



EXPLORATION OF STUDENTS' SOCIAL EXPERIENCE THROUGH A BACKPACKER-BASED EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING AT MADRASAH IBTIDAIYAH ALAM

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ABSTRACT

This research is motivated by the importance of developing students' social experiences in primary education through a contextual, experience-based learning approach. Learning centered solely on classroom activities is considered insufficient to provide opportunities for students to develop real social skills. This study aims to examine the implementation of backpacker strategies to improve students' social experience, and the implications and challenges of these strategies at Madrasah Ibtidaiyah Alam Alfa Kids. This study uses a qualitative approach. Data was collected through observations, interviews, and documentation involving teachers and students as research subjects. Data analysis is carried out through the stages of data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing to gain a comprehensive understanding of the implementation of backpacker strategies in learning. The results showed that implementing backpacker strategies made a real contribution to increasing students' social participation, social adaptability, and social concern. Through systematically designed educational travel activities, students gain an authentic and meaningful learning experience. However, the program's implementation still faces several challenges, including limited availability of companion teachers, implementation time, and the scope of activities. The conclusion of this study emphasizes that the backpacker strategy is an effective experience-based learning approach in supporting the social development of students at the Madrasah Ibtidaiyah level. This approach offers a more contextual, humanistic, and relevant learning process that meets students' developmental needs.

Keywords: social experience, backpacker strategy, Madrasah Ibtidaiyah Alam

INTRODUCTION

Basic education has a strategic role in forming the foundation of children's social development.(Maver and Devjak 2018). At the Madrasah Ibtidaiyah level, the learning process is not only directed at achieving academic competence but also at strengthening social skills that enable students to interact healthily with their surroundings.(Devjak, Tatjana and Maver 2018,Yang, Oh, and Morgan 2025). The ability to cooperate, communicate, empathize, and adapt in social situations is an important part of students' development that will affect their success in social life. Therefore, the social experience students gain during the educational process is an aspect that needs to be consciously designed through the right learning strategy. However, learning practices in elementary schools still tend to be oriented towards intraclassroom activities that are academic and rigidly structured. This kind of learning pattern often limits the space for students' natural interactions, so that the social experiences formed are less optimal. Students have limited opportunities to deal with real-life situations that demand independence, teamwork,



decision-making, and adaptability to a dynamic social environment. This condition underscores the need for innovative learning strategies that provide an authentic learning experience while enriching students' social experiences.(Le et al. 2022)

One relevant approach is the backpacker strategy, an experiential learning strategy that places students as active subjects in exploratory activities outside the classroom.(Black 2018,Martins, da Costa, and Moreira 2022). This strategy provides space for students to learn through educational journeys, interaction with the natural and social environment, contextual problem-solving, and direct reflection on experiences. Through these activities, students not only gain knowledge but also experience real social processes such as collaboration, interpersonal communication, social care, and adaptation to new situations. Thus, backpacker strategies have the potential to be an effective means of shaping meaningful social experiences.(Miller et al. 2015). Although experiential learning is increasingly being studied, in-depth exploration of how backpacker strategies shape students' social experiences in the context of Madrasah Ibtidaiyah is still relatively limited. In fact, the characteristics of Islamic basic education that emphasize a balance among the development of intellectual, social, and Islamic values make social experience an important element of the educational process. Based on this, this study focuses on exploring students' social experiences through the application of backpacker strategies in Madrasah Ibtidaiyah to understand the dynamics of the social processes formed and their contribution to the holistic development of students. This article complements several existing writings related to backpacker strategies as a form of learning outside the classroom. This study provides an overview of backpackers' strategies for enhancing students' social experiences. In line with that, the purpose of this paper is to (a) find out the implementation of backpacker strategies in improving students' social experiences. (b)The implications of the backpacker strategy can be seen from increasing social participation, social adaptation, and student concern, and (c) the challenges of backpacker strategies in improving students' social experience. The benefits of this research are expected to provide a comprehensive picture of backpacker strategies at Madrasah Ibtidaiyah.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study examines backpackers' strategies for enhancing students' social experiences. This study uses a qualitative design. This research uses a qualitative approach to deeply understand the process of implementing backpacker strategies and the social experiences of students in the context of learning at a nature-based Madrasah Ibtidaiyah. The qualitative approach allows researchers to explore the meanings, perceptions, and experiences of research subjects more comprehensively through direct interaction with the situation under study.(Daniel and Harland 2017). In addition, this research not only examines the results but also the process of implementing activities, the dynamics of students' social interactions, and the role of teachers in accompanying backpacker activities. The research was conducted at Madrasah Alam Alfa Kids Indonesia. This is because the madrasah is one of the madrasahs that implements the backpacker strategy.

The data sources in this study were obtained from teachers and madrasah heads. The number of teachers who provide information sources is 5. The selection of respondents was based on the premise that, in applying the social-emotional learning model, the teachers and madrasah heads understood it best. The total number of teachers is 20, and the total number



of students is 100. Data collection in this study used interviews, documentation, and observations. The stages in this research begin with the determination of the research problem. Once the problem is determined, the design and development of the research instrument is carried out. The next step is to appoint a research informant. Then, data collection and examination steps are carried out. The data analysis in this study follows the stages of Miles and Huberman: first, data reduction by selecting and distilling data from interviews, observations, and documentation. Second, presenting data by organizing it into narratives, tables, and images; and third, drawing and verifying conclusions by interpreting findings obtained in the field.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results of the study show that the implementation of the backpacker strategy at the nature-based Madrasah Ibtidaiyah is carried out as a routine school program, scheduled every semester. The program is systematically designed as part of institutional policies to enrich students' learning experiences outside the classroom. Activities are not positioned as purely recreational, but as a structured learning strategy integrated with the goals of madrasah education. Program planning involves determining the trip theme, mapping learning outcomes, strengthening character values, and coordinating among teachers so that the implementation of activities has a clear pedagogical direction. The implementation of the backpacker strategy involves determining when and where students will take trips. For its implementation, students are scheduled to take a bus independently to a place such as a mosque, market, or tourist location to carry out backpacker activities. Before the implementation of backpacking, students are, of course, first directed to prepare what they will bring and how they must travel. The role of teachers is certainly very helpful in determining students' readiness to carry out adventures. The suitability of the location determines the success of this backpacking trip, the route to be taken, students' ability during the adventure, and students' cohesiveness in carrying out their duties.

The backpacker strategy is implemented through a series of educational travel activities that place students as active subjects in the learning process. Students are involved in the preparation of activities, the preparation of personal equipment, the division of group roles, and the completion of field challenges designed by the teacher. This process reflects an experiential learning approach, in which hands-on experience is the primary source of knowledge and social skill development. Learning environments that move from classrooms to social spaces and the outdoors create authentic and contextual learning situations. (Callewaert 2019, Dieu, Hien. Dang Thi, Kim 2018). During the implementation of the activity, students interact intensively with their peers in a variety of collaborative situations. They learn to communicate to agree on joint decisions, share responsibilities in groups, and solve problems that arise during the trip. These natural interactions form a more meaningful social experience than formal interactions in the classroom. Students show greater emotional and social engagement because activities are conducted in a real-life setting that demands everyone's active participation.

The study's findings show a significant increase in students' social participation. Students who previously tended to be passive in group activities began to show initiative in discussions, collaborative games, and joint problem-solving. They are more courageous in expressing opinions, proposing ideas, and contributing to group decision-making. This



active involvement signifies a growing sense of belonging to shared activities and an increased awareness of the importance of social roles in the learning community. In addition to social participation, social adaptability also increased during the program. Students are exposed to new situations that differ from their daily school routine, such as being outdoors, interacting with the surrounding community, and the dynamics of group travel. These conditions train students' ability to adjust to changes in social situations, group rules, and common needs. They learn to understand the differences among friends' characters, manage emotions, and be flexible in dealing with spontaneous social challenges.

Students' social adaptability is also reflected in increased confidence when interacting with new environments. Students become more comfortable communicating with people outside the classroom, such as activity facilitators, local guides, and members of the local community. They can maintain a polite attitude, build conversations, and exhibit social behavior in accordance with applicable norms. This experience expands students' social space while enriching their interpersonal skills. The study also found an increase in students' social concern following the implementation of backpacker strategies. In various group activities, students show an attitude of helping each other when friends are having difficulties, sharing needed equipment, and providing emotional support when facing challenges. This concern arises naturally because students are in situations that demand cooperation and solidarity. Intensive social interaction fosters empathy and awareness that the success of activities depends on shared contributions.

Students' social care is not only evident in relationships with friends but also in interactions with their surrounding environment. Students show an attitude of maintaining the cleanliness of the activity area, respecting the local community, and following the teacher's directions with full responsibility. Social values such as collective responsibility, concern for the environment, and social ethics develop through hands-on experience during the activity. This shows that backpacker strategies not only shape interpersonal social competence but also broaden social awareness. Institutionally, the success of this program is influenced by the management of planned and sustainable activities. Madrasah places the backpacker strategy within the design of an experience-based curriculum to strengthen students' character and social competence. The consistency of implementation across semesters creates a continuous learning pattern, ensuring the social impact is not incidental. School policy support, teacher collaboration, and parental participation sustain the program.

Thus, the implementation of backpacker strategies at nature-based Madrasah Ibtidaiyah has been proven to make a real contribution to improving students' social experience. This program encourages increased social participation, social adaptability, and student concern in various interaction contexts. Experience-based learning, systematically designed, makes educational travel activities an effective means to form students' social competencies holistically. These findings confirm that learning strategies that deliver authentic experiences have an important role in the development of the social dimension of basic education. The results of the study show that implementing backpacker strategies has positive implications for students' overall social development. This strategy not only serves as an experiential learning method but also as a vehicle for developing social competence through real interaction in an authentic learning environment. Educational travel activities that require collaboration, communication, and shared responsibility create a more



dynamic social learning space than conventional classroom learning. These implications can be seen in changes in students' behavior, with students increasingly active, responsive, and caring in various social situations.

The first implication appears to be increased student social participation in joint activities. Students show higher engagement in group discussions, collaborative games, and problem-solving activities during the activity. They no longer wait passively for direction; instead, they take the initiative to express their opinions, offer help, and assume a role in the group. This increase in participation signifies a growing sense of confidence and awareness of the importance of individual contributions in the learning community. In addition, the backpacker strategy also has implications for increasing students' social adaptability. Learning situations that move from the classroom to an open environment present new challenges that demand flexibility in attitudes and behaviors. Students learn to adjust to environmental conditions, group dynamics, and different activity rules from daily routines. They become more accustomed to dealing with change, manage differences among their friends' characters, and show readiness to respond to unexpected social situations.

This social adaptability also strengthens students' independence and social resilience. In various field conditions, students are trained to make decisions together, solve problems collectively, and manage emotions when facing challenges. This experience shapes students' mental readiness to face diverse social environments. Thus, backpacker strategies have implications for developing a more resilient, flexible, and effective person in social interactions. The next implication is the increase in students' social concerns. Intensive interaction during activities encourages mutual help, shared responsibilities, and support for friends who are struggling. Students show greater empathy and awareness that the success of activities depends on group cooperation and solidarity. This concern grows naturally because students experience firsthand the importance of togetherness in achieving common goals.

Social concern is also reflected in students' attitudes towards the surrounding environment. They became more aware of the importance of maintaining cleanliness, obeying common rules, and respecting the community around the activity location. The hands-on experience of interacting with the broader social environment shapes students' collective responsibility and social ethics. This suggests that backpacker strategies have implications not only on interpersonal relationships but also on social and environmental awareness. Pedagogically, the implications of backpacker strategies indicate that authentic learning experiences can enrich the social dimension of basic education. Learning is no longer understood as a process of knowledge transfer alone, but as a process of forming social character through real experience. Interactions that occur naturally during activities become an effective and meaningful social learning medium for students.

From an institutional perspective, these findings provide important implications for the development of educational programs in nature-based madrasas. The backpacker strategy can serve as a routine learning model that supports the sustainable strengthening of students' social competence. Systematic program planning and integration with the curriculum make this activity part of a holistic educational ecosystem. Thus, the implications of implementing backpacker strategies show a real contribution in improving social participation, social adaptation, and student concern. These three aspects are important foundations in the social development of students at the basic education level.



This strategy demonstrates that experiential learning can be an educational process that is more contextual, humane, and relevant to students' developmental needs. The implication can be seen in Table 1 below:

Table 1 Implications of Research Results

No	Implications	Remarks
1	Students' social development	Increase students' social participation in group activities, encourage active involvement in discussion, collaboration, and decision-making, and foster confidence in social interaction.
2	Social adaptation	Being able to adjust to a new environment, not being awkward when in different social situations, staying calm when facing social challenges, confidently interacting with strangers, and showing a positive attitude in social dynamics
3	Student care	Show empathy for friends who are having difficulties, be willing to help friends without being asked, take responsibility for common tasks, and show solidarity within the group.

Based on Table 1, the backpacker strategy implemented programmatically has implications for students' social development, social adaptation, and student concern. This is corroborated by what was conveyed by the Founder of Madrasah Alam Alfa Kids AC, who stated that:

“This backpacker strategy is quite effective at improving our students' social experience. This can be seen in students who are more confident interacting with others; they are also less awkward in new situations and more able to take responsibility and complete tasks together”.

The statement of AC was corroborated by the statement of the head of Madrasah R, which stated that:

“The student experience outside the classroom through this backpacker strategy has a tremendous impact on students. In addition to their increased social experience, students are increasingly active in discussions and expressing opinions. Students also look calmer when carrying out new tasks. Students also increasingly show high empathy, so that if friends need help, they can be helped without having to wait to be asked”

Based on the interview results, observations, and documentation of activities, it can be corroborated that students' social experiences are improving. Students can explore the



surrounding environment as widely as possible. Based on the observation results, backpacking also shows that when backpacking is carried out, students are more engaged and further increase their cohesiveness. The backpacker strategy applied in learning activities at Madrasah Alam Alfa Kids is an experiential learning approach that aims to enrich students' social experiences (Lima et al.). Through this activity, students not only learn in the classroom, but also interact directly with the environment and society. These interactions help students understand social life in real life, practice independence, and foster empathy for others (Kumar, 2025). However, in its implementation, this strategy cannot be separated from various challenges that the madrasah must manage wisely.

Nature-based Madrasah Ibtidaiyah, in addition to prioritizing the cognitive aspect, must also support the affective aspect, especially by fostering good character and cooperation. This is also confirmed by the research results: learning at Madrasah Ibtidaiyah needs to develop all aspects, including preparing students to become independent individuals in an all-digital era. (Maryam, 2025). The main challenge in implementing the backpacker strategy is the limited number of teachers who can accompany the activity. In backpacker activities, mentoring is very important because students learn outside of a more controlled school environment. Teachers act as facilitators who direct the learning experience, ensure student safety, and help students reflect on their social experiences. When the number of teachers is limited, supervision and assistance to students becomes less than optimal. This is strengthened by the results of an interview with Guru KN, who stated that:

“The implementation of the backpacker strategy has a positive impact on students, but the challenge is the limited number of teachers who accompany this activity. Although students have been briefed beforehand, they are also accompanied by a teacher”.

This statement was also corroborated by the AT teacher, who stated that.

“When you look at the challenge faced by the implementation of backpackers, the limited time to carry out activities stems from the need to adjust to various other activities that also need to be prepared. In addition, another challenge in its implementation is the limited range of backpacker implementation in a place that is not too far away. Madrasah also considers the security and safety of students, so they do not dare to hold the activity in a distant location”.

This challenge is increasingly felt because backpacker activities require teachers to divide their attention among several groups of students at once. Each group has different social interaction dynamics, so it requires quite intensive guidance. With a limited number of companions, teachers often must strategize to track students' activities without compromising the expected quality of the learning experience. In addition to teachers' limitations, the limited time to implement activities is also an obstacle to optimizing students' social experiences. Backpacker activities ideally provide a space for students to interact deeply with the surrounding social environment. However, when time is limited, interactions are often brief and do not fully capture the complexity of the community's social life.



The next challenge is the limited range of backpacker activities. Because the participants of the activity come from the Madrasah Ibtidaiyah (MI) level, the location must consider safety, distance, and the students' physical and psychological readiness. This often makes backpacking activities carried out relatively close to schools. This limited reach can limit the variety of social experiences students gain. An environment that is too familiar may not pose social challenges that differ significantly from those in students' daily lives. As a result, students' opportunities to experience the diversity of society and broader social situations become limited. On the other hand, the age of MI students also demands a more careful approach in the implementation of backpacker activities. Teachers need to ensure that each activity remains appropriate to the student's developmental stage. This sometimes requires simplifying the activity so that some of the more complex potential social experiences cannot be fully presented.

Based on the research results, the backpacker strategy is an effective way to improve students' social experience. The implementation of the backpacker strategy at the nature-based Madrasah Ibtidaiyah significantly improves students' social experience. Based on the results of the study, backpacker activities not only serve as educational travel experiences but also as learning media that enable students to interact directly with the surrounding social environment. Through this experience, students can learn about social dynamics in real life, so that learning does not take place only theoretically in the classroom. The results of the study show that the backpacker program can increase students' social participation in various activities. When students are involved in educational journeys, they are encouraged to interact with peers, teachers, and the community they meet during the activity. This situation creates space for students to practice working together, communicating, and sharing roles in groups, which ultimately strengthens their social engagement.

In addition to increasing social participation, backpacker strategies have also been proven to encourage students' social adaptability. This is corroborated by the results of research by Rio and his colleagues, who stated the impact of implementing backpackers. (López Del Río, Ana Abilleira-González, Barcala-Furelos, and Rico-Díaz 2025). In these activities, students are faced with various new situations that are different from the daily learning environment. This experience trains students to adapt to environmental conditions, understand relevant social norms, and be flexible in their interactions with others. (Agostini, Minelli, and Mandolesi 2018, Wei et al. 2024). The study also found an increase in students' social awareness after participating in backpacker activities. Through direct interaction with the community and the surrounding environment, students can see in real terms various social conditions. The experience helps students develop empathy, mutual respect, and awareness of the need to care for others.

The implementation of backpacker strategies in nature-based learning shows that direct experience plays an important role in shaping students' social character. When students learn through real experiences, they not only understand social concepts cognitively, but also feel them emotionally. This makes learning more meaningful and easier for students to internalize. In the context of nature-based madrasas, backpacker activities also support an experiential learning approach that places experience as the center of learning. (Sam Huang and Chen 2018). The learning process not only focuses on delivering



material but also on students' exploration, observation, and reflection on the experiences gained during the activity. (Barker, Chisholm, and Foran 2025, Hollingsworth 2017).

The implementation of backpacker strategies in learning at nature-based Madrasah Ibtidaiyah shows a real contribution to improving students' social experience. This activity presents a more contextual learning process by providing opportunities for students to interact directly with the environment and society. Through this experience, students not only gain knowledge but also understand social values more concretely and meaningfully. In addition, the backpacker strategy encourages greater student social participation by fostering active engagement with peers, teachers, and the community during the activity. This experience also trains students' social adaptability, as they are exposed to situations and environments different from their daily lives, helping them learn to adapt, work together, and be more open in various social contexts.

The backpacker strategy also has implications for a more contextual approach to learning. (Martins and Costa 2021). Learning is no longer limited to theory; it is directly linked to the realities of students' lives. Thus, students can understand the relationship between the learning material and the real situations they encounter in their daily lives. In addition to being contextual, backpacker strategies also present a more humane learning process. In this activity, students are seen as individuals who have the potential to learn through social experiences and interactions. Teachers play the role of facilitators who accompany the student learning process, not just as a conveyor of information. This approach creates a learning atmosphere that is more open, participatory, and respectful of students' experiences.

Another implication is the increasing relevance of learning to students' developmental needs. Backpacker activities provide opportunities for students to learn social skills needed in community life, such as working together, respecting differences, and understanding the social values of the surrounding environment. Challenges that arise in implementing backpacker strategies, such as limited companion teachers, limited implementation time, and a limited range of activities, need to be understood as part of the dynamics of learning program development. In practice, every learning innovation certainly faces various obstacles related to resources, planning, and students' conditions. Therefore, these challenges are not merely obstacles but also opportunities to improve and refine programs.

CONCLUSION

The conclusion of this study shows that implementing backpacker strategies in nature-based Madrasah Ibtidaiyah significantly improves students' social experience. Backpacker activities have been shown to increase students' social participation, adaptability, and concern through direct interaction with the environment and society. Systematically designed experiential learning makes educational travel activities a means of contextual and meaningful learning, so that students not only understand social concepts theoretically, but also experience them directly in daily life. This research has the potential to provide an empirical picture of the implementation of backpacker strategies as a form of experiential learning to develop students' social competence. However, this research still has limitations, including the limited number of accompanying teachers, the relatively short time to implement activities, and the limited range of activities due to the condition and



safety of students at the Madrasah Ibtidaiyah level. These limitations may affect the optimization of activity implementation and the variety of social experiences students obtain.

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