



## Strengthening Tolerance Education for Children from an Early Age

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### ABSTRACT

Tolerance education for young children is essential in fostering empathy, acceptance, and peaceful coexistence from an early age. Research highlights that tolerance involves understanding and respecting cultural, religious, ethnic, and social differences, which can be effectively nurtured through early childhood education using diverse strategies such as storytelling, play, and cooperative activities. Creating a tolerant environment requires collaboration among teachers, parents, and the community, with an emphasis on modeling inclusive behavior and providing continuous support. Literature for children, including fairy tales and poems, serves as a valuable tool to convey tolerance themes in an accessible and engaging manner. Additionally, integrating tolerance education into curricula and teacher training enhances the ability to manage diversity and reduce discrimination in educational settings. Overall, strengthening tolerance education from early childhood lays the foundation for social harmony and respectful interactions in increasingly diverse societies.

**Keywords:** *Children's Literature; Cultural Diversity; Early Childhood; Empathy; Inclusion; Social Harmony; Teacher Strategies; Tolerance Education*

### INTRODUCTION

Indonesia as an archipelagic country that is ethnically, religiously, linguistically, and culturally pluralistic holds a meaningful paradox for the study of tolerance education: this diversity is a potential social capital to enrich life together, but at the same time presents a real challenge in the form of rampant symptoms of intolerance and discrimination that are measurable at various age levels and social spaces; this phenomenon is apparent not only in the form of large-scale conflicts that receive media attention, but also in the form of everyday micro-interactions such as bullying practices based on differences (religion, ethnicity, appearance, economic conditions) as well as exclusionary attitudes reflected in the school environment and children's communities. Available empirical data demonstrates the importance of being vigilant about this trend: a recent survey mapping tolerance attitudes among students revealed an increase in indicators of active and exposed intolerance among high school students, which also indicates that the fragility of tolerance attitudes can be detected as early as pre-adolescence if not addressed early (the findings of the Setara Institute survey on the tolerance attitudes of high school students in 2023 showed an increase in the proportion of active intolerance compared to the previous survey) [1].

Furthermore, cross-generational studies and international surveys on the well-being of children and adolescents conducted by agencies such as UNICEF have found that children and young people are increasingly exposed to social pressures and online content that can reinforce stereotypes or exclusion, and report experiences of discrimination and psychosocial stress relevant to the theme of early social attitude formation; such findings underscore that in addition to macro policies, media dynamics and the family-school environment also play a role in shaping attitudes that can have implications for the emergence of intolerant behavior [2].

Research and studies on early childhood education in Indonesia consistently emphasize that practices in early childhood education (PAUD) and early elementary schools have a significant influence on the development of social values—including respect for differences—and that there are curriculum-based character education intervention programs and extracurricular activities that can increase children's capacity for inclusive behavior; local literature (e.g., studies in the *Obsesi Journal* and other academic publications) documents the efforts of PAUD teachers and institutions to instill values of tolerance through folktales, group play, and guided interactions, which have been shown to foster prosocial attitudes when implemented consistently and supported by the family environment.

However, the reality on the ground also shows structural and practical obstacles: the uneven quality of education, the pressure of a dense curriculum, limited teacher training in fostering pluralistic values, and the conditions of families with varying capacities to support positive socialization processes, all affect the effectiveness of tolerance education efforts; on the other hand, the phenomenon of bullying that is rooted in differences often originates from a combination of family, peer, and media factors, as revealed in a number of studies on the determinants of bullying behavior in the context of Indonesian schools—these findings emphasize that bullying prevention is not only a matter of school rules but requires a cross-sectoral approach that strengthens the relationship model between the main socializing actors for children [3].

The socio-political conditions that demonstrate the use of identity as an instrument of mobilization in several past events, as well as indicators of intolerance at the communal level reported in academic studies and monitoring institutions, strengthen the argument that the corridors of early socialization of children must be strategic intervention points to prevent the reproduction of exclusionary attitudes and the reinforcement of identity biases that are detrimental to long-term social cohesion [4], [5].

Based on the empirical description and theoretical studies, the urgency of building an inclusive character foundation from the critical developmental phase—early childhood—becomes very clear: neurocognitive and socioemotional development in the 0–6 years age range shows high sensitivity to primary social experiences (interactions with parents, caregivers, and teachers), routine patterns of playgroups, and behavioral models demonstrated by authoritative figures; because the capacity to form self-concepts and concepts of others is in a dynamic stage, values education interventions at an early age are not only potentially more effective than interventions at an older age, but also have a preventive effect on the internalization of prejudice and stereotypes that can become the basis for discriminatory behavior later in life. Character education literature and local research on tolerance practices in early childhood education (ECE) show that programs that explicitly integrate values education (e.g., through illustrated stories about diversity, cooperative games that stimulate empathy, and cross-group activities that familiarize children with interactions across diverse backgrounds), accompanied by teacher training and parent empowerment, can

produce indicators of increased tolerance and prosocial behavior in children; similarly, the national policy framework on character building and child-friendly schools provides a normative basis for incorporating tolerance components early on in the curriculum and learning practices.

Furthermore, empirical studies in minority areas and vulnerable communities show that contextualized tolerance education interventions—which value local history, language, and cultural practices while teaching the universal value of respect for differences—have better resilience to social resistance and can strengthen community resilience to polarization; this indicates that efforts to strengthen tolerance education should be directed not only at the transfer of normative knowledge but also at the formation of an inclusive relational culture at the school and family levels, with an approach that is sensitive to local economic, geographic, and cultural conditions [6].

Given the evidence linking discriminatory/bullying experiences to long-term impacts on children's psychological well-being—including lowered self-esteem, social isolation, and impaired emotional development—preventive early childhood education-based policies that integrate the development of empathy, emotion regulation, and social skills are both moral and pragmatic imperatives; investments in teacher training, learning tools that promote inclusion, and collaborative parent-school programs that provide practical guidance for addressing differences can be expected to reduce the incidence of difference-based bullying and strengthen the social capital needed by future generations [7].

First, a more comprehensive national mapping of the prevalence of intolerance and bullying at younger ages (including standardized data collection in early childhood education and early elementary schools) is needed to provide a strong baseline for interventions; second, the development of tolerance education curricula for early childhood should be evidence-based, integrating structured play activities, illustrated story literacy that represents diversity, and pragmatic parent engagement modules—all developed through a participatory approach with educators, parents, and local communities to increase the program's relevance and sustainability; third, teacher training should emphasize skills in facilitating discussions about differences that are safe for children, mediative peer conflict techniques, and strategies for creating child-friendly and stigma-free classroom environments; fourth, monitoring and evaluation should adopt multi-dimensional indicators (attitudes, knowledge, behavior) and utilize mixed methods to evaluate both short-term and long-term impacts, including aspects of community social resilience; and fifth, bullying prevention efforts should be viewed as a cross-sectoral agenda involving education, child protection, mental health, and socio-economic policies to address the structural determinants that support exclusion [8], [9]. These arguments are supported by a local literature review that emphasizes the effectiveness of a comprehensive approach, as well as by the findings of a monitoring agency that maps trends in intolerance among students, so that an intervention framework that combines a universal-normative approach and contextual adaptation is a rational step from both a pedagogical and social perspective [10].

Understanding how children develop morality and tolerance can be traced through classic theories of moral development that are still relevant today. Jean Piaget, through his theory of cognitive development, divided children's moral development into several stages. At an early age (around 2-7 years old), children are in the stage of heteronomous morality, or morality by force. At this stage, children view rules as absolute and unchangeable, and the consequences of an action determine whether a behavior is good or bad [11]. Therefore, tolerance education at this stage needs

to be carried out through role models, habituation, and clear and consistent direction from authority figures such as teachers and parents.

Lawrence Kohlberg later expanded Piaget's theory by emphasizing moral reasoning through three main levels, each divided into two stages. Early childhood is generally at the pre-conventional level. In the first stage (punishment and obedience orientation), children determine right and wrong based on physical consequences (punishment or reward). In the second stage (instrumental and relative orientation), children begin to recognize that there are different views of what is right and wrong. The implication for tolerance education is the importance of creating a safe and supportive environment where children can learn through direct experience about the consequences of their actions and begin to be introduced to others' perspectives through stories, role-playing, and simple discussions [12].

Islam, as a religion of *rahmatan lil 'alamin* (blessing for all the worlds), has a very strong theological foundation for promoting tolerance and living harmoniously in diversity. One of the core verses often referred to is QS. Al-Hujurat: 13, which means: "O mankind, indeed We created you from a male and a female and made you into nations and tribes so that you may know one another (*li ta'arufu*). Indeed, the most honorable among you in the sight of Allah is the most pious" [13]. Indeed, Allah is Knowing and Acquainted." The concept of *ta'aruf* (getting to know each other) in this verse is a basic philosophy for human relationships. It is not just superficial acquaintance, but is an active recognition and respect for the identity and existence of others who are different. In the context of early childhood education, the concept of *ta'aruf* can be implemented through activities that encourage children to interact and cooperate with friends who have different ethnic backgrounds, physical abilities, or habits [14].

The values of tolerance in Islam are also reflected in the teachings about compassion, justice, and respect for differences. Research at PAUD Anak Sholih Mandailing Natal shows that tolerance education from an Islamic perspective is implemented through teacher role models (*uswah hasanah*), habituation, and Islamic stories and games. Children are guided to respect each other, share, apologize, and resolve conflicts peacefully, all of which are derived from the values of *akhlakul karimah*. This approach is in line with Pascal's concept of rationality of the heart, which offers a paradigm where religious issues are not only focused on the dogmas of reason alone, but are experienced with a heart full of love, thus being able to penetrate the boundaries of religious space.

Various previous studies have examined the importance of character and multicultural education in early childhood. Research at the Anak Sholih Mandailing Natal Preschool, for example, successfully identified supporting factors for the implementation of tolerance education: teacher commitment, parental support, and a conducive social environment. Despite challenges such as limited media and time. Other research offers philosophical approaches such as perennialism, which emphasizes the recognition of universal spiritual values shared by all religions, as a basis for building harmony. This concept, when combined with religious moderation—which promotes an inclusive and tolerant attitude in religious practice—can serve as strategic pillars in strengthening interfaith dialogue and social solidarity.

In addition, the "7 Habits of Great Indonesian Children" movement launched by the Directorate of Elementary Education Teachers is also an example of a national effort in building a learning culture that instills life values from an early age, starting from the discipline of waking up early, getting used to worship, exercising, consuming healthy food, learning habits, to social habits

[15]. These social habits directly train children to interact healthily, building empathy, cooperation, and tolerance for differences.

Despite the extensive theoretical foundations and supporting policies, a significant gap remains. Much research and programs on tolerance education focus primarily on secondary school-aged children, while practical, contextual, and measurable implementation strategies in early childhood education settings remain relatively limited and require further study. Existing research is often general in nature and fails to provide a comprehensive model for integrating tolerance and Islamic values with the curriculum and daily practices in early childhood education. Furthermore, systemic challenges such as frequent changes to the national education curriculum—which has reportedly changed 10 times since Indonesia's independence—create instability that can disrupt the equitable and sustainable development of quality human resources [16]. Criticism from the Indonesian Student Monitoring Network (JPPI) states that this curriculum overhaul only turns children into "educational probationers," which can lead to confusion and frustration. Therefore, a model is needed that is not only practical and contextual for early childhood education (PAUD), but also has resilience and sustainability by focusing on character building, regardless of the dynamics of the national curriculum.

Based on the background, theoretical framework, and gap identification above, this study aims to: Describe and analyze the implementation of strengthening tolerance education in PAUD and the supporting and inhibiting factors that influence it. The analysis will focus on how tolerance values based on an Islamic perspective are integrated into the main components of PAUD management, including curriculum planning, learning processes, assessments, and community relations.

The novelty of this work lies in the proposed holistic and contextual model for integrating tolerance values into the curriculum and daily practices of Islamic-based early childhood education (PAUD). This model emphasizes not only cognitive aspects (knowledge of differences) but also affective aspects (empathy and appreciation) and psychomotor aspects (skills in interacting and resolving conflicts) [17].

This model is designed to be adaptable to various types of early childhood education (PAUD), particularly those based on Islamic values, while taking into account the context of local wisdom and diversity in Indonesia. This model is built on the foundation of the philosophy of perennialism, which recognizes the existence of universal human values—such as love, honesty, and justice—that transcend the boundaries of formal religion [18]. These universal values are then elaborated and operationalized through the lens of Pascal's "rationality of the heart," where children are guided not just to learn the rules, but to experience the beauty and peace of living side by side with others. The teacher's role is to create positive emotional experiences related to differences, for example through the joy of celebrating religious holidays inclusively or through the shared sadness when a friend is hurt by teasing [19].

The integration of tolerance values into early childhood education is achieved through three main, complementary approaches. First, Integrated Learning, where the values of tolerance and the concept of *ta'aruf* are internalized across all subjects and play areas. In math lessons, for example, children don't just count abstract objects, but are also asked to count the number of friends who wear headscarves, don't, or come from different ethnic backgrounds. Similarly, in storytelling activities, they are not only presented with Islamic stories about brotherhood but also introduced to folk tales from various regions in Indonesia, filled with messages of tolerance and respect for differences.

Second, the Hidden Curriculum approach, which is realized through the creation of an inclusive school environment and culture. This includes the physical arrangement of classrooms that display symbols of Indonesian diversity, such as images of flags, traditional clothing, and houses of worship of various religions, the use of positive and constructive language in every interaction, and the implementation of fair routine procedures such as queuing systems and turn-taking. Third, Contextual Project-Based Learning, where children are invited to engage in simple projects that solve real-world problems around them. For example, the "Getting to Know the Bookseller Teteh from Sunda" project to learn about cultural and professional diversity, or the "Gardening with Friends with Disabilities" project to practice empathy and cooperation. These kinds of projects directly apply the concepts of *ta'aruf* and collaboration in a real-life context.

To support the effectiveness of this approach, several recommended learning methods are implemented. Modeling serves as the foundation, where teachers and all school staff consistently demonstrate respect, active listening, and empathy in every interaction, whether with fellow educators, children, or parents. Habit formation is implemented to build positive routines, such as in the "7 Habits of Great Indonesian Children" movement, which includes greeting, thanking, apologizing, and helping each other [20], [21]. Storytelling with Islamic and Multicultural Media utilizes the stories of the prophets who are full of examples of doing good to all creatures, as well as contemporary stories that depict the diverse social life of Indonesia. Role-playing is used to develop social skills, where children are invited to act out simple social conflict situations and find peaceful solutions, or to act out professions and roles from various cultures. Finally, Community Habits involve children in social activities that go beyond the school walls, such as visits to nursing homes or community service programs, to foster a sense of belonging, caring, and social responsibility within the wider community [22].

The success of this model depends heavily on strong synergy between schools, families, and communities. Schools need to proactively involve parents from diverse backgrounds in program planning and evaluation, conduct parenting classes on tolerance education, and build networks with local religious and traditional leaders to create a consistent ecosystem of values for children. As emphasized in the context of Indonesia Emas 2045, this collaboration will accelerate the birth of a great generation ready to meet the challenges of the future [23], [24].

## RESEARCH METHODS

This research uses a qualitative approach with a case study to explore the implementation of strengthening tolerance education in an Islamic-based early childhood education (PAUD) environment. The research location was Kindergarten X, with a duration of implementation for 3 months, from October to 2023. The research participants consisted of the principal, four teachers, six parents, and direct observation of children's activities in the classroom. Participant characteristics include the principal who plays a role as a manager and policy maker, teachers who are active in the learning process and character development of children, and parents who play a role in supporting tolerance education at home and in the children's social environment [25], [26].

Data collection techniques include participant observation to observe children's interactions and behavior during learning and non-learning activities, semi-structured in-depth interviews with school principals, teachers, and parents to explore understanding, strategies, and challenges in tolerance education, as well as documentation studies in the form of Daily Learning Implementation Plans (RPPH), photos, and videos of activities that record the learning process and children's social

interactions [27]. The main research instrument was the researcher himself, assisted by validated observation and interview guidelines to ensure the consistency and depth of the data obtained.

Data analysis used the Miles and Huberman interactive model, which consists of three main stages: data reduction, data presentation, and verification or drawing conclusions. Data reduction was carried out by sorting and summarizing data from observations, interviews, and documentation to focus on important aspects related to tolerance education. Data presentation was done in narrative and tabular form, making it easier to understand patterns and relationships between data. Data verification is carried out through triangulation of sources and methods, namely comparing data from observations, interviews, and documentation to increase the validity of the findings [28]. This triangulation technique also involves cross-checking information from the principal, teachers, and parents to ensure the validity and reliability of the data.

Several similar case studies demonstrate that integrating tolerance values into early childhood education (PAUD) can be achieved through various activities such as habituation, contextual learning, and non-learning activities that involve direct social interaction with children. For example, at Talenta Kindergarten in Semarang, tolerance values are instilled through activities that prioritize peace, respect for individual differences, and consistent social awareness in daily learning. Adaptive and contextual approaches employed by teachers, such as the use of stories, games, and group work, have also proven effective in fostering inclusive attitudes and empathy in children. Furthermore, parental involvement through parenting activities is an important factor in strengthening tolerance education at home and in children's social environments.

Conceptually, this research framework can be illustrated in a diagram showing the flow of integration of tolerance education in Islamic-based early childhood education (PAUD), starting from curriculum planning that adopts the values of tolerance and Islamic principles (e.g., the concept of *ta'aruf* and QS. Al-Hujurat: 13), implementation of learning that involves habituation and social interaction, to evaluation and reinforcement through collaboration between schools, teachers, and parents. This model emphasizes the continuity between religious values and inclusive social attitudes that are developed from an early age, so that children not only understand tolerance cognitively but also internalize it in their daily behavior.

With this research approach and design, it is hoped that a comprehensive picture can be obtained regarding the practice of strengthening tolerance education in PAUD, supporting and inhibiting factors, as well as strategic recommendations for developing an effective and contextual tolerance education model based on Islamic values. This is important to address the urgent need to build inclusive character from an early age in Indonesia's pluralistic and diverse social context.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### *Tolerance Learning Strategy through Play and Story Methods*

Learning strategies for tolerance through play and storytelling are effective approaches to instilling empathy and social understanding in early childhood. Role-playing with different characters allows children to experience others' perspectives firsthand, enhancing their ability to understand different feelings and situations. Furthermore, storytelling about harmony and friendship provides a moral narrative that children can easily understand, fostering an inclusive attitude and respect for differences. Singing songs about friendship also serves as a fun learning medium and reinforces messages of tolerance emotionally and cognitively [29].

Vygotsky's play theory emphasizes the importance of social interaction and the role of language in children's cognitive and moral development, where role-playing serves as a means of learning through the zone of proximal development with the guidance of teachers or peers. Meanwhile, Bandura's social learning theory highlights the process of imitation and modeling, where children learn tolerant attitudes and behaviors by observing and imitating figures they admire, such as teachers and peers, in the context of play and storytelling. The combination of these two theories supports the effectiveness of play and storytelling methods in building empathy and social understanding in children [30].

Empirical research shows that storytelling, especially involving interactive techniques such as variations in voice, body language, and dialogue, can significantly improve children's empathy skills. Children who engage in stories featuring characters with values of cooperation, helpfulness, and social understanding show improvements in their ability to recognize and respond to others' emotions. Similarly, role-playing involving taking on different social roles helps children internalize values of tolerance and develop inclusive attitudes in everyday interactions.

Furthermore, this method facilitates the development of broader social and emotional skills, such as emotional regulation, effective communication, and peaceful conflict resolution. Singing friendship-themed songs together can strengthen social bonds and a sense of community among children, creating a supportive and inclusive learning environment. This approach also allows children to learn holistically, combining cognitive, affective, and psychomotor aspects in the process of learning tolerance.

In practice, implementing play and storytelling methods requires the active role of teachers as facilitators capable of creating an interactive and enjoyable learning environment. Teachers need to develop creativity in selecting stories and play activities relevant to the child's social context and consistently integrating values of tolerance. Parental involvement is also crucial to strengthening learning at home and in the child's social environment, so that the values of tolerance can be fully internalized.

### *Teacher Modeling and School Culture*

The role of teachers as role models and school culture is crucial in fostering respect for diversity and instilling values of tolerance in early childhood. Teachers serve not only as instructors but also as concrete examples demonstrating inclusive attitudes through the use of language that respects differences and the creation of a classroom environment that represents diversity, such as through posters, toys, and diverse learning media. A classroom environment rich in symbols of diversity contributes to the formation of positive attitudes in children toward cultural, ethnic, and social differences, while also creating a safe learning environment and supporting children's social-emotional development [31].

In the context of Islamic education, the concept of *uswah hasanah*—a good example—is an important foundation for teachers in carrying out their roles. As *uswah hasanah*, teachers must be able to display attitudes and behaviors that reflect Islamic values, such as justice, compassion, and respect for others, so that children can emulate and internalize these values in their daily lives. This aligns with the principle of the hidden curriculum, namely the values and norms implicit in the school environment that indirectly shape children's character and attitudes. A school environment that supports diversity and inclusivity is an important medium for conveying the hidden curriculum, so that learning about tolerance occurs not only explicitly through materials, but also through everyday interactions and experiences at school [32].



Research shows that teachers who actively practice respect and use inclusive language can increase children's awareness and acceptance of diversity. For example, teachers who engage children in discussions about cultural differences, use stories and activities that reflect diverse backgrounds, and display symbols of diversity in the classroom can create a positive classroom climate and support children's social development. Furthermore, teacher involvement in designing and managing inclusive learning environments also plays a role in reducing prejudice and stereotypes from an early age, so that children grow up with a broader understanding and empathy for others.

An inclusive and diversity-respecting school culture also requires structural and pedagogical support, such as ongoing teacher training on multicultural education and character development, as well as school policies that promote values of tolerance. Systematic studies have shown that a positive classroom climate, characterized by supportive teacher-student interactions, trusting relationships between teachers and families, and the use of learning materials that reflect diversity, significantly contributes to children's social and emotional development in multicultural contexts. Therefore, strengthening school culture must be a priority in efforts to build inclusive education from an early age.

Furthermore, the role of teachers as agents of change in tolerance education also requires critical awareness of their own social position and context, as examined within the framework of critical pedagogy and culturally relevant education. Teachers who understand and reflect on their own identities and experiences of diversity tend to be more effective in teaching and modeling inclusive attitudes. This is important considering that diversity in the classroom is not only demographic, but also involves complex aspects of language, culture, and life experiences. Therefore, developing teacher capacity through training and professional reflection is key to the successful implementation of authentic and sustainable tolerance education [33].

### *Strengthening Values through Integration into Daily Activities*

Values education in early childhood is a very strategic arena for instilling and internalizing basic social values such as tolerance, empathy, cooperation, and respect for diversity; theoretically, early childhood (0–6 years) is a sensitive period for affective and social development where direct experience, repetition of routines, and modeling of behavior by significant figures shape early representations of “self” and “others,” so that values education interventions at this stage have the potential to have long-term impacts on children's social relationship patterns in the future. Child development and character education literature confirms the effectiveness of value reinforcement strategies carried out through integration into daily activities (habit formation) and experience-based thematic projects—not just as additional activities or standalone materials—because integration allows values to become part of repeated, observed, and shared interpreted habitual practices in the context of children's real lives. The concept of internalization here is not merely cognitive absorption of norms, but rather the formation of affective-behavioural dispositions that emerge through repeated experiences, role models, and opportunities for safe social practice; Therefore, educational designs that place the value of tolerance in daily routines (for example, praying activities according to each person's beliefs, sharing supplies, taking turns when playing) as well as thematic projects that allow for cultural exploration (for example, Indonesian cultural festivals, mini-exhibitions of local culture) have empirical and conceptual rationales for fostering children's ability to appreciate differences spontaneously and contextually.

Practically, the integration of tolerance values into daily habits in PAUD (Early Childhood Education) environments can be realized through several seemingly simple but meaningful activities: the habit of praying according to each person's beliefs, which is interpreted as respect for differences in worship rituals and religious freedom; the habit of sharing supplies or toys that trains prosociality and empathy; the routine of greeting each friend in a warm manner; practice waiting for turns, taking turns in games, and resolving conflicts through simple dialogue moderated by teachers; and the introduction of picture stories that represent the diversity of ethnicities, languages, and cultural practices in Indonesia. These activities, when carried out consistently and consciously linked to narrative values (e.g., "we respect friends who are different"), help children understand tolerance as a practice—not just an abstract concept—implemented in daily interactions. Several local studies have shown that folklore media (big books based on local stories) and structured games are effective in increasing tolerance and prosocial attitudes in early childhood because children are allowed to place themselves in other roles and experience social scenarios that require understanding others' perspectives. Action research and case studies in Indonesia confirm that strategies based on routines and local cultural narratives show visible results in increasing indicators of prosocial behavior and inclusive attitudes in early childhood education classrooms; these studies position habituation as a powerful internalization mechanism because it combines affective (positive emotions in interactions), cognitive (simple understanding), and pragmatic (real actions) aspects simultaneously.

Expanding on the above point, thematic projects such as "Understanding the Nusantara Cultural Festival" or "Nusantara Mini Expo" are examples of educational practices that enable the integration of tolerance values at the collective and cultural levels. These projects engage children in multisensory learning experiences: they see clothing, hear music, taste food (with attention to allergies and hygiene), produce simple creations, and present their findings to peers and parents. Thematic projects provide children with opportunities to experience diversity as interesting and valuable, facilitate teacher-led intercultural dialogue, and enable the formation of a collective identity that values differences. Such practices also stimulate family and community engagement—parents are encouraged to participate, sharing stories or family cultural artifacts—which in turn reinforces children's experience that diversity is valued not only at school but also at home. Several reports of practices in Indonesia (e.g., conference reports and studies on the implementation of educational festivals) document how the Nusantara Cultural Festival or mini cultural exhibitions in elementary schools/preschools create spaces for intercommunity dialogue, enrich children's social skills, and directly reduce stereotyping tendencies through personal interaction experiences. Given Indonesia's heterogeneous context, such thematic projects also have a pedagogical function in combining cultural recognition with the strengthening of civic values—for example, respecting the symbols and customs of others—thus supporting the process of forming an inclusive national identity.

From a developmental psychology perspective, internalizing values through daily activities and thematic projects is closely related to social learning and social-cognitive learning processes; children observe and imitate the behavior of teachers and parents (modeling), receive social feedback, and through positive reinforcement develop certain behavioral tendencies. Furthermore, discussions and stories about feelings (conversations about inner states) have been shown to enhance children's prosocial skills, including empathy and willingness to share—factors that functionally support tolerance. Interventions that combine practical activities (sharing, cooperative play), teacher-guided discussions (exploring feelings and motivations), and reinforcement of values

through daily routines tend to produce stronger results than normative instructional approaches without practical experience. The international literature on children's prosociality also shows that sharing and helping behaviors in preschool can be modified through learning contexts that support mental-state understanding and social reinforcement, so that the habit of sharing supplies or toys is not merely a fleeting altruistic act, but rather an internalized practice when linked to an explanation of values (e.g., "we share so that our friends are also happy"). Recent empirical studies on food sharing and prosocial behavior in preschool support this claim, showing that social conditions (close friends vs. others) and teacher facilitation influence children's sharing tendencies; these results can be adapted in the ECE context to design learning situations that maximize opportunities for internalizing tolerance through concrete actions.

Analytical, the integration of values through daily practices and thematic projects can be understood as a contextual internalization process that differs from topical or episodic "values teaching" techniques. Internalization in context emphasizes the importance of continuity (repetition and routine), emotional engagement (positive affect), social engagement (interactional opportunities), and cultural relevance (cultural fit). When the value of tolerance is present as part of a respected religious routine, a sharing ritual, or a cultural activity that is exhibited and discussed, children process these values within a meaningful experiential framework; they are not simply told that "we must be tolerant," but experience the social and emotional impacts of tolerant actions (e.g., a feeling of acceptance, praise from teachers, happiness from friends). The results of this type of education tend to be long-lasting because the internalization process is not simply normative memorization but the formation of social schemata that are automatically activated during real interactions. Case studies of values integration in Indonesian early childhood education (PAUD) settings show that locally context-based programs—for example, using local folktales to illustrate the value of togetherness, or involving local communities in cultural projects—increase the relevance of learning and reduce parental resistance to material perceived as "too abstract." This contextualization is crucial in a multicultural country like Indonesia where the meaning of the term "tolerance" can differ across groups; therefore, integrative strategies must be designed to be culturally sensitive so that the values taught are not seen as foreign or counter-normative to family practices.

Comparing this values integration with other research on integrated character education, several broadly consistent findings emerge: first, studies of character integration implementation across various levels of education (preschool to elementary) generally find that systematic integration—through curriculum, classroom environment, teacher training, and family engagement—is more impactful than stand-alone programs; second, successful integration relies heavily on teachers' capacity to be values facilitators (not just instructors), which requires pedagogical training on how to utilize daily activities as moments for values learning; third, ongoing monitoring and evaluation using behavioral indicators (not just values knowledge) are necessary to assess progress in internalization. Quantitative and qualitative research on integrated character in Indonesia highlights challenges related to uniform implementation: although national policy advocates character strengthening, implementation on the ground varies widely due to differences in resources, teacher competencies, and family engagement; therefore, locally adaptable thematic projects and routines are often strategies that allow for adaptation without losing the pedagogical core. Meta-studies and international literature reviews also support that integrative approaches that

combine direct experience, guided reflection, and social reinforcement prove most effective in shaping moral and social dispositions in children.

However, there are also a number of critical concerns that need to be addressed when designing values integration through habituation and thematic projects. First, there is a risk of banality or ritualism—when routines are repeated without meaningful reflection, resulting in children performing actions without understanding their meaning. For example, prayer activities performed merely as routines without a simple explanation of tolerance and respect for other beliefs can end up becoming formalities. Therefore, teachers must contextualize routines through dialogue, stories, and concrete examples to convey the meaning of values. Second, ethical concerns arise when activities relate to religion or belief—learning approaches must respect families' religious freedom and avoid proselytism; best practice is to provide space for each child to express their own beliefs in a safe and respectful setting, and to treat differences as learning materials, not conflict. Third, there needs to be an awareness that values integration cannot replace structural needs: issues such as economic inequality, social segregation, and external exclusion can hinder the internalization of values if not addressed through broader policies. Therefore, values reinforcement in early childhood education needs to be situated within a broader ecosystem of policies and community support. The literature on the implementation of child-friendly schools and inclusion programs emphasizes the importance of synchronization between school practices and family/community support to achieve sustainable results [34].

At the operational level, the design of values integration programs for PAUD can follow several practical principles: (1) incorporating the value of tolerance into the RPPH (Daily Learning Implementation Plan) so that the value becomes an official part of the learning objectives for each session; (2) developing specific and observable habituation guidelines—for example, indicators such as “waiting one’s turn” or “inviting friends to play” that can be observed and given positive feedback; (3) designing participatory and multisensory thematic projects, such as mini cultural festivals involving exhibitions, simple dances, or puppet shows that represent diversity; (4) involving parents as learning partners through values-related homework assignments—for example, bringing a family specialty for a sharing session (with hygienic settings) or sharing family traditions in class; (5) training teachers in values facilitation skills—how to facilitate discussions about feelings, how to resolve children’s conflicts using language that emphasizes respect, and how to model inclusive behavior; (6) conducting monitoring based on simple but meaningful behavioral indicators, so that teachers can track the development of values internalization in each child. These approaches are based on a combination of empirical evidence and good practices documented in early childhood education research in Indonesia as well as international literature on integrated character education [35].

From an evaluation perspective, measuring the impact of integrative pedagogy on the internalization of tolerance requires a multi-method approach that combines behavioral observations, portfolio assessments (photos/videos of activities, teacher notes), and reflective reports from parents and children (in the form of simple narratives or drawings). Observation instruments should be designed to capture the frequency and quality of tolerant actions—e.g., how often a child invites playmates from different backgrounds, how they respond to differences in eating habits, or how they participate in cross-cultural activities. Studies in the literature using repeated observations and prosocial measures report that measurable behavioral changes often emerge after several weeks to months of integrated intervention, with inter-individual variation influenced by family and

temperamental factors. Therefore, program evaluations should consider realistic time frames and employ multilevel assessments (short-term for behavioral observations, medium-term for habit consolidation, and long-term for dispositional influences).

Finally, theoretical discussions on strengthening values through integration require recognition that tolerance education is not only a tool for preventing discrimination but also for building productive social capacities: children accustomed to respecting differences tend to demonstrate better cooperation skills, social flexibility, and readiness to interact in pluralistic environments. Within the framework of inclusive community development, investment in values education from an early age through daily practices and thematic projects can be interpreted as a long-term investment in social capital, community cohesion, and democratic stability. Comparison with the literature on integrated character education demonstrates consistency in recommendations—namely the need for a supportive curriculum, teacher capacity, family involvement, and behavior-focused evaluation—but also emphasizes the need for contextual adaptation to ensure cultural relevance and sustainability of practices. Policy implications include the importance of incorporating values integration guidelines into national/regional early childhood education curriculum standards, providing teacher training modules on inclusive values facilitation, and encouraging school-community collaboration on cultural projects that foster cross-group dialogue and understanding. In summary, theoretical and empirical evidence supports the claim that reinforcing values through integration into daily activities and thematic projects is an effective and contextual strategy for internalizing the value of tolerance in early childhood, with the caveat that successful implementation depends heavily on consistency of practice, cultural sensitivity, and support from the broader educational ecosystem [36].

#### *Parental Participation and Implementation Challenges*

Parental involvement in children's education is a crucial factor influencing the success of the learning process and their overall development. Numerous studies have shown that parental involvement not only positively impacts academic achievement but also children's social and emotional well-being. However, implementing parental involvement often faces various challenges, such as limited resources, unsupportive parental paradigms, and communication barriers between schools and families. For example, a qualitative study of parents of premature infants revealed that fear of handling the infant, time constraints, and changes in daily routines were major obstacles to implementing early intervention at home. In addition, research in the Philippines on parental involvement in STE (Science, Technology, and Engineering) programs shows that although the level of parental involvement is quite high, there are significant challenges in terms of infrastructure and communication between schools and parents that hinder the effectiveness of the program.

In the context of character education and online learning for early childhood, strong partnerships between schools and families are crucial to addressing these barriers. Studies in Kenya and Tanzania highlight that parents' lack of understanding of their role in competency-based curricula, time constraints, and economic constraints are key barriers to parental involvement. Therefore, the proposed strategy includes increasing the socialization of parents' roles, training in learning support skills, and providing a variety of flexible participation methods to suit parents' circumstances. This approach is also supported by findings that emphasize the importance of effective communication and harmonious relationships between schools and families as the foundation of a productive partnership.

Furthermore, specific challenges in online learning, such as parents' lack of technology management skills and children's motivation, also require special attention. Research in the United Arab Emirates shows that limited language skills and children's motivation are major barriers to online English learning, necessitating school support in the form of parent training and intensive communication [37]. In this context, empowering parents through training and technical support is key to increasing their involvement in online learning, particularly in developing gross motor skills in early childhood, which require direct and consistent guidance [38], [39].

## CONCLUSION

Research on the impact of online learning on gross motor skills in early childhood has shown mixed results but generally emphasizes the importance of adaptive and innovative learning approaches to support children's motor development. Experimental studies with e-Learning interventions for early childhood educators indicate significant improvements in children's locomotor skills, although motor control has not shown significant changes, indicating that online training for teachers can contribute positively to children's gross motor development. Furthermore, the use of audio-visual and interactive media in online learning has also been shown to be effective in increasing children's motivation and engagement in physical activities that support gross motor development, as demonstrated in research on the development of audio-visual media that received positive responses from students and educators.

However, online learning also faces challenges, particularly in terms of the limited direct physical interaction essential for gross motor stimulation. Qualitative studies on online learning for early childhood children highlight the difficulty in maintaining children's concentration and engagement during online sessions, necessitating specific strategies such as integrating fundamental movement exercises and sensory activities that can be done independently at home with virtual teacher guidance. Project-based learning approaches have also shown positive results in improving children's coordination, body balance, and large muscle strength through thematic activities tailored to the child's needs and abilities, which can be adapted in the context of online learning to optimize gross motor development.

Furthermore, family environmental factors and parenting styles also influence children's gross motor development during online learning. Research shows that an overprotective parenting style is positively correlated with children's gross motor skills, while a high tendency to be addicted to digital games can hinder motor development due to reduced physical activity. Therefore, the role of parents in accompanying and facilitating children's motor activities during online learning is crucial to address the limitations of direct physical interaction.

Overall, online learning has the potential to support the development of gross motor skills in early childhood if supported by interactive and innovative learning media, training for educators, and active parental involvement. However, online learning also requires special adaptations to overcome the limitations of direct physical stimulation and maintain children's motivation to stay active. Further research is needed to develop effective and sustainable online learning models to support gross motor development in early childhood, including the exploration of technologies such as virtual reality games that have shown promising results in children with special needs. Therefore, the integration of technology, appropriate pedagogical approaches, and family support are key to optimizing the impact of online learning on gross motor skills in early childhood.

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