

The Role of Peer Relations in Creating a Comfortable Learning Experience for Elementary Madrasah Students

Anton Tri Hasnanto¹

¹ Raden Intan State Islamic University, Indonesia

Correspondence Email: antontri@radenintan.ac.id

ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:

peer relations, learning comfort, elementary madrasah students, school social environment.

Article history:

Received 2026-05-01

Revised 2026-05-03

Accepted 2026-05-03

ABSTRAK

This study aims to analyze the role of peer relationships in shaping the learning comfort of students at an Islamic Elementary School (Madrasah Ibtidaiyah). This study used a qualitative approach with a descriptive type and was conducted at one of the State Islamic Elementary Schools in Bandar Lampung. The research subjects consisted of 31 students selected purposively. Data collection techniques were carried out through semi-structured interviews, while data analysis used thematic analysis to identify patterns and themes that emerged from students' experiences. The results of the study indicate that peer relationships have a significant role in shaping students' learning comfort. Most students feel comfortable at school because they have positive relationships with peers, which are characterized by friendly attitudes, mutual support, and a pleasant social atmosphere. These relationships not only provide a sense of security but also increase student engagement in the learning process. However, less supportive relationships were also found, which resulted in learning discomfort in some students. These findings indicate that peer relationships have two sides, namely as a supporting factor and a potential obstacle to learning comfort. This study concludes that student learning comfort is not only influenced by academic factors, but is also greatly determined by the quality of social relationships in the school environment. Therefore, it is important for schools to create an inclusive and supportive social environment to support optimal student learning comfort.

This is an open access article under the CC BY-NC-SA license.



Copyright © 2026 by Author.

Published by LPPI Musa Publishing, Yayasan Mujtahidin Sajimah Selong

INTRODUCTION

Learning comfort is a crucial factor in supporting the success of the educational process in elementary schools, particularly at the Madrasah Ibtidaiyah level, which emphasizes not only academic aspects but also the development of students' social character. In this context, learning comfort is influenced not only by physical factors such as facilities, but also by the quality of social interactions within the school environment. Research shows that peer relationships play a significant role in shaping students' learning experiences, as at elementary school age, children begin to develop a need for social acceptance and a sense of belonging within a group (Wentzel, 2017; Ryan & Deci, 2000).

Peer relationships serve not only as a means of social interaction but also as a source of emotional support that can increase students' motivation and learning comfort. Wentzel (2017) emphasized that positive peer relationships correlate with student engagement and well-being in the classroom. However, less supportive relationships can also cause discomfort and even affect students' attitudes toward school. This demonstrates that peer relationships have two sides: they can be both supportive and inhibiting factors in the learning process (Rubin, Bukowski, & Bowker, 2015).

In the context of Indonesian education, particularly in madrasas (Islamic schools), social relations are often overlooked in studies of learning comfort, which tend to emphasize curriculum and teaching methods. However, daily interactions between students at school are equally important in shaping their learning experiences. Research by Sari and Murdiono (2019) shows that the school social environment, including peer relationships, contributes to students' sense of comfort and engagement in learning activities. However, studies specifically examining the role of peer relations in the madrasah context are relatively limited.

Initial observations through interviews indicate that most students feel comfortable at school because they have good, friendly, and fun friends. Statements such as "my friends here are nice and fun" and "there are lots of good friends here" indicate that social relationships play a significant role in shaping students' perceptions of learning comfort. However, some students also feel uncomfortable due to unsupportive social relationships, such as the expression "not happy, friends are not supportive," which indicates a variation in social experiences among students.

Based on these conditions, a gap can be seen between the importance of peer relationships in fostering a comfortable learning environment and the limited number of studies specifically addressing this aspect in the madrasah context. Therefore, this research is crucial to examine in more depth how peer relationships play a role in fostering a comfortable learning environment for elementary madrasah students. This study is expected to contribute to the development of a more supportive learning environment, not only from a pedagogical perspective but also from a social perspective that supports student well-being and engagement in the learning process.

METHOD

This study uses a qualitative, descriptive approach to deeply understand the role of peer relationships in shaping the learning comfort of elementary school students. This approach was chosen because it allows researchers to explore the experiences, perceptions, and meanings students construct regarding social interactions in the school environment. Creswell and Poth (2018) explain that qualitative research focuses on understanding the meaning of individual experiences within a specific context, while Moleong (2017) emphasizes that this approach is relevant for studying complex and contextual social phenomena.

The research was conducted at a State Islamic Elementary School in Bandar Lampung City, with 31 elementary school students as subjects. Subjects were selected using a purposive sampling technique, considering that students have direct experience interacting with peers in the school environment. Patton (2015) stated that purposive sampling allows researchers to obtain rich and in-depth data from informants relevant to the research focus, while Sugiyono (2019) emphasized that this technique is commonly used in qualitative research to obtain data that aligns with research objectives.

The data collection technique used semi-structured interviews, which allowed researchers to explore students' experiences and perspectives in greater depth. Interviews were used to understand how students interpret peer relationships and their impact on their learning experience. Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) stated that qualitative interviews aim to understand the subjects' life worlds from their own perspectives, while Creswell and Poth (2018) added that this technique is effective for exploring subjective experiences within a social context.

Data analysis was conducted using thematic analysis, which includes coding, categorizing, and drawing key themes from the data. Braun and Clarke (2006) explain that thematic analysis is a systematic and flexible method for identifying patterns of meaning in qualitative data. The analysis process is carried out iteratively from the data collection stage to the conclusion drawing to ensure depth of interpretation. Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014) also emphasize that qualitative data analysis is interactive and continuous.

The validity of the data in this study was maintained through source triangulation techniques and increased diligence in analysis. Researchers double-checked the interview data and compared answers between respondents to ensure consistency of information. Lincoln and Guba (1985) stated that credibility in qualitative research can be strengthened through repeated checking and comparison between data sources. Thus, the research results are expected to represent students' experiences and perspectives validly and in-depth.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Forms of Peer Relations in the Madrasah Environment

Peer relationships are a crucial aspect of elementary school students' social development, as at this stage, children begin to develop a social identity through interactions with their surroundings. From an educational psychology perspective, peer relationships serve not only as a means of interaction but also as a social learning space that shapes students' attitudes, behaviors, and emotional experiences. Wentzel (2017) asserts that positive peer relationships contribute to student engagement in school activities, while Rubin, Bukowski, and Bowker (2015) state that the quality of children's social relationships can influence their psychological well-being and adjustment to the school environment.

Previous research also shows that, at elementary school age, children tend to judge their school experiences based on the quality of their social relationships. Ryan and Deci (2000), using self-determination theory, emphasize the importance of the need for relatedness in shaping individual motivation and well-being. In this context, peer relationships are a key factor influencing how students perceive the school environment as enjoyable or unpleasant.

Based on the interview results, peer relations in the madrasah environment tend to be predominantly positive. Most students described their relationships with friends as enjoyable and supportive of their school experience. This is reflected in statements such as "my friends here are nice and fun" (Student 2), "there are lots of good friends here" (Student 8), and "the students here are friendly and don't bully each other" (Student 3). These statements indicate that social interactions among students tend to be supportive and create a positive atmosphere.

Furthermore, peer relationships are also built through shared activities at school, both during learning and outside of class. Some students attribute their comfort to being together in activities such as playing, studying, and participating in extracurricular activities. This suggests that social relationships are formed not only through verbal communication but also through shared experiences that strengthen bonds between students. However, not all students experience the same quality of relationships. Some experiences also indicate less supportive relationships, as expressed by the statement "not happy, friends are not supportive" (Student 1). Although not a dominant figure, this finding indicates that peer relationships in the madrasah environment are not entirely homogeneous, but rather vary, influenced by each student's individual experiences.

Thus, the forms of peer relationships developed in madrasah environments tend to be dominated by positive and supportive relationships, but there is still variation in the quality of interactions experienced by students. These relationships serve as an important foundation in shaping students' social experiences at school, which in turn influences their learning experience.

Peer Relationships as a Source of Learning Comfort

Learning comfort is a psychological state that allows students to feel safe, accepted, and motivated in participating in the learning process. From an educational psychology perspective, learning comfort is determined not only by academic factors but also by the quality of social relationships students have in the school environment. Ryan and Deci (2000), through their self-determination theory, emphasized that the need for relatedness is a key factor in shaping intrinsic motivation and individual comfort. Similarly, Wentzel (2017) stated that positive relationships with peers contribute to student engagement, a sense of security, and satisfaction in learning.

Previous research also shows that students with good social relationships tend to exhibit higher levels of comfort and engagement in learning. Rubin, Bukowski, and Bowker (2015) explain that peer support can increase self-confidence and reduce anxiety in the school environment. In this context, peer relationships serve not only as a complement but also as a primary factor shaping students' overall learning experience.

Based on the interview results, most students linked their learning comfort to the quality of their peer relationships. Many students stated that having good and pleasant friends made them feel at home at school. This was evident in statements such as "Yes, I'm happy because my friends here are nice and fun" (Student 2), "I'm happy because I have many good friends here" (Student 6), and "I'm very happy because I have many good friends" (Student 33). These statements indicate that positive social relationships are a major source of students' learning comfort. Furthermore, the comfort felt by students is not only related to the presence of friends, but also to the quality of interactions, such as friendly attitudes, mutual support, and the absence of negative behaviors such as bullying. One student stated that they feel comfortable because "the students here are friendly and don't bully each other" (Student 3), indicating that a safe and supportive social environment plays a significant role in creating a pleasant learning atmosphere. This shows that learning comfort does not solely originate from individual factors, but is formed through positive social interactions among students.

Furthermore, peer relationships also contribute to student engagement in school activities. Students who have good relationships with their friends tend to be more active in learning and extracurricular activities because they feel part of the social environment. This reinforces the idea that the sense of belonging formed through peer relationships is a crucial factor in increasing student comfort and participation in learning.

Negative Relationships and Their Impact on Learning Discomfort

Although peer relationships are often viewed as a positive factor in the school environment, not all social interactions between students are harmonious. In developmental psychology, peer relationships can also be a source of social stress, especially when the interactions are unsupportive or even exclusive. Rubin, Bukowski, and Bowker (2015) emphasized that negative relationship qualities, such as social rejection or lack of support, can impact children's emotional well-being. This finding is reinforced by Wentzel (2017), who stated that unhealthy social relationships can reduce students' engagement in learning and influence their perceptions of the school environment.

Interview results indicate that not all students experience positive social relationships in the madrasah environment. Some students expressed unpleasant experiences interacting with peers, such as the statement "not happy, friends are not supportive" (Student 1), which clearly indicates social relationships that do not support comfortable learning. Although not as numerous as positive experiences, this finding is important because it demonstrates variations in the quality of social relationships experienced by students.

Furthermore, unsupportive relationships can also lead to feelings of emotional discomfort, such as a lack of acceptance or support within a peer group. This can potentially leave students feeling isolated or disconnected from the school environment. In the long term, these experiences can impact student engagement in the learning process and reduce their sense of belonging at school.

Peer relationships not only serve as a factor that enhances learning comfort, but can also be a source of discomfort if the quality of interactions is negative. These findings emphasize the importance of not only viewing social relationships from a positive perspective but also understanding the potential negative dynamics, thus providing a foundation for creating a more inclusive and supportive school environment for all students.

CONCLUSION

This study shows that peer relationships play a significant role in shaping the learning experience of elementary school students. Most students feel comfortable learning because of their positive relationships with their peers, characterized by friendly attitudes, mutual support, and a pleasant social atmosphere. These relationships not only provide a sense of security but also strengthen student engagement in learning activities, making school a pleasant and meaningful environment.

However, this study also revealed that not all students experience the same quality of relationships. Some students experience less supportive relationships, which can lead to discomfort in learning. These findings suggest that peer relationships have two sides: they can be both a supporting factor and a potential barrier to comfortable learning. Therefore, more systematic efforts are needed to build an inclusive and supportive school social environment, taking into account the dynamics of relationships between students, so that comfortable learning can be felt equally by all students.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77–101. <https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa>
- Creswell, J. W., & Poth, C. N. (2018). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches (4th ed.)*. SAGE Publications.
- Kvale, S., & Brinkmann, S. (2009). *InterViews: Learning the craft of qualitative research interviewing (2nd ed.)*. SAGE Publications.
- Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry*. SAGE Publications.
- Miles, M. B., Huberman, A. M., & Saldaña, J. (2014). *Qualitative data analysis: A methods sourcebook (3rd ed.)*. SAGE Publications.
- Moleong, L. J. (2017). *Metodologi penelitian kualitatif (Edisi revisi)*. PT Remaja Rosdakarya.
- Patton, M. Q. (2015). *Qualitative research & evaluation methods (4th ed.)*. SAGE Publications.
- Rubin, K. H., Bukowski, W. M., & Bowker, J. C. (2015). *Children in peer groups*. Dalam R. M. Lerner (Ed.), *Handbook of child psychology and developmental science (7th ed.)*. Wiley.
- Ryan, R. M., & Deci, E. L. (2000). Intrinsic and extrinsic motivations: Classic definitions and new directions. *Contemporary Educational Psychology*, 25(1), 54–67. <https://doi.org/10.1006/ceps.1999.1020>
- Sari, D. P., & Murdiono, M. (2019). Pengaruh lingkungan sosial sekolah terhadap kenyamanan belajar siswa sekolah dasar. *Jurnal Pendidikan Dasar*, 10(2), 120–130.
- Sugiyono. (2019). *Metode penelitian kuantitatif, kualitatif, dan R&D*. Alfabeta.
- Wentzel, K. R. (2017). *Peer relationships, motivation, and academic performance at school. Handbook of competence and motivation: Theory and application (2nd ed.)*. Guilford Press.