

Implementation of Early Childhood Multicultural Education in Increasing Tolerance

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ABSTRACT

Multicultural education is an important approach in building tolerance from an early age, especially amidst the socio-cultural diversity of Indonesian society. Early childhood is in a period of rapid development in the social-emotional aspect, so it is necessary to provide stimulation through learning activities that respect differences, foster empathy, and encourage positive interactions between children with diverse religions and backgrounds. This study aims to analyze the implementation of multicultural education in increasing tolerance in early childhood at Santa Bernadeth Kindergarten. The study used a descriptive qualitative method with observation, interview, and documentation techniques. The results showed that multicultural education was implemented through contextual learning activities, the use of media based on religious and cultural diversity, inclusive habits, and social interaction practices that emphasize the value of mutual respect. Teachers have a central role as facilitators and role models in building tolerant behavior, while the school environment creates a culture that supports diversity. This study concludes that the consistent and planned implementation of multicultural education can increase empathy, cooperative skills, and acceptance of children's differences. These findings provide an important contribution to the development of tolerance learning models in schools.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Early childhood education plays a fundamental role in shaping a child's basic character, including social, emotional, and moral skills. At this stage, it is crucial for children to understand the social realities around them, recognize differences, and develop responses to various interpersonal situations. Experts state that early childhood is the most effective time to instill the values of tolerance, as children's emotional regulation and empathy skills are developing rapidly (Sulastri, 2021). Therefore, an

appropriate educational approach is key to developing a tolerant character in children from an early age.

Indonesia itself is a highly multicultural country, meaning it encompasses a diverse range of religions, ethnicities, cultures, languages, and customs. In the context of Indonesia's pluralistic society, children grow up in an environment filled with diverse cultures, languages, religions, and social values. This diversity presents both potential and challenges in the educational process. If not handled properly, differences can actually trigger social conflict in the future (Pratiwi, 2022). Therefore, educational institutions, particularly kindergartens, need to provide a learning environment that positively introduces diversity, fosters social acceptance, and fosters mutual respect.

Multicultural education emphasizes recognition, appreciation, and understanding of diversity in backgrounds, cultures, ethnicities, and religions. Furthermore, multicultural education has emerged as a pedagogical approach recognized as effective in instilling tolerance in early childhood. This education encourages children to recognize, accept, and appreciate differences in their environment, whether in cultural, ethnic, religious, or cultural aspects (Sanjaya & Herlina, 2023). Furthermore, multicultural education emphasizes the development of a perspective that all individuals have equal status and value within the community. This approach aligns with the democratic values that underpin national education.

The implementation of multicultural education in kindergartens not only focuses on delivering learning materials related to diversity, but also encompasses how teachers create a safe learning environment that respects differences. Teachers need to encourage children to interact positively, resolve conflicts peacefully, and learn to see things from others' perspectives (Ardiansyah, 2021). Furthermore, teachers need to model tolerant behavior in every day of school activities so that it becomes a habit.

Multicultural education in early childhood can improve children's social skills, such as empathy, cooperation, and the ability to understand others' perspectives (Wibowo, 2020). Children who are accustomed to seeing diversity in their learning environment tend to be more accepting of differences as they grow older. This demonstrates the importance of kindergarten in building a strong foundation of tolerance from an early age through systematic educational interventions.

However, the implementation of multicultural education in kindergartens still faces various obstacles. Many teachers lack a comprehensive understanding of the concept of multiculturalism and relevant learning strategies. Furthermore, the lack of media that reflects diversity often hinders providing meaningful learning experiences (Sudarma, 2023). Therefore, capacity building for teachers is necessary through training and the development of materials on multicultural education.

At the same time, advances in information technology have opened up new opportunities for implementing multicultural education. Various digital learning resources containing stories, images, or videos about diversity can be utilized to enrich children's learning experiences. Research by Kurniawan (2024) shows that the use of diversity-based visual media allows children to understand the concept of difference in a more concrete and accessible way.

The school environment also plays a crucial role in building an inclusive culture. Schools need to create an environment of acceptance, mutual respect, and freedom from discrimination. Habitual activities such as morning greetings, playing with diverse groups, and positively managing conflict are essential components of multicultural education implementation strategies (Hasanah & Putri, 2022). This demonstrates that the development of a tolerant character is inseparable from school culture.

Besides teachers, parental involvement also plays a crucial role. Parents are the primary role models for children in understanding diversity within the family environment. Research shows that parental attitudes toward diversity significantly influence children's behavior at school (Mulyani, 2020). Therefore, collaboration between teachers and parents is a crucial element in creating synergy in multicultural education.

In addition to the family environment, the surrounding community also significantly influences children's understanding of social diversity. Children who grow up in diverse communities will interact more with individuals from different cultural and religious backgrounds, increasing the opportunity to

develop a tolerant attitude (Rahmawati, 2022). However, without appropriate educational support, children can misinterpret differences as threatening or confusing. Therefore, schools need to be a balancing space that provides concrete guidance on how children interpret and respond to diversity positively.

Multicultural education in kindergarten focuses on developing four basic skills: self-awareness, awareness of others, the ability to understand differences, and the ability to interact positively. These four skills are the foundation for developing a mature attitude of tolerance later in life (Nugroho & Fadillah, 2023). Children with self-awareness are able to identify their emotions, while awareness of others helps them understand that each individual has a unique background. The ability to understand differences makes it easier for children to reject new experiences, and positive interactions enable them to build healthy social relationships.

Children aged 5–6 years begin to distinguish between social categories such as skin color, language, or certain customs, but their understanding of the social meaning of these categories remains highly flexible. This is what makes multicultural education interventions highly effective at this age range (Setyaningsih, 2021). When teachers provide positive learning experiences about diversity, children tend to develop inclusive mindsets that persist over the long term. Conversely, negative or discriminatory experiences at an early age can shape beliefs that are difficult to eradicate.

In Indonesia, multicultural education programs are now part of school initiatives. The focus is not only on cultural introductions through ceremonial activities such as cultural festivals, but also on integrating values of tolerance into daily learning activities (Lestari, 2023). For example, teachers can integrate the value of respecting differences into group play routines, simple discussions, or sharing activities. This approach is more effective because the values of tolerance are practiced in real life, not just taught verbally.

The implementation of multicultural education requires teachers to possess adequate pedagogical, social, and emotional competencies. Teachers are not only responsible for delivering material but also for modeling tolerant behavior that children can directly observe. Numerous studies show that children imitate teachers' actions, including how they resolve conflicts, respond to differences of opinion, or treat all children fairly (Putri & Sari, 2024). Therefore, teacher competence is a crucial element in determining the success of multicultural education in schools.

In addition to individual competencies, teachers and schools need to create internal policies that reflect the principles of equality and mutual respect for differences. These policies can include the use of positive language, prohibitions on discrimination, the creation of learning environments that represent diversity, and the provision of media that depicts various social groups (Hartati, 2020). When children see various forms of diversity reflected in the school environment, they tend to perceive differences as a natural part of life, not something to be feared or avoided.

However, not all schools have adequate resources to support the optimal implementation of multicultural education. Some schools face limitations in learning media, teacher skills, or support from parents who lack an understanding of the importance of multicultural education (Fauziah, 2022). This highlights the need for synergy between schools, the government, and the community to collaboratively create an educational ecosystem that supports diversity. This support is crucial so that multicultural education remains not merely theoretical but truly implemented in children's lives.

Santa Bernadeth Kindergarten is an interesting example to study because it operates in a diverse social environment. The children attending the school come from families with diverse religious backgrounds, social statuses, and cultures. This situation creates both a need and an opportunity for the school to develop a comprehensive multicultural learning program. Based on initial observations, the school already has routines such as morning greetings and group play activities that reflect the values of unity and togetherness, but their implementation has not been systematically structured. In addition, teachers are also committed to building inclusive interactions but still need to strengthen concepts in the learning curriculum.

Research is needed to uncover how multicultural education is implemented in learning activities at Santa Bernadeth Kindergarten, as well as how this implementation impacts children's tolerance.

Research focused on real-world practices can make a significant contribution to the development of multicultural education models that are appropriate to the characteristics of Indonesian children. Furthermore, this research can provide input for other educational institutions seeking to develop similar approaches (Yuliana, 2024).

Based on this background, this study aims to describe the implementation of multicultural education in increasing tolerance in early childhood at Santa Bernadeth Kindergarten. This research is important to provide an empirical overview of the strategies, challenges, and impacts of multicultural education in the school environment. With comprehensive research results, it is hoped that schools, teachers, and parents can strengthen their collective efforts to cultivate a young generation with tolerant, inclusive characters and the ability to live harmoniously in a diverse society.

2. METHODS

This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach to understand the implementation of multicultural education in a real-life school context. This approach was chosen because it depicts the learning processes, social interactions, and dynamics of tolerance that naturally emerge in early childhood (Creswell, 2021). The research focuses on how teachers implement multicultural values in learning activities, how children respond to them, and the factors that support and hinder their implementation.

The research was conducted at Santa Bernadeth Kindergarten, located at Jl. Diponegoro No. 741, West Tanjungpinang District, Tanjung Pinang City, Riau Islands. Santa Bernadeth Kindergarten has diverse socio-cultural characteristics, making it relevant to the needs of this research. The research subjects included the principal and teachers. Meanwhile, children aged 5–6 years old served as the primary observation subjects for observing the development of tolerance attitudes.

Data collection was conducted using three techniques: direct observation of learning activities, interactions between children, and school-based practices; in-depth interviews with principals and teachers regarding the implementation of multicultural education; and documentation, such as photographs of other relevant learning activities.

Data analysis was conducted through the stages of data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing, following the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2020). Triangulation techniques were used to increase data validity by comparing information from various sources and instruments. Thus, the research results are expected to provide a comprehensive overview of multicultural education practices at Santa Bernadeth Kindergarten.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The research results show that the implementation of multicultural education at Santa Bernadeth Kindergarten is carried out through various learning and habituation activities that emphasize aspects of equality, diversity, and respect for differences. Teachers begin each activity by facilitating positive interactions between children through group games, morning greetings, and morning activities that involve all children regardless of background (Lestari, 2023). These activities build a foundation of warm interactions so that children feel safe and accepted.

Teachers also implement an inclusive, child-centered learning approach. They accommodate diverse interests, provide equal opportunities in play activities, and create spaces for children to express their understanding of their respective religions, ethnicities, and cultures. This approach has been shown to increase self-confidence while also opening up opportunities for children to recognize their differences (Hasanah, 2024).

During play activities, teachers deliberately organize groups of children from diverse backgrounds. This arrangement aims to encourage children to work together and learn to understand the characteristics of their peers, who are not always the same as themselves. Previous research has shown that this strategy is effective in fostering empathy and broadening children's social perspectives (Wibowo, 2020).

Learning media is also a crucial part of implementing multicultural education. Teachers use storybooks, pictures, and visual media that represent diverse religions and cultures. Children show great interest in illustrated stories about friends from different religions or ethnicities, which helps them understand diversity concretely (Kurniawan, 2024).

Observations show that children are beginning to exhibit positive behavioral changes, such as helping each other, sharing, and being more selective with playmates. These changes demonstrate that the implementation of multicultural education has a significant impact on developing tolerance in early childhood (Rahmawati, 2022).

Teachers also implement simple discussions using language that children can easily understand. Discussion topics often relate to family customs, regional specialties, or differences in clothing styles. These discussions provide an important space for children to understand that differences are a normal part of life (Nugroho & Fadillah, 2023).

Habitual practices also play a crucial role. Children are taught to greet each other, apologize when they make a mistake, and express gratitude in every interaction. This practice teaches children to recognize social values that underlie tolerant behavior, such as empathy and politeness (Putri & Sari, 2024).

In conflict management, teachers use a dialogical approach. Instead of imposing punishment, teachers encourage children to discuss their feelings and those of their peers. This approach teaches children to resolve conflicts peacefully and understand their peers' perspectives. This strategy has proven effective, according to research by Setyaningsih (2021).

Religious celebrations are an important part of introducing religious tolerance to children. Santa Bernadeth Kindergarten hosts religious celebrations such as Christmas, Eid al-Fitr, and Chinese New Year. The school also introduces culture through traditional clothing and traditional foods from various regions. These activities not only introduce children to religious holidays and other cultures but also celebrate differences as a shared treasure (Lestari, 2023).

However, teachers acknowledge that they still face several challenges, particularly in terms of the availability of learning media that comprehensively reflect Indonesia's cultural diversity. Teachers need to improvise to create their own culture-based media. This issue was also highlighted by research by Sudarma (2023), who found that many schools still experience limited multicultural media.

Another challenge is the varying levels of parental understanding regarding multicultural education. Some parents don't fully grasp the importance of introducing diversity early on for the development of children's character. This difference in perspective sometimes impacts the consistency of implementing tolerance values at home (Fauziah, 2022).

Despite this, teachers continue to demonstrate a strong commitment to integrating multicultural values into various daily activities. This commitment is key to success, as teachers are the figures who interact most frequently with children and serve as primary role models for social behavior (Hasanah, 2024).

The implementation of multicultural education also impacts a more positive classroom climate. Children appear happier, greet each other without discrimination, and enjoy group learning harmoniously. This demonstrates that an inclusive classroom climate helps children build stronger social relationships (Yuliana, 2024).

Interviews with teachers revealed that the majority of children showed significant improvement in empathy and sharing skills. Teachers stated that children became more sensitive to their peers' well-being, such as when someone was sad or needed help. This development aligns with findings that multicultural education increases social empathy (Wibowo, 2020).

In addition to its impact on children, the implementation of multicultural education also impacts teachers. Teachers become more reflective in managing differences in children's character and improve pedagogical skills sensitive to diversity. This is crucial for creating equitable and adaptive learning (Ardiansyah, 2021).

Principals also play a crucial role in supporting multicultural programs. They provide discussion spaces for teachers, supervise them, and provide administrative support for media development and cultural activities. This structural support is fundamental to successful implementation (Hartati, 2020).

Overall, research results indicate that multicultural education significantly contributes to the development of tolerance in early childhood. Children not only understand differences but also learn to appreciate them through direct experience, familiarization, and regular social interactions. This underscores the importance of implementing multicultural education in the early childhood education curriculum (Nugroho & Fadillah, 2023).

Thus, it can be concluded that the implementation of multicultural education at Santa Bernadeth Kindergarten is effective, despite still facing several challenges. The combination of learning activities, habituation, and teacher commitment significantly fosters tolerance in children. These findings support the notion that multicultural education is a strategic approach to developing a tolerant generation capable of living harmoniously within diversity (Lestari, 2023).

4. CONCLUSION

This study shows that the implementation of multicultural education at Santa Bernadeth Kindergarten has a positive impact on increasing tolerance in early childhood. Inclusive learning activities, diversity-based media, habituation practices, and positive interactions between children play a crucial role in fostering empathy, cooperation, and mutual respect. Despite challenges such as limited media and teacher commitment, the inclusive school culture has successfully provided a strong foundation for fostering tolerant character in children. Therefore, multicultural education needs to be continuously strengthened and made an integral part of the early childhood education curriculum.

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