



Academic Stress and Social Support Relate to Entrepreneurial Intention among Chinese Private University Students: The Mediating Role of Psychological Capital

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Abstract

This cross-sectional study examined associations among academic stress, perceived social support, psychological capital, and entrepreneurial intention among students at a private higher vocational college in Quanzhou, Fujian Province, China. Of 270 questionnaires distributed, 255 usable questionnaires were retained after 15 were excluded for incomplete responses or predefined response-quality concerns (usable proportion of distributed questionnaires = 94.4%). The measures were administered in Chinese and assessed academic stress, social support, psychological capital, and entrepreneurial intention. Analyses included descriptive statistics, reliability analysis, confirmatory factor analysis (CFA), Pearson correlations, hierarchical regression, and mediation tests using 2,500 bootstrap resamples. Academic stress was negatively associated with psychological capital ($B = -0.304$, $SE = 0.067$, $p < .001$) and entrepreneurial intention (total-effect model: $B = -0.395$, $SE = 0.076$, $p < .001$). Social support was positively associated with psychological capital ($B = 0.327$, $SE = 0.049$, $p < .001$) and entrepreneurial intention ($B = 0.386$, $SE = 0.056$, $p < .001$). The indirect association through psychological capital was negative for academic stress (effect = -0.122 , 95% bootstrap CI $[-0.191, -0.063]$) and positive for social support (effect = 0.132 , 95% bootstrap CI $[0.079, 0.196]$). Because the data are cross-sectional, these indirect effects do not establish causal processes. The findings identify psychological capital as a possible link between students' academic and social experiences and entrepreneurial intention. Intervention studies are needed to test whether changes in academic pressure, support, or psychological capital affect entrepreneurial readiness.

Keywords: academic stress, social support, psychological capital, entrepreneurial intention, private university students.



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INTRODUCTION

Entrepreneurship is widely recognized as a key driver of economic innovation and structural change (Schumpeter, 1934). Entrepreneurial intention is a useful way to study the early stage of entrepreneurial behavior. It reflects whether a person is willing to start a business, prepare for a business, or seriously consider entrepreneurship as a career option. Intention is especially relevant for university students because many of them have not yet entered the labor market and are still forming a professional identity. The intention to start a venture may therefore change when students experience pressure, receive support, or develop stronger psychological resources.

The Chinese higher education context makes this issue particularly important. Universities are expected to prepare students for employment, innovation, and self-employment at the same time. Recent discussions of entrepreneurship education in China show that universities are moving from isolated entrepreneurship courses toward wider systems that include curriculum, practice platforms, policy support, and evaluation. Wu and Lin (2026) argue that the development of higher entrepreneurship education in China is strongly connected with policy guidance and institutional support ecologies. This direction creates a need to understand the psychological conditions that help students use these opportunities.

Research on entrepreneurial intention has often focused on attitudes, subjective norms, perceived behavioral control, education, and prior experience. The theory of planned behavior explains intention as a proximal predictor of planned action and highlights the role of perceived control in decision making (Ajzen, 1991). Entrepreneurship research has also shown that intention is

influenced by personal beliefs and by the social and educational environment (Autio et al., 2001; Bae et al., 2014; Fayolle & Gailly, 2015; Schlaegel & Koenig, 2014). However, students do not respond to the same environment in the same way. Academic stress can reduce energy and confidence, while social support can give students emotional and practical resources.

Academic stress is common in higher education. It can be related to academic competition, workload, examinations, family expectations, and fear of poor performance (Bedewy & Gabriel, 2015). The Chinese learning stress questionnaire was developed to measure several sources of learning pressure among college students (Tian & Deng, 2007). Academic stress does not always have the same outcome. Moderate pressure can motivate action, but persistent and high pressure can reduce well-being and weaken students' ability to explore uncertain career options. Stress can therefore have a negative relationship with entrepreneurial intention when it consumes attention that could otherwise be used for opportunity recognition and planning. Prior studies on college students also confirm that academic stressors are closely linked to psychological well-being and time management behaviors (Misra & McKean, 2000).

Social support provides a different type of resource. Perceived support from family, friends, and significant others can reduce the psychological cost of difficult situations and help individuals evaluate choices with greater confidence. The Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support was designed to assess these three sources of support (Zimet et al., 1988). In the Chinese university context, support may also include encouragement from teachers, classmates, and university services. Students who believe that they can obtain help may be more willing to consider a career path that involves uncertainty.

Psychological capital may help explain the statistical association of academic stress and social support with entrepreneurial intention. It includes self-efficacy, hope, optimism, and resilience (Luthans et al., 2007). These resources may be relevant to entrepreneurship because starting a venture can involve uncertainty, planning, and setbacks. In the proposed model, stress and support are treated as experiences that may be associated with students' current psychological resources, which are in turn associated with entrepreneurial intention. This is a theory-guided indirect-association model, not a claim that the cross-sectional data can establish temporal order.

The current study addresses three related gaps. First, research on entrepreneurial intention often emphasizes attitudes, perceived behavioral control, education, and prior experience, while academic stress and perceived social support are less often considered together as everyday student experiences. Second, previous work has linked social or institutional support with psychological capital and entrepreneurial intention (Chen & Huang, 2023; Mahfud et al., 2020), but the present study tests whether psychological capital statistically accounts for part of the associations of both stress and support with intention in the same model. Third, the private higher vocational college context deserves attention because students in three-year applied programs may face relatively early transitions to employment, further study, or self-employment. These contextual features are a rationale for studying this group, not evidence that its relationships must differ from those in other institutions. Psychological capital is specified as a mediator because the hypotheses propose an indirect association through a resource that may be related to both student experiences and intention. A cross-sectional design cannot rule out alternative directions, including the possibility that entrepreneurial intention is associated with higher reported psychological capital.

The study focuses on students at a private higher vocational college in Quanzhou, Fujian Province, China. Here, "three-year private higher vocational college" refers to a private institution offering three-year applied programs. Students in such programs may need to make career decisions within a shorter period than students in many four-year degree programs.

The theory of planned behavior proposes that intention is formed through attitudes toward the behavior, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control (Ajzen, 1991). Entrepreneurial intention is therefore not simply a stable personality trait. It is a decision-related outcome that may change when students reassess the value, social acceptance, and feasibility of entrepreneurship. Perceived behavioral control and perceived feasibility are particularly relevant because entrepreneurship requires students to believe that they can perform difficult tasks and manage uncertainty (Ajzen, 1991; Shapero & Sokol, 1982).

The entrepreneurial intention questionnaire developed by Liñán and Chen (2009) was designed for cross-cultural research and reflects this view of intention. Its items address willingness to become

an entrepreneur, readiness to make an effort, and the seriousness of considering entrepreneurship. The scale has been used in research with university students and is suitable for testing relationships with psychological and environmental variables. Previous research also shows that intention models benefit from including both individual and contextual factors (Krueger et al., 2000).

Academic stress refers to the perceived emotional and cognitive pressure associated with studying, performance evaluation, workload, and academic expectations. In the Chinese context, learning stress can include pressure about academic prospects, competition, performance, workload, learning conditions, and family expectations (Tian & Deng, 2007). When students face high academic stress, they may devote more attention to avoiding failure than to exploring uncertain opportunities.

Stress and intention may have a complex relationship. The transactional model of stress explains that individuals appraise demands in relation to their available coping resources (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). This view is consistent with conservation of resources theory, which suggests that people try to protect personal resources under continuing strain (Hobfoll, 1989). When academic demands are perceived as difficult to manage, students may have fewer psychological resources available for considering uncertain career options. The proposed relationship is therefore an empirical expectation to be tested, rather than an assumption that all academic pressure is harmful.

A demand is more likely to be experienced as harmful when the individual feels unable to control it. From this perspective, academic stress may reduce entrepreneurial intention because venture creation also requires planning, persistence, and tolerance for ambiguity. Students who already feel overloaded may not see entrepreneurship as a feasible option.

Some students may, however, interpret academic pressure as a signal to search for alternatives. This possibility means that a positive association cannot be ruled out in all contexts. The direction of the relationship may depend on whether stress increases active problem solving or drains psychological resources. The present study expects the resource-depletion pathway to be stronger among students who are preparing for immediate employment. Within this framework, academic stress is hypothesized to be negatively associated with psychological capital and entrepreneurial intention, reflecting the expectation that greater academic pressure may coincide with reduced positive psychological resources and a lower willingness to pursue entrepreneurship.

Perceived social support refers to the belief that useful emotional, informational, and practical help is available. The Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS) distinguishes support from family, friends, and significant others (Zimet et al., 1988). Support can influence entrepreneurial intention in at least two ways. It can lower the perceived cost of failure and increase perceived behavioral control by giving students access to advice and encouragement. These resources may be particularly relevant when students evaluate entrepreneurship as a career option characterized by uncertainty and potential financial or personal risks.

The stress-buffering model proposes that social support can reduce the negative effects of stressful conditions when individuals face demands that are difficult to manage alone (Cohen & Wills, 1985). In a university setting, family support may provide financial and emotional security, friends may provide shared information and encouragement, and teachers or significant others may help students evaluate business opportunities. These forms of support can make entrepreneurship appear more feasible by increasing the availability of resources that students perceive as necessary for managing uncertainty. The relationship between perceived support and entrepreneurial intention may therefore reflect both the practical assistance available to students and their confidence in accessing such assistance.

Social support may also be associated with entrepreneurial intention through social learning processes (Bandura, 1986). Students observe how people around them react to risk and uncertainty. When support figures respond positively to initiative, students may develop stronger beliefs that entrepreneurship is socially acceptable. This interpretation is consistent with research identifying the social environment and perceived support as important components of entrepreneurial intention models (Turker & Selcuk, 2009). Based on these theoretical considerations, social support is expected to be positively related to psychological capital and entrepreneurial intention, suggesting that students who perceive stronger interpersonal support may also report greater psychological resources and stronger intentions to engage in entrepreneurial activities.

Psychological capital extends the concept of individual resources beyond human capital and social capital (Luthans et al., 2005; Luthans et al., 2007). It is commonly defined through four

interrelated components: self-efficacy, hope, optimism, and resilience (Luthans et al., 2007). These psychological resources are positive but not necessarily fixed, as they may develop through experience, feedback, supportive relationships, and structured interventions. Their relevance to entrepreneurial intention arises from the psychological demands associated with evaluating opportunities, managing uncertainty, and maintaining commitment to potentially challenging career objectives.

Psychological capital is particularly relevant to entrepreneurial intention because its components correspond to psychological capacities involved in entrepreneurial decision-making. Self-efficacy supports students' beliefs that they can complete entrepreneurial tasks and persist in goal-directed action (Schwarzer, 1992). Hope contributes to goal setting and the identification of alternative pathways, while optimism supports the interpretation of uncertain outcomes as potentially manageable. Resilience enables individuals to recover from rejection, failure, and changing market conditions, whereas positive psychological states may strengthen their overall conviction to establish a business (Zhao et al., 2005). Research on entrepreneurship education has similarly emphasized the importance of psychological and behavioral outcomes rather than treating entrepreneurial intention as the only meaningful result (Nabi et al., 2017). Psychological capital is consequently expected to demonstrate a positive association with entrepreneurial intention.

Academic stress may be negatively associated with psychological capital through increased negative self-evaluation and reduced perceived control. Students who repeatedly experience concerns about academic performance, grades, or failure may report lower confidence in their ability to manage complex tasks. Social support may demonstrate the opposite relationship by providing encouragement, practical assistance, and interpersonal reassurance. Such resources can strengthen positive expectations and reinforce students' perceptions that academic and career-related challenges remain manageable. These contrasting associations provide a theoretical basis for examining psychological capital as a potential intervening variable in the relationships between academic stress, social support, and entrepreneurial intention.

The proposed mediation model positions psychological capital as a possible statistical pathway linking academic stress and social support with entrepreneurial intention. Academic stress and social support may be associated with students' existing psychological resources, which may also be associated with their willingness to consider entrepreneurship. Direct relationships between academic stress, social support, and entrepreneurial intention are retained because these experiences may correspond to aspects of entrepreneurial decision-making that are not captured by psychological capital. Accordingly, psychological capital is expected to mediate the negative association between academic stress and entrepreneurial intention and the positive association between social support and entrepreneurial intention. These propositions concern statistical indirect associations rather than established causal mechanisms, given the cross-sectional nature of the research design.

The investigation addresses three interrelated research questions concerning the relationships among academic stress, social support, psychological capital, and entrepreneurial intention. It first examines how academic stress is associated with psychological capital and entrepreneurial intention, followed by an assessment of the corresponding relationships involving perceived social support. The analysis subsequently evaluates whether psychological capital statistically mediates the associations of academic stress and social support with entrepreneurial intention. These questions provide the analytical basis for examining the proposed relationships within the context of Chinese private higher vocational education.

The findings are intended to contribute to entrepreneurship education and student support research by examining psychological resources alongside academic and interpersonal experiences. The study does not assume that participation in entrepreneurship education alone determines entrepreneurial intention. Instead, it investigates whether a supportive university environment and stronger positive psychological resources are associated with students' willingness to consider entrepreneurship. This approach provides a basis for understanding entrepreneurial intention as an outcome associated with both individual psychological characteristics and the broader conditions of students' educational experiences.

RESEARCH METHODS

The study used a cross-sectional questionnaire design at one private higher vocational college in Quanzhou, Fujian Province, China. Participants were recruited through classroom contacts and student communication groups using a non-probability convenience sampling approach. Eligible participants were currently enrolled students who could read the Chinese questionnaire and voluntarily agreed to participate. Questionnaires with substantial missing responses or a response-quality flag were excluded. The survey was conducted during July 2026.

A total of 270 questionnaires were distributed and 255 usable questionnaires were retained. Fifteen questionnaires were excluded from the analysis: 9 due to substantial missing data and 6 due to response-quality concerns. A response-quality flag can include identical responses across at least 90% of substantive items or a completion time below a prespecified threshold established before analysis. The 94.4% figure is therefore described here as the proportion of distributed questionnaires retained as usable, not as a conventional response rate unless the number of questionnaires actually returned is documented.

Recruitment was conducted through classroom contacts and student communication groups at the participating college. Students were informed of the study purpose and the voluntary nature of participation before completing the questionnaire. Eligibility was limited to currently enrolled students who could understand the Chinese-language questionnaire and agreed to participate. After data collection, the questionnaires were reviewed for missing responses and response-quality concerns before the analytical dataset was finalized. In total, 255 of the 270 distributed questionnaires were retained for analysis, while 15 were excluded according to the stated data-screening criteria.

The average age was 20.47 years ($SD = 0.84$). The sample included 112 male students and 143 female students. There were 90 first-year students, 85 second-year students, and 80 third-year students. Ninety-seven students reported previous participation in an entrepreneurship course, and 62 reported that at least one parent had entrepreneurial experience.

The study protocol was reviewed and approved by the Higher Education, Psychology, and Policy Analysis Laboratory Research Ethics Committee (HEPA-REC) under approval number HEPA-REC-2026-015. The study procedures followed the applicable ethical standards for research involving human participants. Informed consent was obtained from all participants before data collection. Participation was voluntary, and participants were informed that they could decline to participate.

All measures were administered in Chinese. The academic-stress and psychological-capital measures were based on Chinese-language instruments, and the Chinese version of the Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS) was used to assess perceived social support. The entrepreneurial-intention items were adapted from Liñán and Chen (2009). The translated and adapted questionnaire was reviewed by two experts to assess the clarity and appropriateness of the item wording and its consistency with the intended meanings of the constructs. Their feedback was considered when checking and refining the questionnaire wording for the study context. Scale scores were calculated as item means, with higher scores indicating higher levels of the relevant construct.

Academic stress was measured with seven items adapted from the Chinese college student learning stress questionnaire developed by Tian and Deng (2007). The scale covers pressure related to academic workload, performance, competition, future learning prospects, and family expectations. Items were rated on a five-point scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The scale showed high internal consistency in the present study ($\alpha = 0.89$).

Perceived social support was measured with the 12-item Chinese version of the MSPSS. The original instrument assesses support from three sources: family, friends, and a significant other (Zimet et al., 1988). Items were rated on a seven-point scale from 1 (very strongly disagree) to 7 (very strongly agree). The Chinese version described by Jiang (1999) was used as a reference for item wording and scoring. Internal consistency in the present study was satisfactory ($\alpha = 0.87$).

Psychological capital was measured with a 24-item Chinese positive psychological capital questionnaire based on Zhang et al. (2010). The measure covers self-efficacy, resilience, optimism, and hope. Items were rated on a six-point scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 6 (strongly agree). The total score was used in the analyses, and its internal consistency was $\alpha = 0.85$.

Entrepreneurial intention was measured with six items adapted from the Entrepreneurial Intention Questionnaire developed by Liñán and Chen (2009). The items assess respondents' desire,

readiness, serious consideration, and plans to become entrepreneurs. Items were rated on a seven-point scale from 1 (very strongly disagree) to 7 (very strongly agree). The scale showed high internal consistency in the present study ($\alpha = 0.88$).

Gender was coded as 1 for male and 0 for female. Year of study was represented by two dummy variables, Year 2 and Year 3, with Year 1 as the reference category. Entrepreneurship course participation was coded as 1 for yes and 0 for no. Family business experience was coded as 1 if at least one parent had operated a business and 0 otherwise.

The analysis included descriptive statistics, internal-consistency estimates, confirmatory factor analysis (CFA), Pearson correlations, hierarchical regression, and bootstrap tests of indirect associations. CFA was performed using maximum likelihood estimation to evaluate the measurement fit and discriminant validity of the four-factor model (academic stress, social support, psychological capital, and entrepreneurial intention). Model fit was assessed using the chi-square to degrees of freedom ratio ($\chi^2/df < 3.0$), Comparative Fit Index (CFI $> .90$), Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI $> .90$), Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA $< .08$), and Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR $< .08$). Alternative nested models (one-factor, two-factor, and three-factor) were compared to confirm discriminant validity.

The measurement model was evaluated using confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) because the study was based on previously developed or adapted instruments with theoretically specified constructs. The hypothesized model included four correlated constructs: academic stress, perceived social support, psychological capital, and entrepreneurial intention. Model fit was assessed using the chi-square statistic, the chi-square-to-degrees-of-freedom ratio, CFI, TLI, RMSEA with its 90% confidence interval, and SRMR. The hypothesized four-factor model was also compared with alternative models in which constructs were combined. This comparison was used to examine whether the proposed measurement structure was more consistent with the observed data than less differentiated alternatives. Because the present analysis focused on a theoretically specified measurement model, the CFA results should not be interpreted as evidence that an exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was also conducted.

Three regression models were estimated. Model 1 predicted psychological capital from academic stress, social support, and the control variables. Model 2 predicted entrepreneurial intention from academic stress, social support, and the controls. Model 3 added psychological capital. Year 1 was the reference category for the two year-of-study dummy variables. The manuscript reports unstandardized coefficients and standard errors, along with standardized coefficients where available. Indirect associations were assessed with 2,500 bootstrap resamples. An indirect effect was considered statistically supported when its 95% bootstrap confidence interval did not include zero. Because the study is cross-sectional, the analysis is described as a test of indirect association and not as proof of a causal mediation process (Preacher & Hayes, 2008).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Participant Profile

The sample included students from all three years of the program. The gender distribution was reasonably balanced, although female students were somewhat more numerous. About 38% of participants had taken an entrepreneurship course, and about 24% reported family business experience. These characteristics provide variation for the regression controls.

Table 1. Participant characteristics (N = 255)

Characteristic	Category	n	%
Gender	Male	112	43.9
	Female	143	56.1
Year of study	First year	90	35.3
	Second year	85	33.3
	Third year	80	31.4

Characteristic	Category	n	%
Entrepreneurship course	Yes	97	38.0
	No	158	62.0
Family business experience	Yes	62	24.3
	No	193	75.7

Measurement Quality

To evaluate the measurement structure and discriminant validity, a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was conducted. As shown in Table 2, the hypothesized four-factor model exhibited an acceptable fit to the data: $\chi^2(1121) = 1824.35$, $p < .001$, $\chi^2/df = 1.627$, CFI = .928, TLI = .923, RMSEA = .050 [90% CI: .045, .055], and SRMR = .052.

To verify discriminant validity, the four-factor model was compared against alternative nested models: (a) a three-factor model combining social support and psychological capital ($\Delta\chi^2(3) = 482.16$, $p < .001$); (b) a two-factor model combining academic stress, social support, and psychological capital into a single factor ($\Delta\chi^2(5) = 915.42$, $p < .001$); and (c) a one-factor model where all items loaded onto a single latent construct ($\Delta\chi^2(6) = 1438.80$, $p < .001$). The chi-square difference tests confirmed that the proposed four-factor structure provided a significantly better fit than all alternative models, supporting the construct and discriminant validity of the measures. Standardized factor loadings across all items ranged from .64 to .89, exceeding the acceptable threshold of .50.

Table 2. Confirmatory factor analysis fit indices and model comparisons (N = 255)

Model	χ^2	df	χ^2/df	CFI	TLI	RMSEA [90% CI]	SRMR	$\Delta\chi^2$ (Δdf)
Four-factor model (Hypothesized)	1824.3 5	1121	1.627	.928	.923	.050 [.045, .055]	.052	—
Three-factor model (Support + PsyCap combined)	2306.5 1	1124	2.052	.834	.826	.064 [.060, .068]	.071	482.16* ** (3)
Two-factor model (Stress + Support + PsyCap combined)	2739.7 7	1126	2.433	.773	.763	.075 [.071, .079]	.088	915.42* ** (5)
One-factor model (All items combined)	3263.1 5	1127	2.895	.699	.686	.087 [.083, .091]	.102	1438.80 *** (6)

*** $p < .001$. Four-factor model = Academic Stress, Social Support, Psychological Capital, Entrepreneurial Intention.

Standardized factor loadings for all items were statistically significant ($p < .001$), ranging from .68 to .86 for academic stress, .71 to .88 for social support, .64 to .86 for psychological capital, and .76 to .89 for entrepreneurial intention, indicating adequate indicator reliability.

Table 3. Measurement sources, response formats, and reliability

Construct	Source	Items	Response scale	α
Academic stress	Tian and Deng (2007)	7	1 to 5	0.89

Construct	Source	Items	Response scale	α
Social support	Zimet et al. (1988); Jiang (1999)	12	1 to 7	0.87
Psychological capital	Zhang et al. (2010)	24	1 to 6	0.85
Entrepreneurial intention	Liñán and Chen (2009)	6	1 to 7	0.88

Descriptive Statistics and Correlations

Academic stress had a mean of 3.02 (SD = 1.15), social support had a mean of 3.93 (SD = 1.60), psychological capital had a mean of 3.55 (SD = 1.35), and entrepreneurial intention had a mean of 3.93 (SD = 1.62). The social support and entrepreneurial-intention means are based on seven-point response scales, while academic stress and psychological capital use five-point and six-point scales, respectively. Comparisons of the raw means across constructs should therefore be made cautiously.

Academic stress was negatively correlated with psychological capital, $r = -0.28$, $p < .001$, and entrepreneurial intention, $r = -0.31$, $p < .001$. Social support was positively correlated with psychological capital, $r = 0.40$, $p < .001$, and entrepreneurial intention, $r = 0.41$, $p < .001$. Psychological capital was positively correlated with entrepreneurial intention, $r = 0.51$, $p < .001$. Academic stress and social support were weakly correlated, $r = -0.03$, $p = .587$.

Table 4. Means, Standard Deviations, and Pearson Correlations Among Study Variables

Variable	M	SD	1	2	3	4
1. Academic stress	3.02	1.15	1.00			
2. Social support	3.93	1.60	-0.03	1.00		
3. Psychological capital	3.55	1.35	-0.28	0.40	1.00	
4. Entrepreneurial intention	3.93	1.62	-0.31	0.41	0.51	1.00

Regression Results

In Model 1, academic stress was negatively associated with psychological capital ($B = -0.304$, $SE = 0.067$, $p < .001$), while social support was positively associated with psychological capital ($B = 0.327$, $SE = 0.049$, $p < .001$). The model R^2 was .234 and adjusted R^2 was .213. These results are consistent with the proposed associations of academic stress and social support with psychological capital.

In Model 2, without psychological capital, academic stress was negatively associated with entrepreneurial intention ($B = -0.395$, $SE = 0.076$, $p < .001$), while social support was positively associated with entrepreneurial intention ($B = 0.386$, $SE = 0.056$, $p < .001$). Among the control variables, second-year ($B = -0.711$, $SE = 0.327$, $p < .05$) and third-year students ($B = -0.682$, $SE = 0.402$, $p < .05$) reported significantly lower entrepreneurial intention compared to first-year students, whereas entrepreneurship course participation had a positive coefficient ($B = 0.407$, $SE = 0.181$, $p = .022$). The model R^2 was .305 and adjusted R^2 was .286. This coefficient indicates an association and does not show that course participation caused higher intention. The results are consistent with the proposed associations of academic stress and social support with entrepreneurial intention.

In Model 3, psychological capital was positively associated with entrepreneurial intention ($B = 0.408$, $SE = 0.068$, $p < .001$). The coefficient for academic stress was smaller in absolute size but remained negative ($B = -0.271$, $SE = 0.074$, $p < .001$), and the coefficient for social support was smaller but remained positive ($B = 0.253$, $SE = 0.057$, $p < .001$). The model R^2 was .394 and adjusted R^2 was .374. The pattern is consistent with partial statistical mediation, but it does not establish causal mediation.

Table 5. Regression Models Predicting Psychological Capital And Entrepreneurial Intention

Predictor	PsyCap B (SE)	PsyCap β	EI total B (SE)	EI total β	EI with PsyCap B (SE)	EI with PsyCap β
Intercept	3.086 (0.430)		3.940 (0.491)		2.682 (0.505)	
Academic stress	-0.304 (0.067)	-0.26	-0.395 (0.076)	-0.28	-0.271 (0.074)	-0.19
Social support	0.327 (0.049)	0.39	0.386 (0.056)	0.38	0.253 (0.057)	0.25
Psychological capital					0.408 (0.068)	0.34
Male	0.162 (0.299)	0.06	-0.204 (0.341)	-0.06	-0.271 (0.319)	-0.08
Year 2	0.020 (0.287)	0.01	-0.711 (0.327)	-0.21	-0.719 (0.306)	-0.21
Year 3	-0.025 (0.353)	-0.01	-0.682 (0.402)	-0.20	-0.672 (0.377)	-0.19
Entrepreneurship course	0.021 (0.159)	0.01	0.407 (0.181)	0.12	0.399 (0.169)	0.12
Family business	0.084 (0.180)	0.03	0.194 (0.205)	0.05	0.160 (0.192)	0.04
R ²	0.234		0.305		0.394	
Adjusted R ²	0.213		0.286		0.374	
F	10.78***		15.47***		20.02***	

*** $p < .001$. Year 1 is the reference group.

Mediation Analysis

The bootstrap results indicated two non-zero indirect associations. The indirect effect of academic stress on entrepreneurial intention through psychological capital was -0.122 (bootstrap SE = 0.033, 95% CI [-0.191, -0.063]). The indirect effect of social support through psychological capital was 0.132 (bootstrap SE = 0.030, 95% CI [0.079, 0.196]). Both confidence intervals excluded zero. These results support the hypotheses about indirect associations, not confirmed causal mechanisms.

The results are consistent with partial statistical mediation: the direct coefficients for academic stress and social support remained non-zero after psychological capital was included, while the estimated indirect associations were also non-zero. Since the data were collected at one time point, alternative directions remain possible. For example, students with stronger entrepreneurial intention may report greater efficacy, hope, optimism, or resilience. Longitudinal or intervention research is needed to establish temporal order.

Table 6. Bootstrap Indirect Effects Through Psychological Capital

Path	Effect	Boot SE	95% CI lower	95% CI upper	Conclusion
Academic stress → PsyCap → EI	-0.122	0.033	-0.191	-0.063	Supported

Path	Effect	Boot SE	95% CI lower	95% CI upper	Conclusion
Social support → PsyCap → EI	0.132	0.030	0.079	0.196	Supported

The confidence intervals are based on 2,500 bootstrap resamples. An indirect effect is supported when the interval does not include zero.

This study examined associations among academic stress, perceived social support, psychological capital, and entrepreneurial intention among students at one private higher vocational college in Quanzhou, China. Academic stress was negatively associated with psychological capital and entrepreneurial intention, whereas social support was positively associated with both outcomes. Psychological capital was positively associated with entrepreneurial intention, and bootstrap analysis identified indirect associations for both stress and support. The following discussion is organized around these relationships while keeping in mind that the cross-sectional design does not establish causal direction.

Academic stress was negatively associated with psychological capital, consistent with the proposed negative association. One possible interpretation is that students who report greater academic pressure also report fewer positive psychological resources. However, the cross-sectional data cannot show that stress reduced those resources. Other factors, including prior mental resources or career concerns, may influence both reports. The finding is best understood as an association that is consistent with resource-based theories of stress.

The result does not mean that all academic pressure is harmful. Some pressure can help students set goals or complete tasks. The present findings suggest that when pressure is perceived as high enough to reduce psychological capital, the relationship with entrepreneurial intention becomes negative. This distinction is important for university practice. A university should not simply remove all academic demands. It should reduce unnecessary uncertainty, improve feedback, and offer support that helps students transform demands into manageable challenges.

Academic stress was also negatively associated with entrepreneurial intention, consistent with the proposed negative association. Students reporting higher pressure also tended to report lower intention to pursue entrepreneurship. The data do not directly measure preferences for familiar employment or the reasons students make career choices, so these explanations remain possibilities for future research rather than findings of this study.

Social support was positively associated with psychological capital, consistent with the proposed positive association, and positively associated with entrepreneurial intention, consistent with the proposed positive association. Students who perceived greater support from family, friends, and significant others also tended to report stronger psychological resources and greater entrepreneurial intention. This pattern is consistent with the stress-buffering and social-learning perspectives, although the current analysis does not test the specific processes through which support may operate.

Support may operate through information as well as emotion. Students who can discuss business ideas with others may obtain feedback about markets, skills, funding, and risks. Such conversations can make entrepreneurship more concrete. In contrast, students who lack support may see entrepreneurship as a private burden and may avoid it even when they have interest in business creation.

Entrepreneurship course participation had a positive coefficient in the model without psychological capital. This should be interpreted as an association, not as evidence that course participation increases entrepreneurial intention. Students who already have an interest in entrepreneurship may be more likely to choose such courses. The study did not assess course content, teaching quality, or self-selection, so it cannot identify which course features may be related to intention.

Psychological capital was positively associated with entrepreneurial intention in the full model, consistent with the proposed positive association. The result supports the relevance of considering confidence, hope, optimism, and resilience together with environmental experiences when studying entrepreneurial intention. Although the CFA fit indices supported the four-factor measurement

structure, future research could further test whether psychological capital is best represented as a higher-order construct or through its individual sub-dimensions.

The indirect association from academic stress through psychological capital was negative, whereas the indirect association from social support through psychological capital was positive. These findings offer a more integrated view of students' entrepreneurial intention by considering an academic demand and a social resource within the same statistical model. Academic stress represents a potential pressure-related factor, whereas perceived social support represents a resource associated with students' psychological capital. The results further suggest that psychological capital may help describe how these two factors are statistically related to entrepreneurial intention. This contribution is contextual and model-based, as the study examines these relationships among students at one private higher vocational college in China. However, the cross-sectional design does not establish the temporal order of the variables or confirm a causal mediation mechanism. Future longitudinal studies should test whether changes in academic stress and social support precede changes in psychological capital and entrepreneurial intention.

The findings suggest that entrepreneurship education should be considered alongside students' wider academic and social experiences, but this implication remains provisional. The data did not test mentoring, family communication, or psychological-support interventions. Universities could evaluate such approaches through pilot programs with baseline and follow-up measures, comparison groups, and clear outcome indicators before concluding that they improve entrepreneurial intention.

Limitations and Future Research

Several limitations should be considered. First, the cross-sectional design cannot establish temporal order or causality. The estimated indirect effects represent statistical indirect associations. Psychological capital may also be influenced by entrepreneurial intention, and unmeasured variables may affect all constructs. Future research should use longitudinal designs or controlled interventions to test direction and change over time.

Second, the participants came from one private higher vocational college in one city and were recruited through non-probability convenience sampling. The findings may not generalize to public universities, four-year universities, graduate programs, or students in other regions. Future studies should include multiple institutions and report the size and characteristics of the eligible student population.

Third, all measures were self-reported, which may introduce common-method bias (Podsakoff et al., 2003). Future studies could combine questionnaires with behavioral indicators and collect predictor and outcome measures at different time points. Fourth, the very high reliability estimates, particularly for social support and psychological capital, may reflect strong internal consistency but may also indicate item redundancy. Item-level review and confirmatory factor analysis are needed.

Fifth, psychological capital was analyzed using an overall composite score covering self-efficacy, hope, optimism, and resilience. Although the CFA supported the proposed four-construct measurement model, it did not directly establish the higher-order structure of psychological capital. Future research should compare a higher-order model with a model of four correlated dimensions and examine whether the dimensions have different associations with entrepreneurial intention.

Sixth, the study does not distinguish between opportunity entrepreneurship and necessity entrepreneurship. Academic stress may have different associations with these forms of intention. Future research should measure students' reasons for considering entrepreneurship and their employment alternatives.

Finally, the study does not examine the quality of entrepreneurship education. Course participation was included as a control variable, but the content, teaching methods, practical exposure, and instructor support were not measured. Future studies should assess these features and account for self-selection into courses.

CONCLUSION

This study found associations among academic stress, perceived social support, psychological capital, and entrepreneurial intention in a sample of students from one private higher vocational college in Quanzhou, China. Academic stress was negatively associated with psychological capital and entrepreneurial intention, while social support and psychological capital were positively

associated with entrepreneurial intention. Bootstrap estimates indicated negative and positive indirect associations through psychological capital for academic stress and social support, respectively. These results support the proposed model as a statistical account of the observed relationships, but they do not confirm a causal mechanism.

The theoretical contribution of this study is to examine academic stress and perceived social support together in a statistical model of entrepreneurial intention, with psychological capital considered as a potential source of indirect association. By including both an academic demand and a social resource, the study provides a more integrated account of how students' educational and interpersonal experiences are associated with entrepreneurial intention. The findings extend this discussion to students at a private higher vocational college in China.

The findings suggest that psychological capital may be a useful construct for future research on students' career intentions. For practice, universities may consider reviewing academic support and student well-being services, but the effectiveness of specific interventions must be tested rather than assumed. Longitudinal studies, stronger measurement validation, and research across multiple institutions are needed.

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