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Teacher Support and the Transfer of Responsibility: An Exploratory Survey of Students' Perceptions in an Islamic Junior Secondary School in Ternate, Indonesia

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ABSTRACT

Teacher support is widely valued, yet support does not automatically hand cognitive and conversational responsibility to learners. This study examined how students at SMP Muhammadiyah 1 Ternate, Indonesia, perceived teacher guidance, autonomy-preserving scaffolding, and classroom participation, where these perceptions diverged, and whether they differed by gender or grade. A cross-sectional survey was conducted with 101 students in Grades VII–IX using a researcher-developed, exploratory 15-item, five-point Likert questionnaire. Data were analysed with descriptive statistics, paired-samples t tests on within-person contrasts, Welch's t test, one-way ANOVA, Kruskal–Wallis tests, and an equivalence test. Internal consistency was acceptable (α = .73) and overall perceptions were favourable (M = 4.20, SD = 0.35). As hypothesised, direct assistance and task supervision were rated higher than hints that withhold an immediate answer (Mdiff = 0.81, $t(100) = 7.47$, $p < .001$, dz = 0.74). Opportunities to ask questions and express opinions were also rated higher than the balance of teacher and student talk (Mdiff = 1.34, dz = 1.20), although this contrast involves a reverse-worded item and is interpreted with caution. Resource diversity received the lowest rating (M = 2.99). Gender and grade differences were not significant, and the gender difference was statistically equivalent to zero within ±0.5 SD. Because the instrument has not been externally validated, these findings are read as perceived patterns rather than verified practice. They suggest strong relational support alongside an incomplete transfer of responsibility. Teachers can retain care and clarity while offering prompts before answers, widening classroom dialogue, and diversifying learning resources.

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INTRODUCTION

Knowing when to help, how much to help, and when to step back is one of the central judgements of teaching. Too much direction can secure task completion while leaving little room for independent reasoning. Too little help can leave students confused, disengaged, or unequally involved (Reeve & Cheon, 2021). International frameworks now treat student agency, the capacity to set goals, act on them, and take responsibility for one's own learning, as a core aim of schooling (OECD, 2019; Vaughn, 2020). In Indonesia, the *Kurikulum Merdeka* expects teachers to act as facilitators while keeping their instructional and relational responsibilities (Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology, 2022). Implementation studies, however, report that lecturing remains common and that many teachers still find student-centred practice difficult to enact, including in a Muhammadiyah school (Ndari et al., 2023). A six-country observation study likewise found the lowest observed quality of teaching behaviour in Indonesian secondary classrooms among the countries that could be validly compared (Maulana et al., 2021). The question, then, is not whether Indonesian teachers support their students, but whether that support gradually hands responsibility over to them.

Three concepts frame this study. *Teacher guidance* refers to how teachers clarify tasks, monitor progress, respond to difficulties, and steer students towards learning goals. *Scaffolding* is narrower. It is temporary and contingent support that allows learners to accomplish what they cannot yet do alone, and it is faded as competence grows so that control passes to the learner (van de Pol et al., 2010; Wood et al., 1976). Recent classroom research shows that what students do with teacher support in their subsequent peer interaction matters as much as the support itself (van de Pol et al., 2019). *Classroom participation* is multidimensional. It includes behavioural, emotional, and cognitive involvement (Fredricks et al., 2004) and both vocal and attentive, silent forms (Sedova & Sedlacek, 2023). The distinction that motivates this study can be stated simply. When a student struggles, a teacher may provide the answer immediately, or may offer a clue and invite peer discussion. Both responses are supportive, but only the second deliberately transfers cognitive responsibility to students. In this article, "dependency" is therefore not a learner characteristic. It is a shorthand for classroom arrangements in which help is directive enough that students seldom solve problems by themselves.

Evidence on teacher support is consistent. A meta-analysis of 71 studies found that perceived teacher support was related to achievement ($r = .16$) and that this relation was partly carried by student engagement (Tao et al., 2022). Emotional support appears to motivate students by strengthening their sense of autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Ruzek et al., 2016), and longitudinal studies point to reciprocal links between autonomy-supportive teaching and engagement (Yang et al., 2022). In Indonesian classrooms, teacher support for autonomy, competence, and relatedness has each been associated with students' autonomous motivation (Maulana et al., 2016). Support and structure are also not opposites. Hospel and Galand (2016) found in a multilevel study that both classroom autonomy support and

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classroom structure contributed to students' engagement, which echoes the earlier finding that students benefit most when clear structure is combined with autonomy support (Jang et al., 2010).

Research on participation adds a second layer. In middle school, students' perceptions of the school environment, including teacher support and opportunities for discussion and autonomy, predicted their engagement and achievement (Wang & Holcombe, 2010). Large-scale analysis of classroom dialogue shows that elaborated student contributions and the querying of ideas, not merely the amount of talk, are associated with better outcomes (Howe et al., 2019). Structured efforts to involve students in decisions about teaching can strengthen student voice, but established routines often limit how much influence students actually gain (Geurts et al., 2024, 2025). Studies in Ternate point in the same direction. Junior secondary students have been described as relying heavily on the teacher, and structured approaches such as case-based learning and the activities–class discussion–exercise (ACE) cycle have increased learning independence (Miliyawaty & Umar, 2023; Purwati & La Nani, 2023).

Taken together, this literature shows that support, positive relationships, and psychologically safe classrooms are linked to engagement. It also shows that the opportunity to speak does not guarantee shared influence over meaning, and that scaffolding works best when it is contingent and faded. Two gaps remain. First, support, scaffolding, and participation are usually studied separately and summarised as aggregate scores, which can hide a pattern in which high levels of help coexist with few autonomy-preserving prompts. Second, Indonesian evidence on these practices comes mainly from qualitative case studies of single classrooms or from interventions that treat independence as an outcome (Miliyawaty & Umar, 2023; Ndari et al., 2023; Purwati & La Nani, 2023). Item-level survey evidence on how students in Islamic junior secondary schools in eastern Indonesia experience specific forms of support remains scarce. This matters in practice, because a school may read high ratings of assistance as evidence of student-centred teaching even when teachers still make most decisions and solve most problems.

This study therefore examined students' perceptions at SMP Muhammadiyah 1 Ternate and asked three questions. RQ1: How do students rate teacher assistance, autonomy-preserving guidance, task supervision, opportunities to ask questions and express opinions, and encouragement to discuss? RQ2: Where do perceived support, scaffolding, and participation diverge? RQ3: Do overall perceptions differ by gender or grade level? Two directional hypotheses were derived for RQ2. H1 states that students rate direct assistance and task supervision higher than hints that withhold an immediate answer. Direct help is immediately useful and easy for students to recognise, and teachers working under time and curriculum pressure tend to default to telling rather than prompting (Reeve & Cheon, 2021; van de Pol et al., 2010). H2 states that students rate their opportunities to ask questions and express opinions higher than the balance between teacher and student talk. Indonesian classrooms remain largely teacher-led (Maulana et al., 2021; Ndari et al., 2023), so permission

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to speak may coexist with discourse that the teacher still dominates (Howe et al., 2019). Both hypotheses were tested with paired-samples *t* tests on person-level difference scores. The contrast between learning materials and resource diversity, and RQ3, were treated as exploratory because prior evidence gave no clear basis for a directional prediction. Because the questionnaire was developed by the researchers and has not been externally validated, the study as a whole is exploratory, and its results describe how students perceive classroom practice rather than how often the practices actually occur.

The study contributes in three ways. Theoretically, it places the transfer of cognitive responsibility at the point where support, scaffolding, and participation meet. Methodologically, it shows how item-level contrasts can reveal patterns that a favourable overall score conceals. Practically, it offers teachers in a context that is under-represented in the literature a concrete basis for keeping relational care while sequencing help so that students do more of the thinking.

METHOD

Research Design

A quantitative, cross-sectional survey design with descriptive and exploratory aims was used (Cohen et al., 2018; Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Data were collected once, without any intervention, to describe how students experienced specific instructional practices and to compare closely related practices within the same respondents. Because perceptions were measured at a single time point, no causal relations were inferred.

Setting and Participants

The study took place at SMP Muhammadiyah 1 Ternate, an Islamic junior secondary school in Ternate, North Maluku, Indonesia, that serves Grades VII–IX. Data were collected between 14 and 19 August 2026, in the first semester of the 2026/2027 academic year. Participation was voluntary and based on convenience sampling: the questionnaire link was shared with students who were available during the data-collection week. Because the number of students who received the link was not recorded, a response rate could not be calculated, and the sample cannot be assumed to represent the school's whole student body. Of the 101 participants, 60 (59.4%) were girls and 41 (40.6%) were boys. Exact ages were not computed because birth dates were entered in inconsistent formats; students in Grades VII–IX in Indonesian junior secondary schools are typically about 12 to 15 years old.

Grade was collected through an open-text field labelled *Kelas* (class), and students entered their class in different forms, such as Roman or Arabic numerals with or without section letters. Entries were coded as Grade VII ($n = 47$), VIII ($n = 25$), or IX ($n = 14$) only when the intended grade was unambiguous. Fifteen entries (14.9%), for example a section letter without a grade, could not be assigned. These cases were kept in the overall and gender analyses and excluded only from the grade comparison ($n = 86$). Because these entries may not

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be missing at random, the grade comparison is treated as exploratory, and a closed-response grade field is recommended for future use.

Instrument

The questionnaire was developed from the literature on teacher support, sociocultural scaffolding, autonomy-supportive teaching, and dialogic participation (Alexander, 2020; Fredricks et al., 2004; Reeve & Cheon, 2021; van de Pol et al., 2010). It was written and administered in Indonesian, using short statements, familiar vocabulary, and one classroom practice per item. The 15 items were grouped into six conceptual domains: supportive classroom climate (Items 1–3), instructional clarity (Items 4–5), learning resources and media (Items 6–8), student voice and participation (Items 9–11), teacher guidance and scaffolding (Items 12–14), and collaborative participation (Item 15). Because each domain contains only one to three items, the domains are treated as conceptual groupings rather than validated subscales. The full item list in Indonesian, with English translations, is given in Appendix Table A1.

Responses were recorded on a five-point scale: *sangat tidak sesuai* (strongly disagree, 1), *tidak sesuai* (disagree, 2), *kurang sesuai* (somewhat disagree, 3), *sesuai* (agree, 4), and *sangat sesuai* (strongly agree, 5). Items 3, 8, and 11 were negatively worded (see Appendix Table A1) and were reverse-scored ($6 - X$), so that higher scores always indicate a more favourable perception. Negatively worded items are known to produce method effects, lower item–total correlations, and weaker factor structures, particularly when respondents are young or reading carefully is demanding (Suárez-Alvarez et al., 2018; Vigil-Colet et al., 2020). Item 13 is positively worded but describes the absence of an action (the teacher does *not* give the answer immediately), which may also require more interpretation from students. Both features were taken into account when testing H1 and H2.

Validity and Reliability

Content validity. Items were derived from the literature cited above and checked by the research team for relevance, clarity, and suitability for junior secondary students. No independent expert review, content validity index, cognitive interview, or pilot test was carried out. The questionnaire is therefore treated as an exploratory, researcher-developed instrument. Accordingly, the domain labels are used as descriptive groupings, and interpretations that depend on single items, particularly Item 13, are presented as tentative.

Construct-related evidence and reliability. Exploratory factor analysis was not performed, because 101 cases are insufficient to recover a six-domain structure from 15 items with one to three items per domain. Corrected item–total correlations and alpha-if-item-deleted values were inspected instead. After reverse scoring, Cronbach's α for the full scale was .731, which is acceptable for an exploratory instrument but does not establish unidimensionality (Taber, 2018). Corrected item–total correlations ranged from .107 to .568 and alpha-if-item-deleted from .696 to .756 (Table 2). The weakest items were Item 8 (resource

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diversity, .107), Item 13 (hints without immediate answers, .152), and Item 11 (balanced talk, .191). No item was removed to maximise α, because each represents a practice that is central to the research questions. Domain-level reliability was not estimated.

Procedure and Ethical Considerations

The study was conducted with the written permission of the school principal. Formal ethical clearance from a research ethics committee was not obtained before data collection. The study was non-interventional, involved no deception, and asked only for students' views of ordinary classroom practice, but its participants were minors, and this omission is acknowledged as a limitation (Section 3.3). Before data collection, a member of the research team explained to the students orally the purpose of the study, what participation involved, and how their answers would be handled. Students were told that participation was voluntary, that they could decline or stop at any time without penalty, that there were no right or wrong answers, and that their responses would not affect their grades. Students then gave oral assent. Written consent from parents or guardians was not obtained. The questionnaire was completed electronically during the agreed collection period. We did not record how long students took to complete it or whether classroom teachers were present, and we acknowledge that the presence of teachers could have influenced some answers. The form asked for names and birth dates, so responses were confidential rather than anonymous. Identifiers were separated from the responses before analysis, files were stored in password-protected storage accessible only to the research team, and only aggregated results are reported.

Data Preparation and Analysis

All 101 questionnaires contained responses to all 15 items. No duplicates or out-of-range values were found, so the 1,515 item responses were analysed in full. The overall perception score was the mean of the 15 adjusted items, and domain scores were the means of their items.

For RQ1, frequencies, medians, interquartile ranges (IQR), means, and standard deviations were computed for each item, domain, and the overall score. For RQ2, person-level difference scores were calculated for three contrasts: the mean of Items 12 and 14 minus Item 13 (H1), the mean of Items 9 and 10 minus Item 11R (H2), and the mean of Items 6 and 7 minus Item 8R (exploratory). Each was tested with a paired-samples t test, reported with the mean difference, its 95% confidence interval (CI), and Cohen's dz. With 101 cases, the t test is robust to moderate non-normality of difference scores. Because a two-item mean compared with a single item is not a balanced contrast, the two single-item differences underlying H1 (Item 12 vs. 13 and Item 14 vs. 13) are also reported descriptively. The H1 contrasts involve only positively worded items, whereas the H2 and resource contrasts each include a reverse-scored item and are therefore interpreted as potentially confounded by wording.

For RQ3, gender differences in the overall score were tested with Welch's t test, which does not assume equal variances and is recommended as the default when group sizes are unequal (Delacre et al., 2017; here 60 vs. 41, with non-normal scores among boys). A Mann–

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Whitney *U* test served as a sensitivity check, and Hedges' *g* was reported. Because a non-significant result does not show that groups are equivalent, a two one-sided tests (TOST) equivalence procedure with bounds of ±0.5 *SD* was added (Lakens, 2017). Grade differences were tested with one-way ANOVA after checking normality (Shapiro–Wilk) and homogeneity of variance (Levene), with a Kruskal–Wallis test as a sensitivity check. Effect sizes were η^2, ω^2, and ε^2. All tests were two-tailed at $\alpha = .05$. Descriptive and reliability analyses were performed in JASP software ver. 0.99.0; the paired contrasts, Welch's test, and the equivalence test were computed in Python 3 (SciPy).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

1. Participants and item performance

Table 1 summarises the sample and the number of cases available for each analysis. Item-level statistics, including the reliability indicators reported in Section 2.4 and the rank of each practice, are presented in Table 2.

Table 1. Participant Characteristics and Analytic Samples

Characteristic	Category	*n*	%
Gender	Female	60	59.4
	Male	41	40.6
Grade	VII	47	46.5
	VIII	25	24.8
	IX	14	13.9
	Unclassified	15	14.9
Analytic sample	Overall and gender analyses	101	100.0
	Grade analysis	86	85.1

Note. Percentages may not sum to 100 because of rounding.

2. Overall perceptions (RQ1)

Students' perceptions were favourable overall. Of the 1,515 adjusted responses, 43.0% fell in the highest category and 41.2% in the second highest, so 84.2% were favourable, while 10.2% were in the middle category and 5.5% were unfavourable. The overall score averaged 4.20 (*SD* = 0.35; *Mdn* = 4.20, IQR = 0.53), with individual means ranging from 3.27 to 5.00. The highest-rated practices were classroom comfort (*M* = 4.64), opportunities to express opinions (*M* = 4.55), assistance during learning difficulties (*M* = 4.54), appropriate learning materials (*M* = 4.53), and opportunities to ask questions (*M* = 4.52). Three practices stood clearly apart from the rest: hints without immediate answers (*M* = 3.63), balanced teacher–student talk (*M* = 3.20), and diversity of learning resources (*M* = 2.99). These three items also had the largest standard deviations, and Item 8 was the only item with an IQR of 2 (Table 2).

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Table 2. Item Statistics, Ranks, and Reliability Indicators (N = 101)

Item	Classroom practice	*M*	*SD*	*Mdn*	Rank	*r*it	α if deleted
1	Comfortable classroom climate	4.64	0.50	5	1	.252	.725
2	Equal opportunities for involvement	4.44	0.62	4	6	.390	.712
3R	Orderly classroom environment	4.03	0.96	4	12	.307	.722
4	Explanation of learning objectives	4.42	0.65	4	7	.521	.700
5	Explanation of activity procedures	4.37	0.58	4	9	.402	.712
6	Appropriate learning materials	4.53	0.50	5	4	.387	.715
7	Helpful instructional media	4.41	0.71	5	8	.521	.698
8R	Diversity of learning resources	2.99	1.14	3	15	.107	.756
9	Opportunities to ask questions	4.52	0.58	5	5	.440	.709
10	Opportunities to express opinions	4.55	0.52	5	2	.568	.701
11R	Balanced teacher–student talk	3.20	1.02	3	14	.191	.739
12	Assistance during learning difficulties	4.54	0.64	5	3	.400	.711
13	Hints without immediate answers	3.63	1.05	4	13	.152	.745
14	Teacher supervision during tasks	4.34	0.68	4	11	.427	.708
15	Encouragement to participate in discussion	4.36	0.76	4	10	.526	.696

Note. R = reverse-scored item; *r*it = corrected item–total correlation. Higher adjusted scores indicate more favourable perceptions. IQR = 1 for all items except Item 8 (IQR = 2). Cronbach's α for the 15 items = .731.

At the domain level (Table 3), instructional clarity (*M* = 4.39) and supportive classroom climate (*M* = 4.37) were rated highest, whereas learning resources and media (*M* = 3.98) and student voice and participation (*M* = 4.09) were lowest. The lower domain means were driven by Items 8R and 11R. Within the teacher guidance and scaffolding domain (*M* = 4.17), assistance and supervision were endorsed by 96.0% and 95.0% of students, respectively, compared with 62.4% for hints without immediate answers.

Table 3. Descriptive Statistics for the Conceptual Domains

Conceptual domain	Items	*M*	*SD*	*Mdn*	IQR
Supportive classroom climate	1–3	4.37	0.49	4.33	0.67
Instructional clarity	4–5	4.39	0.52	4.50	1.00
Learning resources and media	6–8	3.98	0.47	4.00	0.67
Student voice and participation	9–11	4.09	0.46	4.00	0.67
Teacher guidance and scaffolding	12–14	4.17	0.57	4.00	0.67
Collaborative participation	15	4.36	0.76	4.00	1.00

Note. *N* = 101. Domains are conceptual groupings, not validated subscales; Collaborative participation is a single item.

3. Discrepancies between support, scaffolding, and participation (RQ2)

Table 4 and Figure 1 report the three planned contrasts. H1 was supported. Direct assistance and task supervision (*M* = 4.44) were rated higher than hints that withhold an immediate answer (*M* = 3.63), *M*diff = 0.81, 95% CI [0.59, 1.02], *t*(100) = 7.47, *p* < .001, *d*z = 0.74,

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a medium-to-large effect. The pattern held for each single item: assistance during difficulties exceeded hint-based guidance by 0.91 points and supervision exceeded it by 0.70 points. Because all items in this contrast are positively worded, the difference cannot be attributed to reverse-scoring.

H2 was also supported statistically. Opportunities to ask questions and express opinions (M = 4.54) were rated higher than balanced teacher–student talk (M = 3.20), Mdiff = 1.34, 95% CI [1.12, 1.56], $t(100) = 12.08$, $p < .001$, $dz = 1.20$. This result needs a careful reading. The adjusted mean of Item 11R lies close to the scale midpoint, 40.6% of students chose the middle category, and the item is reverse-worded with a weak item–total correlation. What the data show, therefore, is that students did not clearly endorse a balance between teacher and student talk, not that they reported teacher talk to be excessive. The exploratory contrast followed the same pattern: appropriate materials and helpful media (M = 4.47) were rated well above resource diversity (M = 2.99), Mdiff = 1.48, 95% CI [1.22, 1.74], $t(100) = 11.29$, $p < .001$, $dz = 1.12$, again with a reverse-worded comparison item.

Table 4. Within-Person Contrasts between Support and Transfer of Responsibility (N = 101)

Contrast	Higher-rated *M*	Lower-rated *M*	*M*diff [95% CI]	*t*(100)	*p*	*dz*
H1: Items 12 & 14 vs. 13	4.44	3.63	0.81 [0.59, 1.02]	7.47	< .001	0.74
H2: Items 9 & 10 vs. 11R	4.54	3.20	1.34 [1.12, 1.56]	12.08	< .001	1.20
Exploratory: Items 6 & 7 vs. 8R	4.47	2.99	1.48 [1.22, 1.74]	11.29	< .001	1.12

Note. Paired-samples t tests on person-level difference scores. dz = mean difference divided by the standard deviation of the differences. R = reverse-scored item; contrasts involving a reverse-scored item may be partly affected by wording.

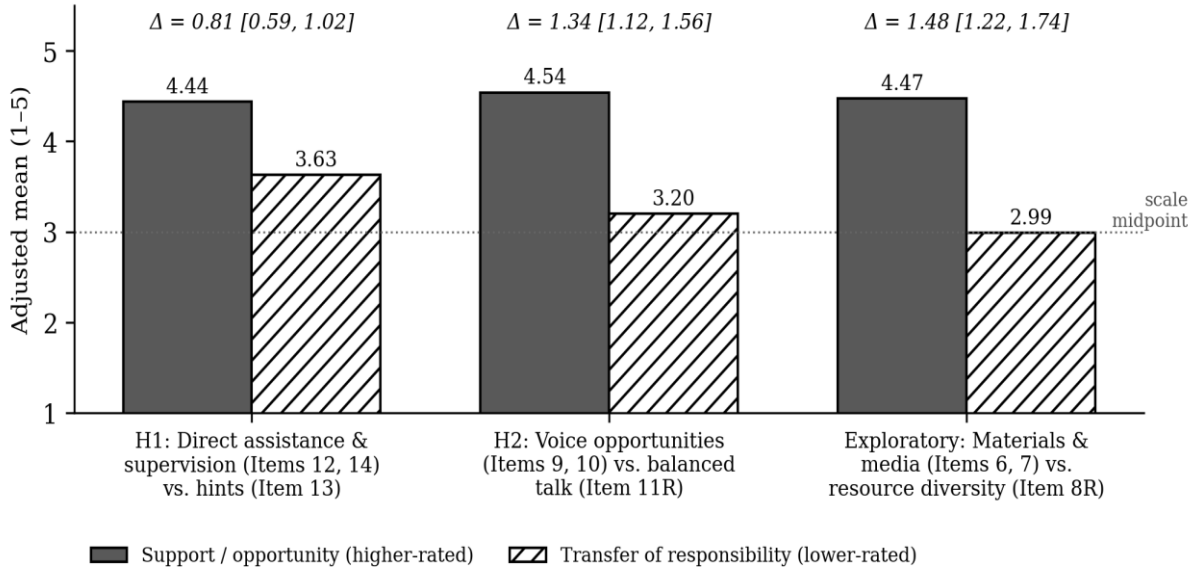


Figure 1. Mean Ratings for Support and Transfer-of-Responsibility Practices in the Three Planned Contrasts

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4. Gender and grade comparisons (RQ3)

Girls (n = 60, M = 4.22, SD = 0.36) and boys (n = 41, M = 4.17, SD = 0.33) differed by only 0.05 points. Scores were approximately normal among girls (W = .977, p = .322) but not among boys (W = .936, p = .024), and variances were homogeneous (Levene's $F(1, 99) = 0.19$, p = .666). Welch's t test showed no significant difference, $t(90.8) = 0.78$, p = .436, 95% CI [−0.08, 0.19], Hedges' g = 0.15, and the Mann–Whitney test agreed (U = 1,414, p = .203). The TOST procedure indicated that the gender difference was statistically equivalent to zero within bounds of ±0.5 SD (p = .044), but not within the narrower bounds of ±0.3 SD (p = .236).

Grade VII students (n = 47, M = 4.24, SD = 0.35) scored slightly higher than Grade VIII (n = 25, M = 4.14, SD = 0.36) and Grade IX students (n = 14, M = 4.15, SD = 0.40). Assumptions were met (Shapiro–Wilk $p \geq .322$; Levene's $F(2, 83) = 0.09$, p = .918), and the ANOVA was not significant, $F(2, 83) = 0.80$, p = .452, η^2 = .019, ω^2 = .000. The Kruskal–Wallis test agreed, $H(2)$ = 1.96, p = .376, ε^2 = .023, so no post hoc tests were performed (Table 5).

Table 5. Overall Perception Scores by Gender and Grade Level

Group	*n*	*M*	*SD*	95% CI for *M*	Test
Female	60	4.22	0.36	[4.13, 4.31]	Welch $t(90.8) = 0.78$, p = .436, g = 0.15
Male	41	4.17	0.33	[4.07, 4.27]	Mann–Whitney U = 1,414, p = .203
Grade VII	47	4.24	0.35	[4.14, 4.34]	$F(2, 83) = 0.80$, p = .452, η^2 = .019
Grade VIII	25	4.14	0.36	[3.99, 4.29]	Kruskal–Wallis $H(2) = 1.96$, p = .376
Grade IX	14	4.15	0.40	[3.92, 4.38]	

Note. Fifteen students with unclassifiable grade entries were excluded from the grade comparison only.

Discussion

Three findings structure the discussion. Students described a supportive classroom; this support was uneven, because help was more visible than the handing over of responsibility; and perceptions did not differ meaningfully by gender or grade.

1. Support as an enabling condition

The high ratings for comfort, equitable involvement, and clear objectives matter because they set the conditions under which students are willing to take the risks that participation involves. Self-determination theory holds that engagement is sustained when learners feel related and competent (Ryan & Deci, 2020), and meta-analytic evidence links perceived support to engagement and, through it, to achievement (Tao et al., 2022). Indonesian data show the same relations between teacher support and autonomous motivation (Maulana et al., 2016). In a Muhammadiyah school, these ratings may also reflect institutional commitments to care, respect, and fairness. Psychological safety and clarity, however, are enabling conditions rather than evidence of autonomy. A well-organised classroom can still be cognitively controlled by the teacher if students understand the task but have little say in how problems are framed or solved.

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2. Support without full transfer of responsibility

The support of H1 is the central finding. Students readily recognised help when they were stuck and supervision while they worked, but endorsed hint-based guidance less consistently. From a sociocultural perspective, scaffolding is not the provision of help as such. It is contingent assistance that is gradually withdrawn as control moves to the learner (van de Pol et al., 2010; Wood et al., 1976). Direct explanations are salient and efficient, whereas prompts, diagnostic questions, and deliberate waiting may be less recognisable as help, and teachers under curriculum and time pressure may favour quick completion (Reeve & Cheon, 2021). This reading fits Indonesian reports that lecturing still dominates even where the *Kurikulum Merdeka* has been adopted (Ndari et al., 2023), and local studies showing that independence grows when lessons are deliberately structured around cases, activities, and class discussion (Miliyawaty & Umar, 2023; Purwati & La Nani, 2023). Structure and autonomy need not compete. Students benefit when clear expectations are combined with real opportunities for initiative (Hospel & Galand, 2016; Jang et al., 2010). In practice, teachers might model a first step, then offer partial clues, guiding questions, incomplete examples, or a peer explanation before giving a solution, so that help moves from direct assistance through guided participation to independent performance.

3. Voice without shared influence

Students reported ample opportunities to ask questions and give opinions but did not clearly endorse a balance of talk. Dialogic research distinguishes access to speech from influence over meaning-making (Alexander, 2020). What predicts learning is the quality of contributions, such as elaborating and challenging ideas, rather than the amount of student talk (Howe et al., 2019). A student can answer a closed question without starting an idea or shaping the next turn of the discussion. In Indonesian classrooms, where interaction is often teacher-led (Maulana et al., 2021), cultural expectations of respect may make listening and deference appear appropriate. Respect, however, need not mean one-way authority. Open questions, problems posed by students, structured peer dialogue, and requests for justification can widen conversational responsibility without removing teacher guidance. Because Item 11 is reverse-worded and its mean lies near the midpoint, this interpretation should be treated as a hypothesis for observational follow-up rather than as an established pattern.

4. Useful materials but limited diversity

The gap between appropriate materials and resource diversity extends the same argument beyond talk. A well-chosen textbook supports comprehension, but multiple sources allow comparison, choice, and alternative routes to understanding, and may reduce reliance on a single teacher explanation. The data do not suggest poor provision, since materials and media were rated highly, and the questionnaire did not ask which formats were used. From a sociocultural view, the value of resources for autonomy depends not only on their availability but also on whether students can select, compare, and use them purposefully (Alexander, 2020; van de Pol et al., 2010). As with Item 11, the reverse wording of Item 8 calls for caution.

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5. Perception, visibility, and wording

An alternative explanation for the discrepancies is that they reflect how visible a practice is to students and how the items were worded, rather than how often each practice occurs. Explanations and supervision are easy to notice, whereas contingent prompting or deliberate waiting may not be recognised as support. Two of the three contrasts also involve reverse-worded items, which tend to lower scores and weaken item–total correlations (Suárez-Alvarez et al., 2018; Vigil-Colet et al., 2020). The H1 contrast, however, involves only positively worded items and still produced a substantial difference, so wording alone is unlikely to account for the overall pattern. Separating perception from practice will require systematic classroom observation and coding of teacher–student dialogue (Hennessy et al., 2020).

6. Gender and grade

The absence of meaningful gender and grade differences suggests that the classroom pattern was shared across the sample, which is consistent with a school-level explanation: common teachers, routines, and institutional expectations may shape students' experience more than demographic grouping. The equivalence test strengthens this conclusion for gender at the level of medium-sized differences, but small differences cannot be ruled out (Lakens, 2017). The grade comparison was limited by small and unequal groups and by 15 unclassified cases, so it cannot show that developmental stage does not shape the experience of scaffolding.

7. Implications

Good scaffolding combines care with the transfer of responsibility. Teachers in this school need not reduce the help that students value. They can change its order instead: prompts and guiding questions before answers, assistance withdrawn as competence increases, and students asked to explain, compare, and defend their solutions. Structured peer discussion can distribute reasoning more widely, and a wider range of resources creates other routes to inquiry. Simple monitoring of who speaks, whose ideas shape the lesson, and how often the teacher resolves difficulties personally can make participation more consequential. Because this is a single-school exploratory study, these recommendations should be tried and evaluated locally before being generalised.

Limitations and Future Research

Several limitations qualify these findings. First, cross-sectional self-reports capture perceptions at one point in time and cannot establish causality or the actual frequency of classroom behaviours. Second, the single-school convenience sample limits generalisation. Third, the questionnaire was not reviewed by independent experts, and no cognitive interviews or pilot test were carried out, so its content validity has not been established. Fourth, the key constructs in RQ2 rest on single items, two of which are reverse-worded and performed weakly, so wording effects may have contributed to the H2 and resource contrasts. Fifth, the six domains are conceptual groupings that have not been confirmed by factor analysis. Sixth, all variables came from one source and one method, and because the form

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collected names and birth dates, responses were not anonymous. Common-method variance and socially desirable responding, which would most likely inflate ratings of teachers, cannot be ruled out (Podsakoff et al., 2024). Seventh, the grade comparison was weakened by unequal groups and missing grade information. Eighth, the response rate and students' exact ages could not be determined, and the study did not obtain formal ethical clearance or written parental consent; consent procedures relied on the principal's permission and students' oral assent, which falls short of current standards for research with minors. Finally, dependency was not measured. It is used here as an interpretive lens on classroom arrangements, not as a characteristic of students.

Future studies should recruit larger probability samples from several Islamic and non-Islamic schools, use positively worded items or balanced item pairs, and test measurement invariance across groups. A validated, age-appropriate scaffolding instrument, developed through expert review, cognitive interviews, and piloting, would strengthen measurement. Classroom observation and coding of discourse could document prompts, wait time, uptake of student ideas, and the fading of assistance (Hennessy et al., 2020), while interviews could explain why some forms of help are recognised more readily than others. With clustered samples, multilevel models could separate student, classroom, and school influences, and quasi-experimental designs could compare direct assistance with autonomy-supportive sequences on engagement, self-regulation, and achievement.

CONCLUSION

Regarding RQ1, students at SMP Muhammadiyah 1 Ternate perceived their classrooms as comfortable, inclusive, and instructionally clear, and they rated teacher assistance, supervision, learning materials, and opportunities to ask questions and give opinions highly.

Regarding RQ2, the favourable overall picture was uneven. Direct assistance and supervision were rated substantially higher than hints that withhold an immediate answer (H1), opportunities to speak were rated higher than the balance of classroom talk (H2), and resource diversity received the lowest rating. The second and third contrasts involve reverse-worded items and should be confirmed with better-balanced measures and classroom observation.

Regarding RQ3, overall perceptions did not differ significantly by gender or grade, and the gender difference was equivalent to zero within ±0.5 *SD*.

Together, these results suggest strong relational and instructional support alongside an incomplete transfer of cognitive and conversational responsibility. Teachers can keep the care and clarity that students value while offering prompts, guiding questions, modelling, peer discussion, and a gradual fading of help before solutions are given. School leaders can support this shift by encouraging resource diversification, structured student dialogue, and student feedback within professional development.

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DECLARATIONS

Ethics statement. This study did not receive formal approval from a research ethics committee. It was conducted with the written permission of the school principal, and all participating students received an oral explanation of the study and gave oral assent. Written parental or guardian consent was not obtained. No identifying information is reported.

Use of artificial intelligence. During revision, the authors used Claude (Anthropic) and Trinka AI to support language editing and the restructuring of the manuscript in response to reviewer comments. The authors checked every sentence, statistic, and reference against the original data and sources and take full responsibility for the content of the manuscript.

Conflict of interest. The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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