

GENDER-BASED DIFFERENCES IN ACADEMIC SUPPORT: HOW PEER AND TEACHER SUPPORT VARY AMONG STUDENTS

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Abstract

This study aims to identify gender-based differences in academic support, focusing on peer and teacher support variations among students. A mixed-methods approach was employed, with a dominant quantitative design complemented by qualitative insights. The research is descriptive-comparative. The primary data were collected from students of state Islamic senior high schools (MAN) in Riau Province, Indonesia, who constituted the study population. The sample consisted of 500 students distributed across four regional zones (north, west, south, and east), selected using a stratified random sampling technique to ensure balanced representation across geographical areas. Quantitative data were collected through a structured questionnaire adapted from validated scales measuring teacher and peer academic support. In contrast, qualitative data were obtained through structured interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs) with selected students. Quantitative data analysis involved independent samples t-tests and multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA), while qualitative data were analyzed using thematic analysis. The t-test results show no significant overall difference in academic support perceptions between male and female students. However, MANOVA revealed significant gender differences in teacher support, especially in communication and social interactions. Qualitative findings indicate that female students are more comfortable seeking help from teachers, while male students prefer peer collaboration. These results underscore the need for gender-responsive support strategies to enhance student engagement and academic outcomes.

Keywords

Academic Support, Gender Differences, Peer Support, Student Engagement, Teacher Support.



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INTRODUCTION

Academic support is a critical factor influencing student success across educational levels. This support generally stems from two primary sources: peer support and teacher support. Peer support includes collaborative learning, emotional encouragement, and the sharing of academic resources, while teacher support encompasses instructional guidance, motivation, mentoring, and personalized feedback. Both forms of support play a significant role in shaping students' engagement, self-efficacy, and academic achievement (Meng & Zhang, 2023). However, the way students perceive and utilize academic support is strongly influenced by gender. Traditional gender roles and societal expectations often shape communication styles, help-seeking behavior, and classroom interactions, resulting in differing experiences of academic support between male and female students (Davis-Bowman, 2021).

In Indonesian education, gender differences remain a persistent issue, particularly regarding student interactions with peers and teachers. Research has shown that female students excel in language and humanities subjects, while male students are more dominant in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) fields (Msambwa et al., 2024). These differences are not solely rooted in ability but are often shaped by gendered perceptions of intelligence, confidence, and classroom participation. Female students are more proactive in seeking teacher guidance, whereas male students rely on peer support or independent problem-solving. Additionally, teacher-student relationships may reinforce these patterns, as teachers tend to provide more emotional encouragement and structured feedback to female students, assuming greater independence from male students (Keijzer et al., 2021).

Several previous studies have examined the role of social support in academic achievement. (Agwu & Nmadu, 2023) found that teacher and peer support significantly enhance classroom participation and academic performance in Southeast Asia. (Banerjee & Halder, 2021) Using the self-determination theory, researchers concluded that feelings of relatedness with teachers and peers increase students' intrinsic motivation. (Wu et al., 2022) Reported that positive relationships with teachers and peers are linked to improved academic motivation and learning outcomes. (Shin & Chang, 2022) highlighted that different relational support profiles correlate with varying levels of academic engagement. Meanwhile, (Liang et al., 2023) noted that female students in Asia are more likely to seek direct teacher guidance compared to male students. However, most of these studies do not comprehensively analyze gender-based dynamics in academic support, particularly at the

secondary education level in Indonesia.

Despite their contributions, previous research has left several important gaps. First, many studies have focused broadly on academic achievement without exploring how gender shapes the type and perception of academic support received. Second, most gender-based research is situated in Western educational settings, which differ significantly from Indonesia regarding culture, pedagogy, and social norms. Third, Indonesian studies rarely explore students' lived experiences of academic support through qualitative lenses. Thus, there is a pressing need for a mixed-methods approach that not only measures the level of academic support but also examines how male and female students experience and respond to it. This study's novelty lies in its integrative approach. It combines quantitative data from surveys and qualitative insights from interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs) to map gender-based differences in academic support among students in state Islamic senior high schools (MAN) in Riau Province, Indonesia. By investigating not only how much support is received but also how students interpret and seek that support, this research contributes to the development of gender-responsive educational strategies and informs the formulation of more inclusive educational policies.

In Indonesia, although national education policies promote equality and inclusive learning environments, gender-based disparities continue to shape students' academic experiences, particularly in how they receive and utilize support from teachers and peers. These disparities often stem from deep-rooted cultural norms and socialization practices influencing help-seeking behaviors. For instance, female students are typically encouraged to communicate more openly and seek assistance, while male students are expected to be more independent and resilient in solving academic challenges (Keijzer et al., 2021; Liang et al., 2023). Such social expectations may hinder male students from accessing essential academic support, especially from teachers, and lead them to rely on informal peer networks.

This divergence in support-seeking behavior has significant implications for academic engagement. Female students who frequently interact with teachers may benefit from direct feedback, emotional support, and personalized guidance, which foster greater academic persistence. In contrast, male students may not receive equivalent feedback or encouragement due to their limited interaction with teachers and possible reluctance to seek help. While peer collaboration among male students may offer some academic advantages, it often lacks the structured and consistent guidance that teacher support can provide (Shin & Chang, 2022; Sulla et al., 2025).

Consequently, these patterns can reinforce gendered differences in learning strategies, academic motivation, and performance.

Furthermore, current educational research in Indonesia has not sufficiently examined how these gender-based differences manifest in secondary education settings, particularly within Islamic schools such as MAN (*Madrasah Aliyah Negeri*). While these institutions adhere to national curricula, they reflect distinctive social and cultural dynamics that may intensify or moderate gender norms. Previous studies have predominantly focused on urban school settings or generalized gender comparisons without analyzing the role of institutional type or geographic distribution (Putra & Siregar, 2023; Qureshi et al., 2023). As such, a need remains to explore how gender differences in academic support occur across various school contexts and regions, especially in provincial and religious school settings. Addressing this research gap is critical for developing equitable and effective academic support strategies. Understanding how gender influences students' access to, perception of, and response to academic support can help educators design targeted interventions. For example, enhancing teacher engagement strategies for male students while fostering collaborative peer learning for female students may bridge existing support gaps. Additionally, equipping teachers with training in gender-sensitive pedagogy can foster more inclusive classroom environments that cater to diverse learning needs (Guzzardo et al., 2021; Smith et al., 2020).

Therefore, the primary objective of this study is to investigate gender-based differences in the perception and reception of academic support from peers and teachers. Specifically, this study aims to: (1) analyze differences in male and female students' perceptions of peer and teacher support, and (2) explore students' experiences and strategies in accessing academic support based on gender. The findings are expected to serve as a foundation for designing more equitable and effective academic support mechanisms tailored to students' gender-specific needs. Therefore, this study is timely and essential in addressing theoretical and practical gaps in the literature. Combining quantitative and qualitative methods offers a comprehensive understanding of the gendered dimensions of academic support in Indonesia. Integrating survey data with student narratives provides deeper insights into what differences exist and why and how they influence student engagement. The findings are expected to contribute to the growing body of knowledge on gender in education and provide empirical evidence to support more inclusive and responsive policy development within Indonesia's secondary education system.

METHOD

This study employed a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative and qualitative methodologies. The quantitative approach was used to objectively measure students' perceptions of academic support from teachers and peers through questionnaires. In contrast, the qualitative approach provided an in-depth exploration of students' lived experiences through interviews and focus group discussions. The research design was descriptive-comparative, aiming to describe and compare the academic support perceived and experienced by male and female students (Rautanen et al., 2021; Stewart, 2024). The study was conducted at State Islamic Senior High Schools (Madrasah Aliyah Negeri/MAN) in Riau Province, Indonesia, which were classified into four geographical zones: northern, western, southern, and eastern. These schools were selected for their representation of secondary Islamic education in diverse geographic and cultural settings.

The study utilized two types of data: (1) Quantitative data, obtained from student responses to structured questionnaires measuring academic support from teachers and peers. (2) Qualitative data, obtained through transcribed interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs). Primary data sources included male and female MAN students across the four zones. Secondary data included school documentation and observations of academic interactions. The study population comprised all students enrolled in State Islamic Senior High Schools (MAN) in Riau Province. A total of 500 students participated in the study, proportionally distributed across the four zones: Northern zone: 115 students, Western zone: 165 students, Southern zone: 165 students, and Eastern zone: 55 students. Sampling was conducted using stratified random sampling, which involves random selection based on geographic strata and student population within each zone (Howell et al., 2020). This ensured representative and balanced samples from each region.

Data were collected through structured questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, and focus group discussions (FGDs). The structured questionnaire was adapted from the Teacher and Peer Social Support Scale (Rautanen et al., 2021) to measure students' perceptions of academic support from peers and teachers. This questionnaire was distributed online and completed independently by the participants. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with selected individuals to gain deeper insights into students' lived experiences. Each interview lasted approximately 30 to 45 minutes and aimed to explore students' narratives regarding the support they received. In addition to the interviews, FGDs were conducted in small groups of 5 to 7 students, encouraging open discussion about how they perceived and accessed academic support. All

interviews and FGD sessions were audio-recorded and transcribed for further analysis. Observations were also conducted during classroom interactions to complement and triangulate the data collected through self-reported instruments.

Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistical methods. Descriptive statistics were used to summarize the distribution and central tendencies of students' responses. To examine gender differences in overall academic support perceptions, an independent samples t-test was applied (Zhao et al., 2022). In addition, Multivariate Analysis of Variance (MANOVA) was used to identify significant differences in specific dimensions of teacher support, such as communication equity and student social interactions, across gender groups (Guo, 2024). For qualitative data, thematic analysis was employed to interpret recurring themes and patterns related to students' help-seeking behaviors, communication dynamics, and obstacles in accessing support. Transcripts from interviews and FGDs were coded and analyzed iteratively, allowing the researchers to construct meaningful categories based on gendered experiences. Triangulation was used by integrating observational data to enhance the trustworthiness and validity of the findings (Guzzardo et al., 2021).

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

The respondents' profiles are discussed based on the percentage of respondents by gender. Out of 500 respondents, 290 female students (58.0%) and 210 male students (42.0%). This shows that more female students were involved in this study than male students.

Peer Support Among Students

Descriptive statistics were used to examine secondary school students' peer profiles. One peer domain was studied to answer the research question regarding the peer support profile of state Islamic high school students, namely classmate support. The researcher collected data through a questionnaire to measure the variables studied. Table 1 shows the high peer domain among state Islamic high school students.

Table 1. Secondary School Peer Support Profile

Peer Domain	Score	Mean	SD	Interpretation
Classmate	77.26	3.863	0.742	High

The findings indicate that peer support from classmates is perceived as high among students, with a mean score of 3.863 (SD = 0.742). This suggests that students actively engage in academic collaboration and assistance within their peer groups, reinforcing the role of classmates as a primary source of support. The high level of peer support aligns with social learning theories, which emphasize that students often rely on their peers for knowledge exchange, emotional encouragement, and problem-solving in academic settings (Amerstorfer & Freiin von Münster-Kistner, 2021). Additionally, the relatively low standard deviation (0.742) suggests consistency in students' experiences of peer support, indicating that this form of academic assistance is widely accessible across different student groups. However, gender-based differences should be further analyzed to determine whether male and female students perceive and utilize peer support differently. This could inform strategies to enhance collaborative learning experiences for all students.

Teacher Support Among Students

To see teacher support among state Islamic high school students. Four domains of teacher support were studied to answer the research questions regarding state Islamic high school teacher support: equality in communication, social relationships between students, group work management, and support tools. The researcher collected data through a questionnaire to measure the variables studied. Based on this questionnaire, respondents assessed the domain. Table 2 shows that a profile of teacher support was studied at a very high level among state Islamic high school students.

Table 2. Profile of Secondary School Teacher Support

No	Teacher Support Domain	Score	Mean	SD	Interpretation
1.	Equality in Communication	84.74	4.237	0.705	High
2.	Social Relationships Between Students	52.74	2.637	1.239	Low
3.	Organizing Group Management Work	51.38	2.569	1.134	Low
4.	Instrumental Support	86.08	4.304	0.758	Very High
Average Mean			3.437		Medium

The results indicate variations in teacher support across different domains, highlighting strengths and areas for improvement in academic assistance provided by teachers. The highest-rated domain was "Instrumental Support" (Mean = 4.304, SD = 0.758, Very High), suggesting that students perceive teachers as effective in providing academic resources, guidance, and structured learning assistance. Similarly, "Equality in Communication" (Mean = 4.237, SD = 0.705, High) reflects positive

teacher-student interactions, where students feel that teachers communicate clearly and provide equal opportunities for academic engagement. However, "Social Relationships Between Students" (Mean = 2.637, SD = 1.239, Low) and "Organizing Group Management Work" (Mean = 2.569, SD = 1.134, Low) received significantly lower ratings, indicating that teachers may not be actively facilitating peer collaboration, teamwork, or social integration within the classroom. The overall average teacher support score (Mean = 3.437, Medium) suggests that while teachers provide strong academic support, they must enhance their role in fostering student relationships and collaborative learning environments. These findings also raise questions about gender differences in the perception of teacher support, as female students often report higher levels of teacher engagement. In contrast, male students may experience less interaction and guidance. Addressing these disparities through inclusive teaching strategies and structured peer collaboration initiatives could further enhance the effectiveness of teacher support across all student groups (Ní Bhroin & King, 2020).

T-Test Analysis

The T-test analysis was conducted to see the difference in peer support among male and female students. The results of the t-test analysis can be seen in Table 3 below.

Table 3. T-Test Differences in Peer Support According to Student Gender

Gender	Mean	t-test	Sig
Male	3.837	-0.662	0.504
Female	3.882		

The independent samples t-test results indicate no statistically significant difference in overall academic support perceptions between male and female students ($t = -0.662$, $p = 0.504$). Despite female students reporting a slightly higher mean score (3.882) compared to male students (3.837), the p-value exceeds the standard significance threshold ($p < 0.05$), suggesting that gender differences in overall academic support may not be substantial. This finding contrasts with previous studies that suggest female students typically receive or seek more teacher and peer support than males (Zhao et al., 2022). One possible explanation is that both genders experience relatively equal access to academic support structures. However, differences exist in specific peer and teacher support domains, such as emotional encouragement or instrumental assistance (Shin & Chang, 2022). Future studies should further investigate which aspects of academic support are more or less influential for male and female students, as well as the role of teacher expectations and peer group

dynamics in shaping these perceptions.

MANOVA Analysis

The significant differences in variances and covariances among the dependent variables for all levels of the independent variable of teacher support with Box's $M = 27.648$ and $Sig = 0.002$ ($p < 0.05$). This means that the variances of the dependent variable are homogeneous across the independent variables. Therefore, a MANOVA test can be conducted to see the differences in teacher support among secondary school students according to gender (Guo, 2024). Teacher support with Wilks' value = 0.963, $F(4.747) = 0.001$ ($p < 0.05$). This indicates that the hypothesis that there is no significant difference in teacher support based on the student's gender factor is rejected. The differences for each aspect of teacher support based on the student's gender factor were analyzed in more detail using MANOVA, as shown in Table 4 below.

Table 4. MANOVA Differences in Teacher Support According to Student Gender

Teacher Support	Gender	N	Mean	SD	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Communication Equivalence	Male	210	4.15	.775	2.544	1	2.544	5.159	.024
	Female	290	4.30	.644					
Student Social Relations	Male	210	2.88	1.268	21.129	1	21.129	14.129	.000
	Female	290	2.46	1.189					
Group Work Management	Male	210	2.64	1.208	1.850	1	1.850	1.439	.231
	Female	290	2.52	1.077					
Instrumental Support	Male	210	4.23	.831	1.748	1	1.748	3.052	.081
	Female	290	4.35	.698					

The Multivariate Analysis of Variance (MANOVA) results reveal significant gender-based differences in specific aspects of teacher support, particularly in communication equivalence and student-social relations. Female students reported a higher mean score (4.30) for communication equivalence compared to male students (4.15), with a statistically significant difference ($F = 5.159$, $p = 0.024$). This suggests that female students perceive greater fairness and accessibility in teacher communication than male students, possibly due to their greater willingness to engage in teacher interactions and seek academic guidance. Meanwhile, for student social relations, male students scored significantly higher (2.88) than female students (2.46), with a highly significant difference ($F = 14.129$, $p = 0.000$). This finding indicates that male students may experience stronger social connections among peers in academic settings, while female students might receive more direct

teacher guidance than peer-based collaboration. These differences could stem from gendered socialization patterns, where male students rely on peer networks for learning, whereas female students may have closer teacher-student relationships.

On the other hand, no significant gender differences were observed in group work management ($F = 1.439$, $p = 0.231$) and instrumental support ($F = 3.052$, $p = 0.081$), suggesting that both male and female students experience similar levels of teacher support in these areas. The lack of significant differences in group work management implies that both genders perceive teachers' ability to organize and manage group-based activities similarly, indicating a neutral approach to facilitating teamwork. Likewise, instrumental support, which refers to academic resources, structured guidance, and direct assistance from teachers, is perceived relatively equally among male and female students. These results suggest that while gender influences perceptions of teacher communication and peer interactions, the academic resources and structural support teachers provide remain consistent across genders (Wu et al., 2022). Future research should explore how these differences impact long-term academic engagement and success, and how teachers can balance support strategies to enhance equity in the classroom.

Experiences Student Support

The qualitative findings provide deeper insights into how male and female students perceive and experience peer and teacher support differently. Four key themes emerged through thematic analysis of the interview data: emotional support, communication with teachers, peer collaboration, and perceived academic challenges. Table 5 below summarizes:

Table 5. Thematic Analysis of Gender-Based Differences in Academic Support

Theme	Participant Quote	Gender	Interpretation
Emotional Support: Seeking Help	I feel more comfortable asking my teachers for help, especially when struggling with an assignment. They usually give detailed explanations, and I am supported.	F (G1)	Female students actively seek teacher guidance for academic struggles.
	Most of the time, I figure things out on my own first. If I ask for help, it is usually from a classmate rather than a teacher.	M (G2)	Male students prefer independence and rely on peers over teachers.
Communication with Teachers	My teachers are approachable and listen when I have a question. They expect girls to be more engaged in class.	F (G3)	Teachers may unconsciously encourage more interaction with female students.
	Sometimes, teachers assume that boys do not need as much guidance, so they do not check in with us as often.	M (G4)	Male students perceive teachers as less involved in their academic progress.

Peer Collaboration & Learning Strategies	I always study with my close friends. We help each other understand complex topics and remind each other of deadlines.	F (G5)	Female students form structured study groups for academic success.
	We help each other, but in a more casual way. Sometimes, we challenge each other to solve math problems instead of just explaining the answers.	M (G6)	Male students prefer competition-based peer interactions rather than structured collaboration.
Perceived Academic Challenges	I have to balance many responsibilities, and sometimes, I rely on my teacher's feedback and my friends to manage stress.	F (G7)	Female students depend on teacher feedback and peer support to handle academic pressure.
	I do not always feel motivated to ask for help, and this sometimes affects my grades.	M (G8)	Male students report lower motivation to seek academic support, which may impact their performance.

The thematic analysis suggests that female students are more likely to seek direct academic support from teachers, while male students rely on peer interactions and independent problem-solving. Female students benefit from structured study groups and emotional encouragement, whereas male students engage in competitive peer learning rather than collaborative discussion. Additionally, perceptions of teacher support differ by gender, with female students feeling more included in academic conversations, while male students perceive less engagement from teachers.

These findings highlight the need for gender-responsive educational strategies. Teachers should balance their support across genders, ensuring that male students receive proactive academic guidance while maintaining structured support for female students (Guzzardo et al., 2021). Schools should also encourage peer learning environments catering to different gender-based learning preferences, such as structured group discussions for female students and problem-solving challenges for male students. Addressing these differences can help create a more equitable academic support system that enhances student success for both genders.

Experiences Teacher Support

The qualitative findings from teacher interviews provide insights into how educators perceive and implement academic support differently for male and female students. The thematic analysis identifies key areas where teachers recognize gender-based variations in student engagement, support-seeking behavior, and academic challenges. Table 6 below summarizes:

Table 6. Thematic Analysis of Teachers' Perspectives on Gender-Based Academic Support Differences

Theme	Participant Quote	Teacher	Interpretation
Student Engagement & Participation	Female students tend to be more active in discussions. They ask questions and are willing to seek clarification, while male students are usually more reserved unless directly asked.	T1	Female students are more proactive in classroom engagement, while male students participate less unless prompted.
	Boys are usually more competitive. They work well in groups but often turn discussions into challenges rather than collaborative learning.	T2	Male students prefer competitive peer learning environments over structured discussions.
Help-Seeking Behavior	Girls are more likely to approach me after class if they do not understand something. Boys, on the other hand, usually try to figure it out themselves or ask their friends.	T3	Female students seek direct teacher assistance, while male students rely on peer support.
	I notice that male students sometimes hesitate to ask for help because they do not want to appear weak in front of their peers.	T4	Social expectations may discourage male students from openly seeking academic support.
Teacher-Student Interaction	I naturally give female students more feedback because they actively engage in lessons, while I have to encourage male students to participate more.	T5	Teachers may unconsciously provide more academic feedback to female students due to their higher engagement levels.
	When assigning group work, I mix genders because all-male groups lack structured discussion, while all-female groups are more collaborative but sometimes hesitant to take risks.	T6	Mixed-gender group assignments may balance strengths and weaknesses in learning styles.
Academic Challenges by Gender	Female students sometimes struggle with confidence, even when they perform well. They tend to doubt themselves and need encouragement.	T7	Female students may require more reassurance and motivation despite strong academic performance.
	Boys are often more distracted and less organized in their studies. They perform well in subjects they enjoy but struggle with consistency.	T8	Male students may benefit from structured academic guidance to improve focus and consistency.

The analysis of teacher responses suggests that male and female students exhibit different learning behaviors and support needs. Female students are more proactive in seeking teacher support, participating in discussions, and benefiting from structured feedback. In contrast, male students rely more on peer interactions, exhibit competitive learning tendencies, and hesitate to seek help directly from teachers. Additionally, teachers unintentionally provide more academic feedback to female students, reinforcing their engagement, while male students may require more

encouragement to participate in learning activities actively.

These findings highlight the importance of gender-sensitive teaching strategies. Teachers can balance classroom participation by using targeted questioning techniques to engage male students and ensure equal access to academic feedback (Aguillon et al., 2020). Additionally, educators should implement peer learning structures that combine collaboration with competition, catering to different gender-based learning styles. By addressing these differences, teachers can create a more inclusive academic support system that maximizes student engagement and learning outcomes for both male and female students.

Discussion

The findings of this study indicate that, overall, there is no statistically significant difference in the perception of academic support between male and female students. This aligns with the findings of (Bedrov & Gable, 2023), who reported that academic support within the school environment tends to be perceived as relatively balanced across genders in secondary education contexts. However, further MANOVA analysis revealed significant differences in specific dimensions of teacher support, particularly in communication equity and student social relations. This suggests that although male and female students may receive a similar overall amount of support, the quality and nature of that support differ significantly.

Regarding communication, female students tend to feel more heard and given more opportunities for dialogue by teachers, whereas male students often experience more limited or one-way interactions. This finding is consistent with (Fussy et al., 2023; Ryan & Deci, 2000; Yani et al., 2025), who noted that teachers are more likely to provide personalized feedback to female students, perceiving them as more open and expressive in articulating their learning needs. This highlights the presence of implicit bias in pedagogical practices that should be addressed through teacher training on gender-responsive instruction. If left unaddressed, this communication disparity may lead to long-term disengagement among male students.

The qualitative findings reinforce the quantitative results, revealing that female students feel more comfortable and proactive in seeking academic help from teachers. In contrast, male students avoid directly asking for help and prefer informal discussions with peers. This phenomenon is supported by Jaber & Al-Hroub (2023), who found that male students often perceive help-seeking from teachers as a sign of weakness, while female students view it as an expression of care for their academic growth. This difference reflects how social norms around masculinity and femininity

influence students' learning behavior. Peer support also revealed gender-based tendencies. Male students rely more on spontaneous group interactions and short discussions, while female students form more stable and deeper study groups. This aligns with (Košir & Lakshminarayanan, 2023), who noted that female students often build stronger affiliative social support systems than males, whose social bonds tend to be functional and temporary. These differences in support patterns suggest that collaborative learning strategies should be designed with consideration of each gender's social characteristics.

The findings of this study significantly contribute to a deeper understanding of how gender influences access to, perception of, and types of academic support received by students. This understanding becomes particularly relevant in Islamic education in Indonesia, where student-teacher relationships carry distinct religious and cultural nuances. (Butler et al., 2022) Argued that interpersonal relationships between students and educators are key in creating a safe and supportive learning environment, especially for socially vulnerable groups. Therefore, the results of this study underscore the need for more inclusive and gender-sensitive educational policies and practices. Teachers must be trained to recognize and respond to male and female students' differing academic support needs. In addition, developing structured peer tutoring programs could serve as an alternative strategy to bridge the gaps in academic support access. In the long term, such strategies can promote greater engagement and academic success for all students, regardless of gender.

The findings of this study also highlight the importance of considering sociocultural dimensions when analyzing academic support in Islamic schools (madrasah). As institutions that integrate national and religious education systems, madrasahs exhibit unique patterns of social interaction. Teacher-student relationships in these settings tend to be paternalistic and hierarchical (Aldhmour et al., 2022), influencing how students access and perceive academic support. In such structures, female students—who tend to adhere more to social norms and actively maintain interpersonal relationships with teachers—are more likely to receive attention and guidance from educators (Abdul-Rahaman et al., 2023). Conversely, male students, who often conceal their academic struggles and avoid expressing vulnerability (Anggraeni et al., 2025; Deci & Ryan, 2000), risk being overlooked both emotionally and academically.

In addition to gender, the study also shows that geographical factors influence students' perceptions and experiences of academic support. For example, students from the eastern zone, with the smallest number of participants, reported lower levels of perceived academic support. This

aligns with the findings of (Hoferichter et al., 2021), who noted that schools in peripheral or rural areas often struggle to provide quality teaching, learning resources, and adequate psychosocial support. This reinforces the argument by (Kristensen et al., 2023) that academic support must be context-sensitive and adapted to local educational realities rather than applied uniformly. From an educational psychology perspective, the gender differences in help-seeking strategies can be understood through Self-Determination Theory (Lei et al., 2018), which emphasizes the importance of fulfilling three basic psychological needs: autonomy, competence, and relatedness. When students feel supported by their social environment—whether by teachers or peers—their intrinsic motivation and learning engagement are likely to increase (Geven et al., 2017). In this study, female students demonstrated higher levels of relatedness with teachers, while male students showed stronger peer-based connectedness. These findings support (Lesperance et al., 2023), who argue that social relationship profiles significantly shape students' academic engagement styles.

The type of academic support received by male students tends to be informal, short-term, and less structured. In contrast, female students access more formal and organized support, such as teacher guidance, academic consultations, and direct assignment communication (Rautanen et al., 2021). This suggests that educational institutions must provide flexible and gender-sensitive learning environments. As (Dan et al., 2024) emphasized, warm and inclusive interpersonal relationships between teachers and students significantly enhance students' sense of belonging, particularly for those from culturally marginalized groups.

This study also reinforces the notion that gender-neutral pedagogical practices often fail to address the real needs of students in the classroom. Teachers without training in gender sensitivity tend to adopt one-size-fits-all approaches, overlooking the psychosocial factors that shape students' access to academic support (Careemdeen, 2023). Such practices create perceptions of academic unfairness and risk disengagement among male students who may feel emotionally isolated from their learning environment. Moreover, academic support should be reactive—provided only when students are visibly struggling—and proactive by creating safe spaces where students can express their learning needs without fear of judgment. Structured peer mentoring programs and collaborative learning forums can be effective tools for increasing male students' engagement without forcing them to display vulnerability (Lietaert et al., 2015). Meanwhile, fostering academic confidence and offering independent learning challenges for female students can help build a stronger sense of competence and autonomy.

Ultimately, this discussion underscores that disparities in academic support are not solely about quantity or frequency, but about the quality of interactions and how students perceive the support they receive. Therefore, strategies for strengthening academic support must be holistic, contextual, and tailored to the psychosocial needs of students. By doing so, madrasahs can function not only as centers for knowledge transmission but also as equitable, inclusive, and sustainable spaces for all learners.

CONCLUSION

This study examined gender-based differences in academic support from peers and teachers, highlighting key variations in how male and female students perceive and experience academic assistance. The findings indicate that female students generally receive higher peer and teacher support levels, particularly in communication and emotional encouragement. In contrast, male students rely more on peer interactions for social and academic engagement while reporting lower levels of direct teacher support. Results from t-tests and MANOVA analyses further reveal that while both genders experience instrumental assistance and group work management equally, differences persist in areas like teacher communication and student social relations. These findings emphasize the importance of gender-sensitive educational policies and teaching strategies to ensure that all students receive equitable academic support tailored to their learning needs.

The qualitative findings provided more profound insights into how students and teachers perceive gender-based differences in academic support. Female students expressed greater comfort in seeking direct help from teachers, while male students were more hesitant to approach teachers for academic guidance, preferring informal peer collaboration. Teachers also recognized differences in student engagement, noting that female students were more proactive in discussions, whereas male students engaged more in competitive learning environments. Additionally, teachers unintentionally provided more feedback to female students, reinforcing their participation in academic activities. These findings highlight the need for balanced teaching strategies, including proactive engagement with male students and encouraging collaborative peer learning methods suited to different gender preferences. Educators can foster a more equitable and inclusive academic environment that enhances student engagement and success by integrating structured teacher involvement and peer-based support systems.

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