

Teachers' Strategies in Instilling Tolerance in Early Childhood

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ABSTRACT

Early childhood education is crucial for instilling empathy, tolerance, and social values through creative methods, while Aceh Flexi School addresses inclusion challenges with teacher strategies and training to foster harmony. This study examines teachers' strategies in fostering tolerance and the challenges faced in the learning environment. Using a qualitative case study, it explores teachers' methods through interviews, observations, and documentation, validated by source and method triangulation. Results show teachers use adaptive, contextual, and experiential approaches, introducing diversity via stories, play, and cooperation. Strategies are tailored to children's character, emphasizing healthy social interaction and positive emotions. Teachers model inclusivity and fairness, supported by the learning environment and parental involvement. Challenges include external influences, child conflicts, and limited facilities and training. Children need time to adjust. Teachers overcome obstacles through restorative approaches, experiential learning, and emotional support. The synergy among school, children, and community strengthens tolerance practices despite limited resources. In conclusion, fostering tolerance in children requires adaptive approaches, direct experience, and environmental support, with active roles from teachers, parents, and the community to overcome challenges and build inclusive character.

Keywords: Teacher Strategies, Tolerance, Early Childhood Education.

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A. INTRODUCTION

Early childhood education is crucial in supporting children's cognitive, emotional, and social development, serving as a foundational pillar for long-term academic success and well-being (Sindhu & Gupta, 2024). Quality early education helps children acquire fundamental skills such as language, executive function, and socio-emotional competence (Davies et al., 2024). Birth to eight years is critical for brain development (Richter et al., 2021). Early childhood education also supports school readiness, reduces social disparities, provides ongoing benefits even during pandemics, promotes professional development for teachers, and contributes to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals, particularly in ensuring universal access to quality early childhood education (Chattopadhyay, 2025; Davies et al., 2021; Eadie et al., 2021; Alaníz-Hernández, 2024; Spiteri, 2022).

Early childhood education is also vital in shaping social skills, empathy, and moral values as the basis for a tolerant attitude (Badea & Suditu, 2024). Activities such as creative drama and role-playing can enhance social awareness and acceptance of differences (Güven &

Adigüzel, 2015). In addition, English as a Foreign Language (EFL) instruction has been found effective in instilling the values of tolerance, as it incorporates social principles (Atamturk, 2018). Early social studies education helps children understand democratic values, family diversity, and special needs, strengthening an inclusive and tolerant mindset (Kimzan & Acer, 2025). Tolerance is essential in creating a peaceful and inclusive life in multicultural societies through early education that instills values of cooperation and respect for differences (Rokhmansyah, 2017; Kemendikbudristek, 2022).

Tolerance is a complex concept crucial for fostering peaceful coexistence in diverse societies. It encompasses various aspects such as culture, politics, ethnicity, religion, gender, and social life (Costantini et al., 2024). Measuring tolerance is challenging due to varying definitions and applications in different social contexts (Verkuyten, 2022). In cultural and social contexts, tolerance helps balance relations between majority and minority groups (Sayama & Yamanoi, 2020; Obratsov & Marchenko, 2022). However, religious tolerance is often criticized for being superficial, as it does not always promote genuine dialogue and mutual understanding (Smith, 2017; Rüpke, 2023).

Aceh Flexi School, an inclusive school in Aceh Province, applies a learning system that integrates students from diverse backgrounds, including children with special needs. Learning experiences at this school reveal that implementing tolerance is a normative requirement and a practical challenge. Initial observations show that teachers at Aceh Flexi School face complex social dynamics, where differences in learning styles, communication abilities, and cultural and religious backgrounds lead to interactions that are not always harmonious. In many cases, misunderstandings among students trigger minor social conflicts in class, which require specific strategies from teachers to prevent discrimination or marginalization.

Teaching tolerance to students requires various strategies, such as using local cultural stories, engaging films, and field trips to foster understanding of diversity (Zakiah et al., 2023). Teachers play a crucial role, with those with 4–7 years of experience generally showing higher tolerance levels than those with 20–40 years, possibly due to professional fatigue. Personal traits such as emotional stability and patience also enhance their effectiveness (Goncharevich et al., 2019). Methods used include Islamic Religious Education and EFL classes that promote inclusive values (Anwar et al., 2024; Atamturk, 2018). However, challenges remain, such as limited interfaith education and the need for teacher training (Sirry et al., 2024; Lukashova, 2016).

Research by Sayyidatul Munawwarah shows that at Pelita Hati Integrated Inclusive Early Childhood Education in Banjarmasin, teachers instill tolerance among regular children and children with special needs through educational activities such as storytelling and the "Breakfast Program." These strategies foster positive interaction, although there are still obstacles such as limited facilities and underutilized roles of special education assistants (Munawwarah, 2023). Meanwhile, character-based learning in inclusive schools contributes to developing mutual respect among students (Fayza et al., 2024). Role modeling, class discussions, and seating arrangements also support the development of tolerance (Mursyidah et al., 2022).

This study aligns with previous research emphasizing the importance of teacher strategies in inclusive education. However, its uniqueness lies in its context, conducted at Aceh Flexi

School, which features the socio-cultural characteristics of Banda Aceh and implements a flexible learning system. This provides a distinct perspective on understanding the approaches used. The primary focus of this research is to explore in depth the strategies teachers use to instill tolerance in children and to identify the various challenges that arise during the process in an inclusive and adaptive school environment.

This study aims to uncover the strategies teachers use to instill tolerance in students within the inclusive environment of Aceh Flexi School, as well as identify the challenges faced in the process. The findings are expected to offer practical contributions to developing tolerance-based and inclusive teaching strategies and serve as a reference for teachers, schools, and policymakers. The research reveals that teachers use approaches tailored to the students' characteristics and the flexible learning system. However, they continue to face obstacles such as limited resources and the need for training to address student diversity.

B. RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a qualitative approach using a case study method to gain an in-depth understanding of teachers' strategies in instilling tolerance in early childhood students (Moleong, 2019). The case study was conducted at Aceh Flexi School, Jalan Ahmad Tuha No. 1, Gampong Ceurih, Ulee Kareng Subdistrict, Banda Aceh City. The research subjects included teachers working in the inclusive education environment and students from the "Tumbuh Kembang" class. The primary informants were selected purposively from the "Tumbuh" class, as they were considered the most relevant and capable of providing in-depth information regarding implementing tolerance values in the school environment (Sugiyono, 2019).

Data collection techniques in this study included semi-structured interviews with the "Tumbuh" class teacher to explore their strategies for teaching tolerance to children. In addition, students were interviewed to assess their understanding of and responses to the value of tolerance. Participant observation was conducted during classroom learning activities, particularly on social interactions among students from diverse backgrounds. The researcher closely examined teachers' attitudes, language, and methods when conveying the value of tolerance. Documentation was also collected, including students' work, classroom activity photos, and school records or archives relevant to the theme of tolerance.

Data analysis in this study followed an interactive analysis technique consisting of three main stages: data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing or verification. During the data reduction stage, information from interviews, observations, and documentation was selected, categorized, and simplified according to the research focus. Data was then presented using descriptive narratives and matrices to facilitate understanding of emerging patterns. The final stage involved drawing conclusions and verification, in which the researcher interpreted the overall meaning of the data and ensured its validity through triangulation and rechecking with informants and field notes.

To ensure data validity, this study used source and method triangulation techniques. Source triangulation involved comparing data from different informants, such as teachers and students. Method triangulation was conducted by comparing the results of interviews, participant observations, and school documents. This approach enabled cross-validation of data, thereby increasing the reliability of the findings. Through this method, the researcher obtained a more comprehensive and complete picture of the strategies used to instill tolerance

at Aceh Flexi School, while minimizing bias and misinterpretation of the data.

C. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. Teachers' Strategies in Instilling Tolerance in Students at Flexi School Banda Aceh

a. Building Understanding of Tolerance

Teachers at Flexi School Banda Aceh understand tolerance as accepting differences and living harmoniously through mutual respect. In early childhood education, this value is crucial as it forms the foundation of students' social character. Children are introduced to diversity from an early age so that they grow accustomed to viewing differences as natural. Teachers use various approaches such as storytelling, games, and group activities, emphasizing cooperation and mutual respect. Empathy is also instilled through simple activities like helping others, sharing, and showing concern for needy classmates. Through these methods, children learn the importance of tolerance, empathy, and respect for diversity in their daily lives and social environment. This approach aligns with Vygotsky's theory, which emphasizes that children's social development is greatly influenced by social interaction within learning environments (Siregar, 2020). Tolerance education at an early age is more effective when delivered through direct experiences rather than mere verbal instruction (Handayani & Munandar, 2019).

Understanding tolerance in children can be instilled through a holistic approach, such as character education emphasizing empathy, cultural awareness, and multicultural perspectives (Sitanggang et al., 2025). Technology integration also plays a vital role, such as video-based learning and digital tools like the comic maker "*It is Me*", which aids communication and understanding between autistic children and their peers (Sakalli et al., 2021; Terlouw et al., 2020). The teacher's role is crucial, as personality traits and teaching experience influence their tolerance level. Using interactive methods and cooperative learning can improve students' social skills and acceptance of others (Goncharevich et al., 2019; Capodieci et al., 2019).

b. Tolerance Teaching Strategies

The strategies implemented by Flexi School Banda Aceh teachers are adaptive and tailored to each child's psychological condition and individual needs. Teachers go beyond verbal instruction, emphasizing direct experiences and healthy social interactions. Children are encouraged to participate in activities that foster empathy, respect, and understanding of differences. Teachers use differentiated approaches when dealing with diverse student personalities, such as dominant or quiet children. The focus is reinforcing positive emotions through praise and encouragement while empowering students to build respectful relationships. This approach creates an inclusive, supportive, and diversity-friendly learning environment. It aligns with Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) principles, which emphasize emotional regulation, empathy, and positive relationships in character development (Putri & Suharti, 2022).

Teachers also actively involve students in activities that promote collaboration among individuals with different traits. Group activities are rotated so children learn to interact with different classmates. After the activity, teachers facilitate reflective discussions to help students understand the meaning of respect. This helps children

recognize the importance of cooperation and empathy within social settings. Moreover, teachers are primary role models by exemplifying inclusive, fair, and open-minded behavior. Through such modeling, children learn firsthand how to act positively toward differences and build healthy peer relationships. Modeling in moral education is vital, especially in early childhood, as noted in contemporary character education studies (Ramadhani et al., 2021, pp. 11–13). A learning environment emphasizing interpersonal relationships and diversity promotes children's prosocial behavior, including tolerance and empathy (Wahyuni & Kurniawan, 2020). Thus, the teachers at Flexi School Banda Aceh implement character-based teaching strategies that align with inclusive education principles.

c. Meaningful Activities Provided by Teachers

Teachers at Flexi School Banda Aceh design various activities to cultivate tolerance values within an inclusive classroom for children aged 4–6 years. In a supportive learning environment, students actively engage in activities emphasizing the importance of appreciating differences. Children learn through firsthand experiences such as group work, role-playing, and simple discussions. When differences in opinions or habits arise, students respond by listening, showing respect, and striving to understand one another. This demonstrates that tolerance is taught theoretically and reflected in students' daily behavior through consistent practice and teacher guidance. These behaviors indicate the development of strong social-emotional skills, which in the SEL framework are categorized as *relationship skills* and *social awareness* (CASEL, 2021). Through group work, students express that diversity in character and thinking styles is a strength that supports mutual complementarity. This suggests that the learning process encourages acceptance of differences and healthy collaboration. These findings align with recent research that shows childhood collaborative interactions support the development of prosocial behaviors such as empathy, helpfulness, and respect for others (Hidayat, 2021).

In addition, teachers guide students to develop an interest in subjects that convey values of coexistence and mutual respect, such as civics education. Children also respond positively to storytelling activities that explore different cultures and traditions. These are forms of multicultural education applied contextually and enjoyably for young learners. In this context, the teacher is a facilitator, enlivening value-based learning through stories and reflection. Students' recognition of fair treatment from teachers toward all classmates is strong evidence of the successful creation of an inclusive learning climate. A safe and non-discriminatory environment helps build students' confidence and openness in expressing their identities. This supports previous findings that tolerance-based character education must begin with teacher modeling and consistency in treating all students equally (Rachmawati & Yusuf, 2023). Therefore, daily activities at Flexi School Banda Aceh reflect an understanding of tolerance and demonstrate the internalization of these values through real behavior. The inclusive and collaborative principles applied from an early age are expected to become a strong foundation for raising a generation that is open-minded, empathetic, and appreciative of diversity in their future social lives.

2. Challenges Faced by Teachers in Implementing Strategies to Instill Tolerance in Children at Flexi School Banda Aceh

a. Obstacles in the Teaching Process

The biggest challenge arises when children interact outside the school environment, where the surrounding community does not fully embrace the principles of inclusivity practiced at school. As a result, children often feel confused or uncomfortable when confronted with attitudes that are less accepting of differences. Conflicts among students within the school still occur, even though they have been equipped with tolerance values. To address this, teachers employ restorative approaches by creating spaces for dialogue, allowing children to learn how to understand differences and resolve conflicts peacefully. Teachers also face significant challenges in supporting children with special needs, which demands patience, focused attention, and more intensive approaches. These conditions require teachers' mental and physical resilience to provide consistent support. On the other hand, limitations in facilities, as the school operates on a community-based model, pose additional obstacles. The lack of learning resources drives teachers to continuously innovate so that all children remain actively engaged in the learning process. A gradual strategy involving concrete modeling and collaboration with parents becomes the primary method to overcome these challenges.

Teaching tolerance in early childhood involves character education that integrates multicultural approaches to enhance social interaction and acceptance of diversity (Mamat et al., 2022). Continuous professional development is essential for teachers to deal with diversity issues and foster inclusive learning environments (Awang-Hashim et al., 2019). Effective communication between families, schools, and the wider community instills tolerance values (Dursun-Bilgin, 2018). Additionally, hidden curriculum elements through school culture and extracurricular activities reinforce mutual respect (Abdurrohman et al., 2025). Interactive methods and multicultural education play important roles in shaping social tolerance (Nagovitsyn et al., 2018; Ainna et al., 2019).

b. Factors Influencing Tolerance Education

Cultural, religious, and individual differences present unique challenges in implementing inclusive learning. Nevertheless, teachers have successfully cultivated a school culture that accepts diversity as normal and necessary. Greater challenges often stem from external environments that have yet to support these values fully. Therefore, support from parents and the community is crucial in building a sustained understanding of tolerance in children. On the other hand, formal training related to tolerance education remains limited, leaving teachers to develop their approaches often independently. School policies are vital in creating an inclusive and consistent atmosphere in this context. The school upholds the principle that every child is a unique individual who deserves respect without discrimination. Several factors influence tolerance education, including personal characteristics, school environment, policies, and teacher training. Personal traits such as personality type and socioeconomic status can negatively affect outcomes, even when provided with

positive educational interventions (Dražanová, 2017). A positive and inclusive school environment is essential, where socioeconomic and social network factors have greater influence than the school's formal structure alone (Lundberg, 2018). In countries with inclusive education policies, public attitudes, infrastructure, and teacher readiness remain significant challenges (Nosheen & Gaad, 2025). Practical teacher training and policies informed by international data are also crucial (Khamzina et al., 2024; Isac et al., 2018).

c. Children's Response to Tolerance Education

Diversity has made learning activities more engaging for students, as they enjoy exchanging stories and learning new things from peers with different backgrounds. When faced with conflict or differing opinions, most children choose to calm themselves by taking a moment of silence before attempting to resolve the issue through discussion or with the help of a teacher. This behavior reflects the development of peaceful conflict resolution skills among students. Teachers play a vital role in guiding this process by applying fair, open, and supportive conflict resolution strategies. Students show great interest and curiosity during storytelling sessions about family culture and traditions. They learn to appreciate differences in customs and cultural backgrounds while maintaining harmonious social interactions. Thus, challenges in instilling tolerance can be overcome through synergy between teachers, students, and the school community. Environmental support, the habitual practice of inclusive behaviors, and active parental involvement are key factors that reinforce value-based learning centered on tolerance.

D. CONCLUSION

Teachers at Flexi School Banda Aceh instill tolerance in early childhood through adaptive, contextual, and experiential approaches. Children are introduced to diversity early on through storytelling, games, group activities, and the habitual practice of empathy and cooperation. Teaching strategies are tailored to each child's character, emphasizing the importance of healthy social interaction and positive emotions reinforcement. Teachers also serve as role models by demonstrating inclusive, fair, and open attitudes, strengthening tolerance values within the learning environment. Nevertheless, teachers face several challenges, such as the influence of a non-inclusive external environment, interpersonal conflicts among students, limited facilities, and a lack of formal training in tolerance education. Children also require time to adapt to diverse settings. To address these challenges, teachers apply restorative approaches, create meaningful learning experiences, and provide consistent emotional support. Gradual strategies, parental involvement, and synergy between the school and community are key to success. The implication is that tolerance education strategies must continue to evolve through ongoing teacher training and school policies that support inclusive approaches. The learning model at Flexi School can serve as a reference for other schools in building an educational ecosystem that respects diversity.

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AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

- Author 1 : Responsible for designing the research framework, collecting data through interviews and observations, and composing the analysis and discussion sections of the study.
- Author 2 : Conducted the literature review, assisted in data processing, drafted the background and methodology sections, and formulated conclusions and recommendations based on the research findings.

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