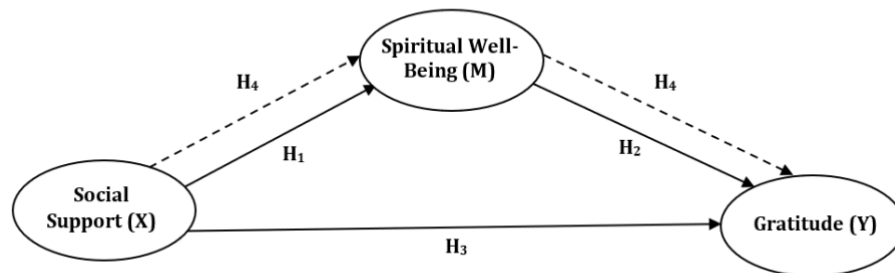
Therefore, this study aims to examine the gratitude model that explains the psychological mechanisms through which social support influences gratitude, both directly and indirectly, through spiritual well-being as a mediating variable. Specifically, the model proposes that social support positively affects spiritual well-being (H_1), spiritual well-being positively affects gratitude (H_2), and social support directly influences gratitude (H_3). Furthermore, it is hypothesized that spiritual well-being mediates the relationship between social support and gratitude (H_4). Theoretically, this study seeks to strengthen the framework of positive psychology by integrating external factors (social support) and internal factors (spiritual well-being) that together contribute to the development of gratitude. Practically, the findings of this study are expected to provide a foundation for designing spiritual guidance, counseling, and psychological well-being programs in Islamic boarding school environments, helping students to balance academic and religious demands while enhancing their overall psychological and spiritual well-being.

METHODS

This study employed a non-experimental quantitative approach with a cross-sectional design and a Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) analysis technique. This approach was chosen because it allows testing the suitability of a theoretical model explaining the causal relationship between social support and gratitude and the mediating role of spiritual well-being in Islamic college students.

The participants in this study consisted of 233 Islamic college students from across Indonesia. The participants were selected using a purposive sampling technique with the following criteria: (1) active students aged 18-25, (2) currently living at the Islamic boarding school for at least one semester, and (3) willing to participate voluntarily. This technique was used because the study population has specific characteristics requiring selective sampling in accordance with the research objectives (Etikan, 2016). Furthermore, the 18-25 age range was chosen because it represents the early adult developmental stage, where individuals begin to explore life values, spirituality, and self-reliance (Frezy, 2023). This sample size meets the minimum criteria for Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) analysis, which is 5-10 times the number of estimated parameters (Hair et al., 2019).

This study began with obtaining permission from the Islamic boarding school management and approval for the use of the MSPSS, SWBS, and IGS-10 instruments, all of which had been previously adapted and psychometrically tested in the Indonesian context by earlier researchers. As part of this prior adaptation, the MSPSS (Zimet et al., 1988) and SWBS (Ellison et al., 1983) underwent established cross-cultural procedures such as forward–backward translation, expert judgment, and validity-reliability testing ensuring their cultural and religious relevance for Indonesian respondents. Because this study only adopted these validated versions, no additional adaptation was required, and the instruments were deemed appropriate for use with the santri population. Ethical clearance for this research was granted by the Research and Community Service Institute *(Lembaga Penelitian dan Pengabdian kepada Masyarakat, LP2M)* of State Islamic University of Maulana Malik Ibrahim Malang with approval number 3750/LP2M/TL.00/11/2025. Data collection was conducted online via Google Form in October 2025. At the beginning of the form, participants were provided with information regarding the purpose of the study, data confidentiality, their right to participate, and the incentives provided. After data collection, a completeness check was conducted, including demographic information and scores on each scale, before proceeding to the statistical analysis stage.

Three scales were used in this study: a social support scale, a spiritual well-being scale, and a gratitude scale, which have been adapted and adjusted to the Indonesian context by previous researchers. Social support was measured using the Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS) by Zimet et al. (1988), consisting of 12 items covering support from family, friends, and significant others. Furthermore, spiritual well-being was measured using the Spiritual Well-Being Scale (SWBS) by Ellison et al. (1983), consisting of 20 items reflecting the dimensions of Religious Well-Being and Existential Well-Being. Gratitude was measured using the Islamic Gratitude Scale (IGS) developed by Rusdi et al. (2021), containing 10 items that measure extrinsic and intrinsic gratitude in an Islamic context. Reliability was tested using Cronbach's alpha (α), with a α greater than 0.70 indicating acceptable reliability. The results of the reliability test for each variable can be seen in Table 1. Validity was assessed by conducting confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) by examining the loading factor values in Table 2, which is a prerequisite for Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) analysis.

Table 1

Reliability of Measuring Instruments

Cronbach's alpha	Social Support	Spiritual Well-being	Gratitude
	0.868	0.867	0.882

Table 2.

Validity of Measuring Instruments

Variable	Loading Factor Range	Invalid Indicator	Information
Social Support (SS)	0.58 – 0.73	–	All indicators are valid
Spiritual Well-being (SWB)	-0.33 – 0.74	SWB13	SWB13 was removed due to negative values
Gratitude (GR)	0.63 – 0.73	–	All indicators are valid

The analysis stages include data prerequisite testing, measurement model analysis (Confirmatory Factor Analysis), and structural model analysis. Prerequisite testing includes checking for normality, outliers, and multicollinearity. Measurement model analysis assesses construct validity and reliability based on factor loadings ≥ 0.50 and goodness of fit indices (χ^2/df, CFI, TLI, RMSEA, SRMR). Structural analysis examines the direct and indirect effects between latent variables "and" reports standardized path coefficients (β), critical ratios (CR), and p-values.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) analysis using AMOS 26 was conducted to test the relationship between social support, spiritual well-being, and gratitude in 233 respondents as shown in Table 3. The model aims to examine that social support influences gratitude, both directly and indirectly through spiritual well-being as a mediator.

Table 3

Respondent Characteristics

Characteristics	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	61	27,3%
	Famale	162	72,6%
Age	18-19 Years	129	57,8%
	20-23 years old	93	41,7%
Length of Stay in Islamic Boarding School	< 1 Year	51	21,9%
	1-2 Years	90	38,6%
	>2 years	82	35,2%
Regional Origin	Java Island	150	64,4%
	Outside Java	83	35,6%

Most respondents were female (72.6%), while male students comprised 27.3% of the total sample. The majority were aged 18–19 years (57.8%), indicating that most participants were in the early stage of their university education. In terms of boarding experience, 38.6% of respondents had stayed in Islamic boarding schools for 1–2 years, followed by 35.2% who had stayed for more than two years, and 21.9% for less than one year, suggesting that most students had moderate to long-term exposure to pesantren life. Regarding regional background, 64.4% of the respondents came from Java Island, while 35.6% were from outside Java, reflecting a diverse but predominantly Javanese sample consistent with the concentration of Islamic boarding schools in Java.

The normality test results showed a multivariate critical ratio (CR) value of 43.395, indicating a mild deviation from multivariate normality. However, with a large sample size ($n > 200$), the Maximum Likelihood Estimation method remained robust against this violation. Several cases showed high Mahalanobis distance ($p < 0.001$), but no significant influence patterns were found in the estimation model. The correlation between constructs was below 0.90, indicating no presence of multicollinearity. Therefore, the data were deemed suitable for further analysis.

In the measurement model analysis stage, validity and reliability tests were conducted on the constructs of social support, spiritual well-being, and gratitude. The results of the Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) in Table 2 showed that most indicators have standardized loading factor values above 0.50, according to the criteria recommended by Hair et al. (2019). In the social support construct, the loading factor values range from 0.58 to 0.73, while for gratitude range from 0.63 to 0.73. This indicates that all indicators in these constructs are valid and contribute significantly to the measurement of each latent variable. As for the spiritual well-being construct, the loading factor values range from 0.33 to 0.74, with one indicator, SWB13, having a negative value, thus being considered invalid and removed from the measurement model.

Table 4

Goodness of fit

Model	χ^2	*P*	χ^2/df	GFI	AGFI	CFI	RMSEA
	12,033	0,150	1,504	0,97	0,94	0,99	0,048

The results of the goodness of fit test in Table 4 indicated that the model has a very good fit, as shown by the value of χ^2 = 12.033 with p = 0.150 which meets the criteria of p > 0.05 (the model is accepted), and the ratio of χ^2/df = 1.504 which is within the ideal limit ($\leq$ 3.00). The GFI index = 0.97 ($\geq$ 0.90 = good fit) and AGFI = 0.94 ($\geq$ 0.90 = good fit) indicated a strong structural fit, while the CFI value = 0.99 ($\geq$ 0.95 = excellent fit) confirms a very high model suitability. The RMSEA value = 0.048 is in the close fit category ($\leq$ 0.05), indicating a very small error in the model's approximation to the population. These cutoff criteria were based on the guidelines proposed by Hair et al., (2019). This analysis uses indicators at the aspect level, not items, because the previous item-based model produced an inadequate fit. The use of aspect indicators increases construct stability and reduces item-specific error, thus better representing the theoretical structure of the variables. Therefore, this modified model is deemed fit and suitable for use in testing the structural relationships between variables in this study.

Table 5

Structural Model Test Results

Path of Influence	Estimate (β)	C.R	p	Information
SWB $\leftarrow$ SS	0,314	4,802	0,001	Significant
GR $\leftarrow$ SWB	0,713	5,181	0,001	Significant
GR $\leftarrow$ SS	-0,010	-0,233	0,815	Not significant
SS $\rightarrow$ SWB $\rightarrow$ GR	0,224	-	0,001	Significant (Full Mediation)

The results in Table 5 showed the causal relationships between variables in the tested structural model. A value of 0.314 on the path between social support and spiritual well-being indicated a moderate and significant positive effect of social support on spiritual well-being. Furthermore, the path between spiritual well-being and gratitude has a value of 0.713, indicating a strong and significant positive effect. Additionally, the direct path between social support and gratitude has a value of -0.010, which is not significant. Meanwhile, the indirect effect of 0.244 indicated that spiritual well-being acts as a full mediator, where the influence of social support on gratitude occurs entirely through increased spiritual well-being. The Structural Model in Path Diagram Form showed in Figure 2.

Figure 2

Structural Model in Path Diagram Form
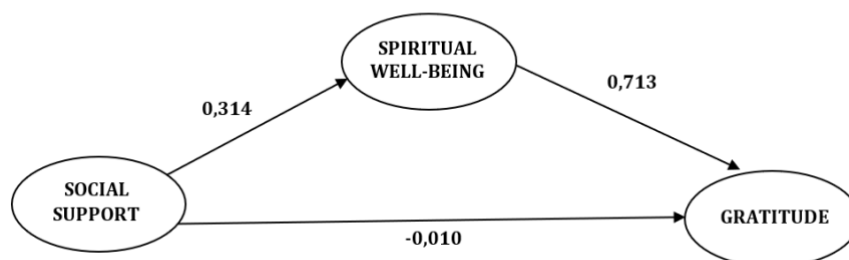
The results of the study indicated that social support has a positive and significant effect on spiritual well-being. This finding is consistent with Feng et al. (2024) and Li et al. (2022), who emphasized that warm and accepting social relationships strengthen spiritual well-being through increased meaning in life and emotional support. Ajoudani et al. (2019) also found that social support accelerates spiritual growth in trauma survivors by providing a new sense of meaning. Recent studies have also shown that social interactions within religious communities deepen spiritual well-being through collective worship and a sense of togetherness (Rochmawati & Laili, 2024). Conversely, Mudzkiyyah et al. (2022) reported that social ties without a religious dimension can decrease spiritual well-being. This analysis indicated that it is not only the quantity of support that is decisive, but also the quality of relationships rich in spiritual meaning and value. From an Islamic perspective, spiritual well-being is formed through the integration of hablum min an-nas, namely social relationships based on empathy and compassion, and hablum min Allah, namely vertical closeness with God (Mustika et al., 2024). This integration creates transcendental social support that strengthens an individual's spiritual well-being.

The next finding is that spiritual well-being has a strong influence on gratitude. This finding is consistent with research confirming that spirituality fosters positive emotions such as gratitude by increasing the meaning of life (Bali et al., 2022; Loi & Ng, 2021). Theoretically, Fredrickson, (2004) broaden-and-build theory explains that spiritual well-being expands an individual's cognitive capacity to interpret life experiences positively, thus giving rise to gratitude. From an Islamic perspective, spiritual well-being is not simply a state of inner calm, but rather a reflection of an awareness of monotheism and closeness to God, which fosters gratitude, patience, and acceptance of all destiny (Al-Jauziyah, 2005). Komarudin et al. (2022) also found that spirituality and gratitude play a significant role in increasing student happiness through self-acceptance. This analysis showed that spiritual well-being is not only an inner state but also a psychological mechanism that facilitates the formation of authentic gratitude.

Interestingly, the results of this study indicated that social support has no direct effect on gratitude. This finding differed from Western-based research (Anand et al., 2024; Zaelani et al., 2025), which stated that social support directly increases gratitude through interpersonal warmth, appreciation, and emotional validation. This difference can be explained from an Islamic perspective, where gratitude is understood as a vertical spiritual awareness that all blessings come exclusively from Allah SWT, rather than as an emotional response to kindness between humans (Rachmadi et al., 2019). Therefore, assistance from humans does not automatically elicit gratitude unless it is cognitively interpreted as part of Allah's blessings. This psychological mechanism suggests that Islamic boarding school students tend to view humans as intermediaries, rather than as the primary source of blessings (Chalmiers et al., 2023; Rachmadi et al., 2019). Therefore, gratitude only emerges when they engage in contemplation *(tafakkur)* and reflection *(taddabur)* on Allah SWT's blessings, a process of spiritual reflection that confirms that Allah is the sole giver of blessings (Hamdan, 2008). From a broaden-and-build perspective, social support can indeed function as a stress buffer (Cohen & Wills, 1985; Fredrickson, 2004), but in religious individuals, this effect is indirect because it must undergo internalization of spiritual meaning before it transforms into gratitude. Thus, gratitude in Islamic boarding school students is shaped more by divine awareness than by interpersonal support alone, in line with the concept of the Islamic Gratitude Scale (IGS), which emphasizes that gratitude is centered on God, not on humans (Rusdi et al., 2021).

The main findings of this study indicated that spiritual well-being acts as a full mediator in the relationship between social support and gratitude. This result indicated that social support does not directly produce positive emotions, but rather needs to be internalized through a spiritual meaning system. Based on the meaning-making model proposed by Park (2013), spirituality functions as a cognitive-affective system that helps individuals interpret social experiences within the framework of values and life goals, so external experiences in the form of social support are transformed into personal growth and positive emotions such as gratitude. Psychologically, this process confirms that spiritual well-being acts as a link connecting social experiences with positive emotional responses. Several studies supported this finding such as Joshanloo (2011) who found that spirituality significantly contributes to hedonic and eudaimonic well-being through the search for meaning in life, and Farrell (2004) showed that spiritual well-being mediates the relationship between social experiences and emotional well-being. In addition, research by Bali et al., (2022) and Sari et al., (2025) confirmed that spiritual well-being consistently acts as a mediator in the psychological processes that transform social support into positive emotional experiences and gratitude. Thus, the nature of full mediation suggests that without the involvement of spiritual meaning, social relationships are not strong enough to give rise to gratitude, because the process demands the integration of transcendental values that give direction, meaning, and emotional depth to human experience.

From an Islamic perspective, the full mediation between social support and gratitude through spiritual well-being can be explained through the concepts of tawhid and gratitude as the foundation of spiritual well-being. In the Islamic perspective, every form of support and kindness is a manifestation of Allah's mercy and will, not merely the result of human interaction. When individuals interpret social support as a divine blessing, they experience a process of self-transcendence that fosters spiritual awareness and a deep sense of gratitude (Rachmadi et al., 2019). Al-Ghazali, in Ihya' 'Ulum al-Din, emphasized that gratitude encompasses acknowledgment of the heart, verbal expression, and the use of blessings for good (Al-Ghazali, 2023), while Ibn al-Qayyim Al-Jauziyah, (2005) stated that spiritual well-being is the fruit of awareness of God's blessings and closeness to Him. When a person is spiritually prosperous, they more easily realize that every blessing comes from God, thus giving birth to a sincere and continuous sense of gratitude. Research by Ningsih et al., (2024) reinforces this view by explaining that a grateful personality in Islamic psychology is built through a balance between the heart, speech, and actions, grounded in spiritual awareness. Individuals who internalize this meaning are able to view life positively, appreciate even small blessings, and maintain emotional balance and social relationships.

The context of Islamic college students makes this finding unique because they live in a social environment rich with religious activity and that demands a balance between academic and spiritual obligations. In such conditions, social support not only provides a sense of security but also serves as a means of constructing religious meaning that strengthens spiritual well-being. The process of forming gratitude in Islamic college students occurs through interconnected cognitive, affective, and behavioral mechanisms. Cognitively, individuals interpret positive experiences as divine gifts, thus forming a mindset that places God as the source of life's meaning (Rachmadi et al., 2019). This interpretation stimulates the affective dimension in the form of positive emotions, inner peace, and spiritual closeness, which strengthen psychological well-being (Park, 2013; Wood et al., 2009). These positive emotions then give rise to a drive to express gratitude concretely through prosocial and religious behavior, as explained by Fredrickson, (2004) who argues that positive emotions build long-term adaptive resources. This is in line with the dispositional gratitude theory McCullough et al.,

(2002) and the findings of Emmons & McCullough (2003) that the affective experience of gratitude triggers altruistic and spiritual actions. From an Islamic perspective, a grateful personality develops from spiritual awareness that balances thoughts, feelings, and actions (Ningsih et al., 2024). Thus, the gratitude of Islamic college students represents a holistic psychospiritual mechanism, where social support is transformed into religious meaning, fostering positive emotions and sustained grateful behavior as a form of resilience and inner well-being.

This study has several limitations. First, the cross-sectional design limits the ability to draw causal conclusions (Schoemann et al., 2017), and the use of self-report questionnaires may introduce subjective perception bias (Podsakoff et al., 2016). Second, this study did not specify the type of Islamic boarding school where the respondents studied, even though the diversity of Islamic boarding schools in Indonesia, such as *salafiyah, khalafiyah*, and combination pesantren, can influence patterns of social interaction, religious practices, and emotional experiences, potentially influencing interpretation of findings (Meliani et al., 2022). Third, the unbalanced sample composition, with a predominance of female respondents (72.6%) compared to male respondents (27.3%), also limits generalizability, given the potential for gender differences in perceptions of social support, spiritual experiences, and expressions of gratitude (Rassoulian et al., 2021). Furthermore, the homogeneity of the respondents' context, all of whom were santri, limits the variation in cultural and institutional backgrounds that might influence the study variables. Therefore, further research is recommended to consider variations in Islamic boarding school types, include a more balanced gender proportion, and use a longitudinal design or mixed-method approach to obtain a more comprehensive and in-depth understanding (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018), including a phenomenological approach to explore students' subjective experiences in interpreting social support, spirituality, and gratitude (Daulay et al., 2022).

Overall, the results of this study confirmed that social support can only foster gratitude when mediated by spiritual well-being. This mechanism reflects a process of inner transformation in which social experiences are understood through the lens of spirituality. This finding is novel compared to previous research, which generally found that social support directly influences gratitude (Algoe & Stanton, 2012; Anand et al., 2024; Zaelani et al., 2025). In the context of Islamic boarding school students, this direct relationship did not emerge because expressions of gratitude are not solely triggered by social interactions but by religious meanings internalized through spiritual well-being. Thus, spiritual well-being serves as a foundation that transforms external social support into emotional and spiritual experiences that engender gratitude. This study provided a theoretical contribution to the development of a positive psychology model based on Islamic values and a practical foundation for student well-being interventions in religious educational settings.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrated that spiritual well-being fully mediates the relationship between social support and gratitude in Islamic boarding school students. This means that social support does not directly shape gratitude but rather requires a process of spiritual meaning-making rooted in monotheistic awareness and religious values. This finding confirmed that spiritual well-being is a transformative mechanism that converts social experiences into meaningful religious emotions. Theoretically, these results strengthened the integration of positive psychology theory, particularly the broaden-and-build theory, with the Islamic concept of gratitude as an act of worship, thus

broadening the framework of religious psychology and coping within the context of Islamic psychology.

Practically, the results of this study can serve as a basis for developing psychological interventions in religious educational settings. Programs such as Islamic gratitude journaling, spiritual reflection training, religious mentoring, and Islamic value-based counseling can help students internalize social support as a source of gratitude and inner well-being. Theoretically, this model opens opportunities to develop an integrative concept between positive psychology and Islam, placing spirituality at the core of positive emotion formation. Future research is recommended to consider variations in Islamic boarding school types, include a more balanced gender proportion, and use a longitudinal design or mixed-methods approach to gain a more comprehensive and in-depth understanding. Future research could also examine other variables such as emotion regulation, Islamic mindfulness, relationship quality with the kyai or ustadz, and perceptions of the meaning of life as factors which may influence the relationship between social support, spiritual well-being, and gratitude.

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