



The role of sincerity (*ikhlas*) in coping with depressive symptoms among student in schools: A narrative literature review

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ABSTRACT

Depression among school students is a mental health problem that affects the learning process, academic motivation, and psychological development of students. In the context of educational psychology, adaptive coping strategies are needed that are in harmony with the characteristics of student development as well as cultural and religious values. This study aims to examine the role of sincerity as a form of spiritual coping in dealing with symptoms of depression among students in the school environment and to explore its implications for the practice of educational psychology and school guidance and counseling services. The study uses a narrative literature review approach from scientific articles published between 2020 and 2025 and obtained from accredited academic databases. A total of 12 articles discussing student mental health, academic stress, religious coping and educational psychology were analyzed thematically and narratively. The results of the literature review show a consistent pattern of findings that suggest that sincerity, as well as related concepts such as acceptance and *tawakal* (trust in God), are often associated with students' ability to cope with academic stress, manage negative emotions, and maintain psychological well-being. The literature reviewed also shows that the value of sincerity helps students interpret academic stress more adaptively and supports emotional stability. Conceptually, sincerity is in line with the principle of acceptance in modern psychology and can be positioned as a potential supporting factor in the psychological development of students in school. These findings emphasize the importance of integrating the value of sincerity into religious education, character education, and Islamic educational psychology-based school guidance and counseling services to support students' psychological well-being holistically and contextually.



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INTRODUCTION

Depression is a mental health problem with a high global prevalence and is recorded as one of the leading causes of disability according to the World Health Organization (WHO, 2023). In the educational context, depression does not only occur in adult populations but is increasingly found among students in school environments, both at the secondary education level and in early higher education. This condition is generally characterized by prolonged feelings of sadness, decreased interest and learning motivation, and disturbances in cognitive and social functioning that may hinder students' academic and psychosocial development (American Psychiatric Association, 2022). Several studies

indicate that the prevalence of depression among school-aged adolescents is relatively high and has a significant impact on academic achievement and students' psychological well-being (Gururajan et al., 2023). Increasing academic pressure, social demands, and adolescent developmental dynamics place students in a vulnerable position for experiencing depressive disorders, thus requiring a deeper understanding of protective factors and adaptive coping strategies within the educational context.

Along with the development of studies in educational psychology, attention to the role of spirituality and religiosity in supporting students' mental health has increased. In the context of Islamic education, one spiritual value that holds important relevance is sincerity (*ikhlas*), which is not only understood as a religious concept but also as a psychological resource in dealing with emotional pressure and academic stress (Koenig, 2022). Various studies show that religiosity and spirituality are positively correlated with students' and university students' psychological well-being, particularly in facing complex academic and social demands (Supriatna & Septian, 2021).

Etymologically, *ikhlas* is interpreted as the purity of intention in performing an action without expecting worldly rewards. From a psychological perspective, sincerity can be understood as an individual's ability to fully accept the conditions they face without excessive resistance or denial (Al-Ghazali, 11th century; Rahmania, 2021). In the context of Muslim students, Islamic teachings provide a distinctive value framework for interpreting suffering, life trials, and emotional regulation. Research conducted among students in Islamic-based schools shows a relationship between levels of spirituality and the incidence of depression, where students with higher spirituality tend to experience lower levels of depression (Sulistiyowati et al., 2022). Sincerity plays a role in helping students accept academic failure, social conflict, and personal pressure with openness and emotional spaciousness. This value is not only related to worship practices but also shapes students' perspectives on life experiences, thereby reducing tendencies toward self-blame, increasing optimism, and fostering hope in Allah's help. Therefore, sincerity has strong relevance in character education and mental health development efforts in school environments.

From an Islamic perspective, sincerity is viewed as a spiritual foundation that strengthens individuals' psychological resilience, including students, in facing mental pressure and depressive symptoms (Suhail & Ahmad, 2023). Islam also emphasizes the importance of *tawakal* after making optimal efforts, which contributes to inner peace and emotional stability (Aycan, 2024). Research findings indicate that individuals who internalize the value of sincerity tend to have lower stress levels and more adaptive coping strategies, which are highly needed by students in dealing with academic and social demands in school settings (Nasir et al., 2022).

Studies in the psychology of religion and spirituality also reveal that sincerity contributes to increased psychological well-being, reduced anxiety levels, and enhanced mental resilience against stress. In the educational context, sincerity can help students manage negative emotions, accept personal limitations, and build psychological resilience that supports learning success. Islamic psychotherapy approaches even place sincerity as one of the core principles in helping individuals achieve better mental health through acceptance of life realities.

On the other hand, modern psychology has begun to acknowledge the importance of integrating spiritual and religious values as part of mental well-being, including in educational contexts. Positive psychology views sincerity and acceptance as character strengths that help individuals cope with psychological suffering (Seligman, 2018). The concept of sincerity in Islam aligns with the principles of mindfulness and acceptance in contemporary cognitive-behavioral therapy approaches, which emphasize acceptance of experiences that cannot be changed (Hayes, 2021). This opens opportunities for integrating the value of sincerity into educational psychology approaches and school guidance and counseling services.

Based on the above discussion, this study aims to comprehensively examine the role of sincerity as a coping strategy in dealing with depressive symptoms among students in school environments through a narrative literature review. Specifically, this study seeks to examine the relationship between sincerity and students' mental health, identify the psychological mechanisms of sincerity in reducing depressive symptoms, and explore the relevance of integrating sincerity into educational psychology approaches and mental health services in schools. The results of this review are expected to contribute theoretically to the development of Islamic educational psychology and serve as an empirical foundation for spiritually based guidance and counseling practices aimed at improving students' psychological well-being (Farhan & Shobahiya, 2024).

METHODS

This study employed a narrative literature review approach to examine the role of sincerity (*ikhlas*) in coping with depressive symptoms among students in school environments by integrating conventional psychological perspectives and Islamic approaches. A narrative review was chosen because it allows for an in-depth analysis of diverse scientific sources and thematic exploration that is conceptual and interpretative in nature. The main focus of this review was to explore how the concept of sincerity, which in Islamic tradition is understood as wholehearted sincerity in accepting and entrusting all matters to Allah, can function as a psychological mechanism in responding to mental pressure, particularly depression, within educational and student developmental contexts. Meanwhile, from a conventional psychological perspective, the review focused on literature discussing acceptance, meaning-making, and coping and emotion regulation strategies relevant to depressive symptoms among students.

Literature was collected from accredited academic databases such as Google Scholar. The keywords used in the search included “*ikhlas*,” “sincerity,” “depression,” “religious coping,” “Islamic psychology,” “mental health in Islam,” “student,” “adolescent,” “school,” and “educational psychology.” The selected literature was limited to articles published between 2018 and 2025 to ensure data currency. Inclusion criteria consisted of articles discussing the relationship between sincerity or similar concepts and mental health conditions, particularly among students or school-age populations, and having strong conceptual foundations or empirical data from general psychology, educational psychology, or Islamic perspectives. Popular non-academic literature, thematically irrelevant articles, and sources that did not undergo peer review were excluded from the analysis.

The analysis process was conducted thematically and narratively. The first stage involved open coding to identify major themes emerging from the literature, such as the function of sincerity in reducing negative emotions, the relationship between faith and students’ psychological stability, and comparisons between religious coping and secular coping. This was followed by categorization and conceptual integration from both psychological theories (e.g., meaning-making theory, emotional regulation, spiritual well-being) and Islamic concepts such as *tawakal*, *rida*, and *sabr*. Interpretation and synthesis were carried out using an interpretative approach while considering the epistemological context of each source. To ensure analytical rigor, source triangulation and cross-checking of relevant scientific publications were conducted. As this study did not involve direct participants, ethical considerations focused on academic integrity in writing, citation practices, and the responsible presentation of theological information.

RESULTS

Based on the literature search and selection process conducted through accredited academic databases such as Google Scholar and national journals, 12 scientific articles met the inclusion criteria. These articles were published between 2020 and 2025 and specifically examined students’ mental health in school settings, particularly in relation to academic stress, psychosocial pressure, and coping strategies used by students. Most of the articles emphasized the role of religious and spiritual coping strategies such as prayer, acceptance, *tawakal*, and meaning-making, which are conceptually closely related to the value of sincerity in Islamic psychology and educational psychology.

Table 1. Characteristics of the Analyzed Articles

No	Author(s) & Year	Research Objective	Method	Findings
1	Muhamad Akip, Muhammad Yunus, dan Sujarwo Sujarwo (2025)	This study aims to examine the role of Islamic religious education in fostering emotional resilience and mental health in students at school. The primary focus of the	The research employed a literature review method, reviewing various scientific journals and academic books on Islamic religious education, mental	The study results show that Islamic Religious Education contributes significantly to strengthening students' emotional resilience. Values such as sincerity, patience, and

		<p>study is how Islamic religious values taught in schools can serve as a source of psychological strength in helping students cope with academic stress and emotional distress.</p>	<p>health, and educational psychology. The analysis was conducted thematically to identify the relationship between spiritual values and students' emotional resilience.</p>	<p>trust in God help students cope with academic pressure more adaptively, reduce stress, and improve emotional balance and psychological well-being.</p>
2	Utami Nurfadilah, Munawar Rahmat, dan Cucu Surahman (2025)	<p>This study aims to analyze the forms of spiritual coping used by students in dealing with academic stress in an Islamic educational environment and to examine their contribution to students' psychological well-being.</p>	<p>The study used a qualitative approach with in-depth interviews and observations of students at an Islamic-based school. Data were analyzed using thematic analysis techniques to identify spiritual coping patterns.</p>	<p>The research results show that students use various forms of spiritual coping, such as prayer, dhikr (remembrance of God), acceptance of fate, and sincerity when dealing with academic pressure. These strategies help students reduce anxiety, increase emotional calm, and strengthen self-confidence and psychological resilience during the learning process.</p>
3	Maroof Ahmed, Iin Afriyanti Umar, Rahayu Azkiya, dan Salsabila Abdul Ghofur (2023)	<p>This study aims to identify coping strategies used by Islamic boarding school students in dealing with academic, social, and emotional pressure.</p>	<p>The study used a quantitative approach with a survey design. The research instrument measured religious coping, emotional coping, and problem-focused coping in boarding school students.</p>	<p>Findings indicate that religious coping plays a significant role in reducing stress and improving students' psychological well-being. Students who actively use religious coping demonstrate better emotional regulation skills and lower stress levels than those who rely on non-religious coping.</p>
4	Hanum Aprilianingrum, Dhikrul Hakim, dan Anna Qomariana (2025)	<p>This study aims to analyze the relationship between stress coping strategies and learning motivation of junior high school (SMP) students.</p>	<p>The study used a quantitative approach with a correlational design. Data were collected through stress coping and learning motivation questionnaires, then analyzed using correlation statistical tests.</p>	<p>The research results show that adaptive stress coping strategies are positively related to students' learning motivation. Students who are able to manage stress well demonstrate higher learning persistence, better academic engagement,</p>

				and more stable emotional states.
5	Dalilah Rafiq El Imamah, Erdi Istiadiji, dan Erwin Nur Rif'ah (2025)	This study aims to describe the forms of stress coping used by Islamic boarding school students in facing academic demands and boarding life.	The research uses a descriptive qualitative approach with in-depth interview and observation techniques.	Findings show that Islamic boarding school students frequently use religious coping strategies such as prayer, trust in God, and sincerity when dealing with stress. These coping strategies help students accept their situation more calmly, reduce emotional stress, and increase psychological resilience.
6	Indah Fitri Sri Wulandari & Arih Merdekasari (2023)	This study aims to examine the role of strategic religious coping in helping high school students manage academic stress and understand how religious values contribute to emotional stability and psychological well-being of students in the school environment.	The study used a qualitative approach with interviews and observations of high school students. Data analysis was conducted thematically to identify the forms of religious coping used by students in dealing with academic stress.	The research results show that strategic religious coping plays a role in reducing students' stress levels through acceptance of academic conditions. The values of sincerity and trust in God help students reduce anxiety, maintain learning motivation, and develop adaptive attitudes toward school pressures.
7	Della Tri Damayanti & Alviyatun Masitoh (2020)	This study aims to analyze the coping strategies used by school students in dealing with psychological stress during the pandemic and their impact on students' emotional conditions and adjustment.	The research used a descriptive qualitative approach, with data collection techniques including interviews and documentation studies. The subjects were high school students who experienced significant changes in their learning process.	Research results show that students who develop adaptive coping, including religious coping, are better able to manage stress and anxiety. Acceptance of the situation and a sincere attitude help students maintain emotional balance during times of crisis.
8	Anisah Tryuliasari, Ni'matzahroh, dan Zainul Anwar (2025)	This study aims to analyze the stress management strategies used by modern Islamic boarding school students and the role of religious values in maintaining	The study used a qualitative approach using in-depth interviews with Islamic boarding school students. Data were analyzed thematically to	Research results show that religious values such as sincerity, patience, and trust in God help students manage academic and social stress. These strategies contribute to

		students' mental health.	identify dominant forms of stress coping.	emotional calm and increased psychological resilience.
9	Nisrina Mirandewi & Dudy Imanuddin Effendi (2025)	This study aims to analyze the role of stress coping guidance in helping high school students overcome psychological stress, especially those related to academic procrastination and learning stress in the school environment.	The research used a qualitative approach with a field study method. Data were collected through interviews and observations of eleventh-grade students experiencing academic stress, then analyzed descriptively and thematically.	The research results show that applying stress coping through guidance helps students understand the sources of academic stress and develop an attitude of acceptance toward learning demands. Students who are able to accept academic situations more willingly show reduced anxiety, improved emotional management, and reduced procrastination.
10	Ayudya Nur Khairunnisa, Artiani Puspita Arwan, dan Daud Effendi AM (2023)	This study aims to examine academic stress management strategies in school students and the role of psychological and religious support in helping students adapt to learning demands.	The research uses a descriptive qualitative approach with data collection techniques in the form of in-depth interviews and documentation studies of high school students.	The research results show that students use various coping strategies, both emotional and religious, to manage academic stress. Acceptance of learning conditions and instilling the value of sincerity help students reduce emotional stress, increase inner peace, and maintain motivation to learn at school.
11	Miftahul Ikhsan, Abdullah Sinring, dan Nur Fadhilah Umar (2024)	This study aims to analyze the forms of stress coping used by school students in dealing with academic pressure and their impact on students' mental health and adjustment.	The study used a qualitative approach, using interviews and observations of high school students. Data were analyzed thematically to identify dominant coping patterns.	Research results show that religious coping, such as acceptance, prayer, and sincerity, plays a role in helping students manage stress and anxiety. Students who internalize the value of sincerity tend to have greater emotional resilience and are able to cope more adaptively with school pressures.
12	Mutiara Harahap & Saiful Akhyar Lubis (2024)	This study aims to examine the effectiveness of implementing individual counseling	This research used a qualitative approach with a case study design. Subjects were school students	Research results show that individual counseling is effective in helping students understand the sources

in helping school students reduce academic stress levels and improve psychological well-being.	experiencing academic stress. Data were collected through counseling interviews and observations of student behavior.	of stress and develop more adaptive coping strategies. The counseling process encourages students to accept learning situations more calmly, reduces emotional distress, and improves their emotional regulation and adjustment in school.
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Based on the analysis of the twelve reviewed articles, a consistent pattern of findings emerged indicating that sincerity (*ikhlas*) plays a significant role as a coping strategy in dealing with academic stress and psychological pressure among students. All studies demonstrated that religious and spiritual coping, particularly those emphasizing acceptance, *tawakal* (trust in God), and sincerity, contributed to reductions in stress and anxiety, as well as improvements in psychological well-being and emotional resilience.

The literature further indicates that sincerity functions as a psychological mechanism that helps students accept academic realities more adaptively, reduces tendencies toward self-blame, and enhances emotional regulation. In the context of Islamic education and pesantren, sincerity serves not only as a religious value but also as a psychological resource that supports emotional stability and mental resilience among students.

Even within general school counseling and guidance contexts, acceptance and sincerity were shown to assist students in managing academic stress and maladaptive behaviors such as academic procrastination. Thus, the findings of this analysis address the research objective by demonstrating that sincerity is a relevant and effective coping strategy for dealing with depressive symptoms and stress among students in school environments. These findings underscore the importance of integrating the value of sincerity into educational psychology approaches, guidance and counseling services, and spiritually based character education to support students' mental health in a holistic manner.

DISCUSSION

The analysis of the twelve reviewed articles reveals a consistent pattern regarding the role of sincerity as a coping strategy in addressing psychological pressure among students, particularly academic stress and tendencies toward depressive symptoms. All reviewed literature positions sincerity either explicitly or through related concepts such as acceptance, *tawakal*, and self-surrender as an adaptive mechanism that helps students respond more healthily to learning demands and social pressures. These findings confirm that sincerity functions not only as a religious value but also as a psychological resource contributing to students' mental health in school settings.

Specifically, the findings indicate that students who internalize sincerity tend to accept stressful academic conditions without excessive emotional reactions, such as intense anxiety or hopelessness. Several reviewed studies report that acceptance of learning realities, academic failure, and personal limitations plays a role in reducing stress and maintaining emotional stability (Akip et al., 2025; Nurfadilah et al., 2025; El Imamah et al., 2025). This pattern aligns with earlier analyses showing that religious coping based on sincerity helps students manage psychological pressure adaptively and prevents the escalation of stress into depressive symptoms.

Another prominent finding concerns the contribution of sincerity to emotional regulation and emotional resilience. Several studies indicate that students who employ religious coping, including sincerity and *tawakal*, demonstrate better emotional regulation and lower stress levels compared to students relying on non-religious coping strategies (Ahmed et al., 2023; Ikhsan et al., 2024). In this context, sincerity functions as a psychological mechanism that reduces self-blame tendencies, fosters acceptance, and maintains emotional balance when facing prolonged academic pressure.

The review also indicates that sincerity indirectly contributes to psychological aspects related to depression risk, such as learning motivation, academic procrastination, and self-adjustment. Studies

show that students who accept academic demands with greater sincerity exhibit more stable academic motivation, higher learning engagement, and lower tendencies toward maladaptive behaviors (Aprilianingrum et al., 2025; Mirandewi & Effendi, 2025; Khairunnisa et al., 2023). This suggests that sincerity not only alleviates negative emotions but also supports students' adaptive functioning in daily academic contexts.

In Islamic education and pesantren settings, sincerity emerges as a central value shaping how students interpret life pressures and learning demands. The findings indicate that internalizing sincerity, patience, and *tawakal* helps students face academic and social stress calmly and enhances psychological resilience (Triyuliasari et al., 2025; Damayanti & Masitoh, 2020). These results reinforce evidence that spiritual dimensions serve as protective factors against mental health problems among school-aged students.

Furthermore, the findings highlight the relevance of integrating sincerity into school guidance and counseling services. Studies on stress coping guidance and individual counseling show that approaches emphasizing self-acceptance and understanding stress sources help students reduce anxiety, improve emotional regulation, and enhance academic adjustment (Harahap & Lubis, 2024; Mirandewi & Effendi, 2025). This demonstrates that sincerity can be contextually adapted into educational psychology practices and school mental health services, particularly for Muslim student populations.

Overall, the discussion confirms that the research findings support the study's objectives by demonstrating that sincerity is a relevant and effective coping strategy for addressing depressive symptoms and psychological pressure among students. Sincerity functions as an acceptance-based mechanism that helps students manage academic stress, maintain emotional stability, and strengthen psychological resilience. Integrating sincerity into religious education, guidance and counseling services, and school mental health promotion programs offers a holistic and evidence-based approach to supporting students' psychological well-being.

CONCLUSION

Based on this narrative literature review, sincerity (*ikhlas*) plays an important role as a spiritual coping strategy in helping students cope with depressive symptoms in school environments. Sincerity contributes to emotional calmness, anxiety reduction, strengthened psychological resilience, and improved emotional regulation and meaning-making among students. This value aligns with modern psychological principles of acceptance and adaptive coping, thus functioning not only within the spiritual domain but also within the psychological domain. Therefore, integrating the value of sincerity into character education, Islamic-based guidance and counseling services, and school mental health promotion programs is important to develop in a contextual and sustainable manner. Future research is encouraged to develop valid and reliable instruments for measuring sincerity to strengthen empirical findings, particularly through quantitative and mixed-method approaches, so that the application of sincerity in educational and counseling practices can be supported by a stronger scientific foundation.

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