



## Internalizing the Value of Tolerance in Elementary Education: A Case Study at Al Islah Elementary School in Surabaya

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### ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis proses internalisasi nilai toleransi dalam pendidikan dasar dengan mengambil studi kasus di SD Al Islah Surabaya. Fokus penelitian adalah mengidentifikasi tantangan dan strategi yang diterapkan dalam membangun toleransi sejak dini. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode kualitatif dengan desain deskriptif-analitis. Data dikumpulkan melalui observasi, wawancara mendalam dan dokumentasi, kemudian dianalisis menggunakan model interaktif yang meliputi reduksi data, penyajian data, dan penarikan kesimpulan. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa internalisasi toleransi dilakukan melalui integrasi dalam pembelajaran, pembiasaan sosial, dan keteladanan guru. Namun, proses ini menghadapi tantangan berupa kesenjangan antara nilai sekolah dan lingkungan eksternal, keterbatasan pengalaman keberagaman, serta variasi tingkat internalisasi siswa. Penelitian ini menegaskan bahwa pendidikan toleransi memerlukan pendekatan holistik yang mengintegrasikan dimensi kognitif, afektif, dan praksis. Temuan ini memberikan kontribusi dalam pengembangan pendidikan karakter yang lebih kontekstual di tingkat sekolah dasar.

### ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyze the process of internalizing tolerance values in elementary education using a case study of Al Islah Elementary School in Surabaya. The focus of the study is to identify challenges and strategies implemented in building tolerance from an early age. This study used qualitative methods with a descriptive-analytical design. Data were collected through observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation. Data were then analyzed using an interactive model that included data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. The results indicate that internalization of tolerance occurs through integration into learning, social habits, and teacher role models. However, this process faces challenges in the form of gaps between school values and the external environment, limited experiences with diversity, and variations in students' levels of internalization. This study confirms that tolerance education requires a holistic approach that integrates cognitive, affective, and practical dimensions. These findings contribute to the development of more contextual character education at the elementary school level.

## INTRODUCTION

Diversity that is not managed properly can transform from a social strength into a latent source of conflict. In this context, Indonesia, as a multicultural society, faces serious challenges in maintaining social harmony amidst religious, cultural, and ethnic diversity. (Aulia et al., 2024). This is crucial because poorly managed diversity has the potential to lead to social conflict and disintegration. Various phenomena such as increasing intolerance, social exclusivism, and the emergence of stereotypes against certain groups indicate that the value of tolerance has not been fully internalized in society (Izzan & Iqbal, 2023). This situation highlights the gap between taught normative values and evolving social practices. Therefore, systematic efforts are needed to strengthen the internalization of tolerance values in social life from an early age.

Elementary education plays a strategic role as the initial setting for the development of tolerant character. This is due to the child's developmental phase, which is still open to the formation of social values, attitudes, and habits. (Akbar & Alkhadafi, 2025). In this context, schools serve not only as a place for transferring knowledge but also as a space for forming values. Various learning practices and social interactions in elementary schools enable students to learn to appreciate differences directly. (Majenang, 2023). Thus, basic education becomes an important foundation in instilling the value of tolerance before more rigid attitudes and prejudices are formed.

Several previous studies have examined the importance of tolerance education through character education and multicultural education approaches. This shows that tolerance is an issue that has received widespread attention in academic studies. For example, research by (Aryani & Wilyanita, 2022) emphasizes the role of families in instilling values of tolerance from an early age, while (Fibrianto et al., 2022) highlights the importance of inclusive character building in elementary schools. Furthermore, (Addurun Nafis Firdaus, Alim Amin Fathan, Maura Febriyanti, Raisha Safina, Silvia Mulyana Putri, Ika Yatri, 2025) demonstrates that elementary schools have a strategic role as cultural institutions in building tolerance. However, most of this research still focuses on normative and conceptual aspects. Therefore, a more in-depth study of the practice of internalizing tolerance in real-life school contexts is needed.

Although research on tolerance has expanded, there remains a gap in examining the relationship between empirical challenges and implementation strategies within a comprehensive analytical framework. This is important because the process of internalizing values does not occur in an ideal setting but is influenced by various social and cultural factors. In practice, schools face various obstacles in instilling the value of tolerance, ranging from the influence of the external environment to limited exposure to diversity. However, studies that simultaneously link these challenges and strategies in the practice of tolerance education remain relatively limited. Therefore, this research aims to fill that gap.

Based on this background, this study aims to analyze the process of internalizing the value of tolerance in elementary education through a case study at SD Al Islah in Surabaya. This study is grounded in the argument that the internalization of tolerance cannot be achieved through a cognitive approach alone, but requires the integration of learning, social conditioning, and

modeling. Therefore, this study focuses on identifying the challenges and strategies applied in daily educational practice. Thus, this study is expected to provide theoretical and practical contributions to the development of a more contextual and applicable model of tolerance education at the elementary school level.

## **RESEARCH METHOD**

This study employs a qualitative method with a descriptive-analytical design to gain an in-depth understanding of the process of internalizing the value of tolerance within the context of elementary education at SD Al Islah in Surabaya. The research site was selected through purposive sampling, taking into account the characteristics of an Islamic-based school that emphasizes character development. The research subjects included the principal, teachers, and students selected through purposive sampling based on their direct involvement in tolerance education practices. Data collection was conducted through non-participant observation of learning activities and social interactions, semi-structured in-depth interviews to explore understanding, challenges, and strategies applied, as well as a documentary study of the school's curriculum and programs. Data analysis utilized the interactive model by Matthew B. Miles and A. Michael Huberman, which involves data reduction, data presentation, and the iterative and reflective drawing of conclusions.(Sugiyono, 2018). Data validity is ensured through the triangulation of sources, methods, and time, as well as member checks to ensure the consistency and credibility of the findings.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Conceptual Framework of Tolerance in Elementary Education**

Tolerance in the context of education cannot be reduced simply to an attitude of accepting differences, but is a complex process that involves cognitive, affective and practical dimensions (Hubby et al., 2024). The cognitive dimension is related to rational understanding of diversity, the affective dimension concerns attitudes of empathy and respect for others, while the practical dimension is reflected in real actions that reflect an attitude of tolerance (Nashrulloh et al., 2024). Conceptually, tolerance can be understood as an individual's ability to acknowledge the existence of others while respecting their rights within the same social space. From a philosophical perspective, tolerance is rooted in the ethical awareness that diversity is an ontological inevitability in human life (Aulia et al., 2024). Therefore, tolerance is not only social, but also existential, because it concerns how humans interpret their own existence and that of others in the relationship of living together.

Furthermore, tolerance can also be understood as a form of ethical relationship that goes beyond mere passive recognition to active involvement in building a just and peaceful life together (Sahudi, Mukhsin, Yayat Hidayatullah, Ani Rindiani, Ilzam Hubby Dzikrillah Alfani, 2025). Within this framework, tolerance requires a willingness to engage in dialogue, openness to differences, and constructively manage potential conflict. Therefore, tolerance is not a neutral or

apathetic attitude, but rather one that presupposes moral responsibility for the existence of others. This perspective emphasizes that tolerance education emphasizes not only avoiding harming others but also the ability to interact ethically within diversity.

In the context of basic education, tolerance is not only taught as normative knowledge, but is internalized through a process of habituation and ongoing social interaction (Khorri, 2024). The concept of internalization of values assumes that values do not stop at the cognitive level, but rather permeate the structure of consciousness and are manifested in everyday actions. This process occurs through concrete experiences, such as group collaboration, interactions between students, and teacher role models (Arfan, 2022). Thus, schools function as social spaces that enable students to directly experience the practice of tolerance, not just understand it theoretically.

However, this internalization process doesn't happen automatically. It is heavily influenced by the social environment, school culture, and the interaction patterns that develop in students' daily lives. Without consistent practice and a supportive environment, the value of tolerance has the potential to stagnate at the symbolic level (Mala & Luqna, 2023). Therefore, tolerance education at the elementary school level requires a holistic approach, emphasizing not only the curriculum but also school culture and inclusive social relations. In this regard, the role of teachers is crucial as both mediators of values and ethical role models for students. (Bina et al., 2023).

In Islamic tradition, the concept of tolerance is in line with the principle of *tasamuh*, which emphasizes an attitude of openness, respect and broad-mindedness towards differences, without sacrificing the principles of faith (Hubby et al., 2024). *Tasamuh* does not mean relativism that obscures the truth, but is a form of balance between commitment to beliefs and respect for the existence of others (Jamaluddin, Subhan Abdullah Acim, Fathurrahman Muhtar, 2023). Thus, tolerance in Islamic education is not a compromise on values, but rather an expression of ethics in communal life based on the principles of justice and humanity. This perspective demonstrates that tolerance education in the context of religious-based schools has a strong normative foundation and is relevant in addressing the challenges of diversity in society.

### **Tolerance Practices at Al Islah Elementary School Surabaya**

Based on observations and interviews, the practice of tolerance at Al Islah Elementary School in Surabaya is not explicitly taught as a separate subject, but rather integrated into learning activities and the school culture. This approach demonstrates that tolerance is positioned as a cross-curricular value present in various learning situations. In classroom activities, teachers consistently encourage collaborative interactions through group work, discussions, and collaborative problem-solving methods. As one teacher expressed, "We don't teach tolerance as a specific topic, but we incorporate it into daily activities, such as group work and discussions, so that children learn to respect each other." This demonstrates that the classroom functions not

only as a place to transfer knowledge but also as a practical space for directly experiencing the value of tolerance.

Interactions between students demonstrate a relatively inclusive pattern of relationships. Students are accustomed to working in groups with diverse academic abilities, creating space for mutual complementarity and respect for differences. This heterogeneity serves as an important tool in building empathy and social awareness. One student stated, "When we work in groups, we usually mix things up, so we can help each other. If someone doesn't understand, the others help." Furthermore, daily practices such as sharing, helping each other, and refraining from teasing friends become part of a culture that is built repeatedly. One teacher emphasized, "We always remind the children not to tease their friends, because every child has strengths and weaknesses." This demonstrates that the value of tolerance develops through consistent social habits in everyday life. From a pedagogical perspective, teachers play a central role as agents of value internalization. The exemplary behavior demonstrated by teachers in being fair, open, and respectful of differences serves as a primary medium for fostering a tolerant attitude in students. The principal stated, "Teachers must be role models. If teachers don't demonstrate respect, students will find it difficult to emulate them." This statement emphasizes that the relationship between teachers and students is not only instructional but also ethical. Teachers serve as social models who demonstrate how the value of tolerance is realized in concrete actions, enabling students to imitate and internalize it (Akbar et al., 2025).

Furthermore, this implicit and experiential practice of tolerance demonstrates that the process of internalizing values occurs contextually and not formally. Students not only understand tolerance as a concept but also experience it as part of their social lives (Hamid et al., 2021). This is reinforced by one student's statement, "We're taught to respect each other, so if there are differences of opinion, we shouldn't get angry." This kind of experience allows students to build personal meanings about tolerance, making it easier for the value to be embedded in their consciousness.

However, this implicit approach also has certain implications. On the one hand, it allows for a more natural and profound internalization of values; but on the other hand, there is the potential that the value of tolerance may not always be reflectively recognized by students (Miftah Farid; Muhammad Iqbal Al Kautsary; Asep Hilmi Muhammad Sidik., 2024). A teacher admitted, "Sometimes children do it out of habit, but they don't necessarily fully understand the meaning." Therefore, a balance is needed between implicit and reflective approaches, for example through discussion or collective reflection. Thus, the practice of tolerance at Al Islah Elementary School in Surabaya demonstrates that integrating social experience, habituation, and role modeling is an effective strategy for building a tolerant attitude from an early age, although it still requires strengthening students' critical awareness.

## Challenges of Internalizing Tolerance

Although efforts have been made to practice tolerance, research findings indicate a number of challenges that affect the internalization of these values. This indicates that tolerance education does not take place in a sterile environment, but rather within a complex network of social relations (Mukhibat et al., 2024). Therefore, the success of internalizing values is largely determined by the interaction between the school environment and the broader social reality.

First, there is a gap between the values taught in schools and the social reality outside of school (Rizq, 2022). Several informants revealed that students bring perspectives or stereotypes from their family environment that do not always align with the values of tolerance taught at school. One teacher stated, "Sometimes children come with different understandings from home, for example, not wanting to associate with certain friends, and that takes time to straighten out." This statement indicates that schools are not the sole agents of value socialization, but must also deal with the influence of family and community environments. In this context, the internalization of values is an open and dynamic process, inseparable from broader social constructs (Hutagalung & Ramadan, 2022). Thus, these challenges are structural in nature because they relate to social conditions beyond the direct control of school institutions.

Second, the homogeneity of the school environment presents a challenge in itself in building substantive tolerance. The lack of direct interaction with real diversity means that students' understanding of tolerance tends to be conceptual and limited to classroom simulations (Nilnal et al., 2024). One teacher stated, "Because students' backgrounds are nearly identical, they rarely encounter real differences directly." This suggests that limited experiences with diversity can hinder the process of deeply internalizing values. Without concrete experiences, tolerance has the potential to remain an abstract value that is cognitively understood but not fully realized in attitudes and actions. In other words, diversity that is not directly experienced will be difficult to internalize as an ethical experience.

Third, there is variation in the level of internalization of values among students. Observations show that some students still exhibit a tendency towards exclusivity in choosing friends, for example, preferring to interact with certain groups. One student stated, "I prefer to only play with friends I'm close to." This phenomenon suggests that the internalization of tolerance values does not occur uniformly, but is instead influenced by individual factors such as the student's experience, personality, and social environment (Al Umairi, 2023). This variation also indicates that the process of value formation takes time and cannot be achieved instantly. Thus, internalizing tolerance is a gradual process that requires consistency in habituation and reinforcement (Ika Wahyuningsih; Sumedi, 2025).

Analytically, these challenges can be categorized into three main dimensions. First, structural challenges related to the influence of the social environment outside of school, such as family and community (Inayah & Haerudin, 2022). Second, cultural challenges related to the background values, customs, and perspectives that students bring into the school environment.

Third, pedagogical challenges related to the limitations of learning methods in providing authentic experiences of diversity (Listriani et al., 2020). This classification demonstrates that tolerance education requires a comprehensive approach, one that focuses not only on classroom learning but also considers the social and cultural context surrounding students. Therefore, efforts to build tolerance from an early age must be understood as a multidimensional process involving various factors simultaneously.

### **Internalization Strategy for Tolerance**

In response to these challenges, Al Islah Elementary School in Surabaya developed strategies that were simultaneously pedagogical and cultural. The primary strategy identified was the integration of tolerance values into daily learning practices, demonstrating that tolerance is positioned as a cross-curricular value, not simply as supplementary material. Teachers not only convey values verbally but also design learning situations that allow students to directly experience the practice of tolerance. One teacher stated, "We emphasize practice over theory, so children learn to appreciate through collaborative activities, not just explanations." This demonstrates that learning is designed as an experiential space, where students not only understand the concept of tolerance but also internalize it through concrete interactions.

Social conditioning is another important strategy in the process of internalizing values. Through routine activities such as group work, discussions, and informal interactions outside of class, students are trained to develop empathy and mutual respect (Mutaqin & Nasir, 2024). This practice creates a social environment conducive to the natural growth of tolerance. One student stated, "If a friend is having trouble, we usually help them, because that's how we're taught." This statement demonstrates that the value of tolerance is not only understood but has become part of the students' social habits. Thus, this habituation strategy confirms that internalization of values is more effective when done through repeated experiences rather than simply one-way, normative instruction. Furthermore, teacher role models are a key factor in shaping students' tolerant attitudes. Teachers serve as ethical models, providing concrete examples of how the value of tolerance is embodied in everyday actions. The principal emphasized, "Children imitate more quickly than they listen, so teachers must directly demonstrate mutual respect." In this context, the teacher-student relationship is not only pedagogical but also ethical, as values are transmitted through lively and meaningful interactions. This role model strengthens the internalization process because students have concrete references they can emulate in their daily lives.

Furthermore, these strategies show that tolerance education at Al Islah Elementary School Surabaya relies on an approach based on experience, habituation, and social relations (Rifki et al., 2024). These three aspects complement each other in gradually shaping student awareness. Integration in learning provides cognitive space, social familiarization strengthens the affective dimension, while teacher role models strengthen the practical dimension. Thus, internalization of tolerance values occurs holistically and in layers, not limited to one particular approach.

However, existing strategies still need strengthening, particularly in providing more concrete experiences of diversity. The limitations of a relatively homogeneous environment mean that students' interactions with broader differences remain limited. One teacher stated, "We've tried to instill tolerance, but the children haven't had much interaction with diversity outside of school." Therefore, programs such as cross-school collaboration, student exchange activities, or diversity-based projects can be strategic alternatives to enrich students' experiences. By providing more varied, direct experiences, students understand tolerance not only within the internal context of the school but also in broader social realities (Mudrik, 2023). This is important so that tolerance does not stop as a local value, but develops into a more universal social awareness.

## CONCLUSION

The main findings of this study indicate that the internalization of tolerance values at Al Islah Elementary School in Surabaya occurs through the integration of learning practices, social conditioning, and teachers' exemplary behavior in students' daily lives. Tolerance is not taught as an abstract concept but is manifested in concrete interactions such as cooperation, mutual respect, and an inclusive attitude. However, this process faces challenges in the form of a gap between school values and the external environment, limited exposure to diversity due to the homogeneity of the environment, and variations in the level of internalization among students. This underscores that tolerance education is a contextual process influenced simultaneously by pedagogical, cultural, and social factors. This study has several limitations. First, the limited scope of the study, which was confined to a single school, means that these findings cannot yet be widely generalized. Second, the lack of direct interaction with a broader diversity of contexts means that the analysis of tolerance remains focused on the internal school context. Third, this study has not yet thoroughly examined the role of the family environment in the process of internalizing tolerance values. Therefore, future research is recommended to involve more school contexts, expand the scope of informants, and integrate cross-environmental analysis to achieve a more comprehensive understanding.

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