



## TEACHERS' STRATEGIES IN MANAGING LEARNING FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD STUDENTS FROM DIVERSE RELIGIOUS BACKGROUNDS AT TK KALIBENING 2 WONOSOBO

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### Abstract

*This study was motivated by the religious diversity among students at TK Kalibening 2 Wonosobo, which requires teachers to implement inclusive learning practices and foster tolerance from an early age. The study aimed to analyze teachers' strategies in managing learning activities involving children from different religious backgrounds. This research employed a qualitative approach with a descriptive design. The research subjects consisted of the principal, teachers, and parents. Data were collected through observation, interviews, and documentation. Data validity was ensured through source and technique triangulation, while data analysis followed the Miles and Huberman model, including data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. The findings revealed that teachers implemented habituation, role modeling, collaborative play, storytelling, singing, and question-and-answer activities to promote tolerance among children. Learning activities were planned through inclusive and general approaches that accommodated students from different religious backgrounds. During Islamic religious activities, non-Muslim students were provided with alternative activities under teacher supervision. The main challenges included teachers' limited knowledge of non-Muslim religions, the lack of diversity-based learning training, and young children's limited understanding of religious differences. These challenges were addressed through communication with parents, teacher supervision, and simple explanations regarding religious diversity. The study found that tolerance can be effectively developed through daily interactions, habituation, and inclusive learning experiences. The novelty of this research lies in its focus on teachers' strategies for managing learning in an early childhood classroom with students from different religious backgrounds. The findings contribute to the development of multicultural and inclusive education practices in early childhood education.*

**Keywords:** *Teacher Strategies, Early Childhood Education, Religious Diversity, Tolerance, Inclusive Learning.*

## INTRODUCTION

Indonesia is a country characterized by a very high level of diversity in terms of religion, ethnicity, race, culture, language, and customs. This diversity serves as a distinctive feature of Indonesian society, where people coexist despite their differences. In such a pluralistic society, mutual respect and appreciation are essential values that cannot be overlooked. One of the most important

attitudes that should be developed is tolerance. Tolerance refers to the attitude of respecting, accepting, and appreciating the differences of others without losing one's own identity (Susanto, 2019). Tolerance plays a crucial role in creating harmonious social life and serves as a foundation for unity within diversity.

The cultivation of tolerance values should begin in early childhood because this period is highly influential in shaping an individual's character. Early childhood is a stage of rapid development, during which experiences significantly affect future attitudes and behaviors. According to Suyadi and Ulfah (2017), early childhood education is a developmental effort directed toward children from birth to six years old through educational stimulation that supports their physical and psychological growth, enabling them to be prepared for the next level of education. Therefore, early childhood education focuses not only on cognitive development but also on the formation of character and social values.

Within Indonesia's multicultural society, early childhood education plays a strategic role in introducing diversity to children. Children need to understand that individuals come from different backgrounds in terms of religion, culture, language, and lifestyle. Such understanding is essential to help children accept differences as a natural part of life and prevent them from using those differences as reasons for discrimination. According to Tilaar (2015), multicultural education is an educational process that provides learners with opportunities to understand, appreciate, and live harmoniously within a diverse society. Thus, early childhood education serves as an effective means of instilling tolerance and respect for diversity. Previous studies have discussed multicultural education, character education, and the cultivation of tolerance values among young children. However, research specifically examining teachers' strategies in managing learning environments with students from different religious backgrounds remains relatively limited, particularly in early childhood education settings where religious diversity is directly encountered.

Diversity is one of the social realities inseparable from Indonesian society. One of its most visible forms is religious diversity. Religion plays a significant role in Indonesian life as it serves as a guide for daily activities and moral conduct. Although Indonesia is not a religious state, religious values remain an integral part of national life. This is reflected in the first principle of Pancasila, "Belief in the One and Only God," which demonstrates the nation's commitment to religious values. Religious diversity in Indonesia is also constitutionally protected through Article 28E Paragraph (1) and Article 29 Paragraph (2) of the 1945 Constitution of the Republic of Indonesia, which guarantee every citizen the freedom to embrace and practice a religion according to their beliefs (SETARA Institute, 2023).

Religious diversity can also be found in educational institutions, including early childhood education centers. Many schools have students from various religious backgrounds. This situation presents both opportunities and challenges for teachers in managing the learning process. On the one hand, religious diversity can become a valuable learning resource for children to recognize and

understand differences from an early age. On the other hand, it requires appropriate management to prevent exclusive, discriminatory, or intolerant attitudes from emerging within the school environment.

A concrete example of this situation can be found at TK Kalibening 2 Wonosobo. The school is located within a community characterized by religious diversity, particularly among Muslim and Christian families. Children from both religious groups learn together in the same school environment and interact on a daily basis. This condition provides children with opportunities to experience diversity directly through authentic interactions. Through such experiences, children learn that religious differences do not hinder friendship, play, or cooperation with others.

In this context, teachers play a vital role in managing learning activities. Teachers are not only responsible for delivering academic content but also for shaping children's character through various school activities. According to Mulyasa (2021), teachers are central figures in the educational process who function as educators, mentors, facilitators, and role models for students. Therefore, teachers must be able to create inclusive, safe, and comfortable learning environments for all children regardless of their religious backgrounds.

The religious diversity found at TK Kalibening 2 can be utilized as an effective learning medium for instilling tolerance values in children. Teachers can integrate tolerance into various learning activities such as role-playing, storytelling, singing, simple discussions, and group activities. Through these experiences, children can learn to respect friends from different religions and understand the importance of living peacefully alongside others. According to Lickona (2013), effective character education should be implemented through habituation and direct experiences so that the values taught can be understood and practiced in everyday life.

Nevertheless, managing learning in a religiously diverse environment is not without challenges. Preliminary observations indicate that teachers still face several difficulties in managing early childhood learning among children from different religious backgrounds. Learning strategies have not fully accommodated students' religious diversity. In some activities, certain religious practices tend to be emphasized, potentially causing children from other religious backgrounds to feel less involved in the learning process.

In addition, teachers encounter challenges in introducing tolerance values effectively to young children. The cultivation of tolerance is often carried out spontaneously and has not been systematically integrated into learning activities. In fact, the development of tolerant character requires a continuous and intentional process to become deeply embedded in children's personalities. Teachers also face limitations in accessing training related to multicultural education and diversity-based learning. Consequently, the approaches used to manage religious diversity remain relatively general and do not fully reflect the principles of inclusive education.

Other challenges are associated with lesson planning that has not been fully adapted to the needs of students from different religious backgrounds. Teachers also experience difficulties in assessing children's social and tolerance development because there are no specific indicators designed to accommodate aspects of religious diversity. Furthermore, communication and collaboration between teachers and parents in supporting tolerance education still need improvement. Parental involvement in school activities related to religious diversity management remains limited, reducing the effectiveness of character development efforts.

The absence of clear policies or guidelines regarding the management of religious diversity at the school level also presents challenges for teachers. In many situations, teachers must make decisions based on personal judgment without standardized guidance. This condition may lead to inconsistencies in implementing learning practices that respect diversity. Religious diversity within schools should instead be viewed as a valuable learning resource for fostering mutual respect and appreciation of differences from an early age. If not managed appropriately, opportunities to develop tolerant character traits among children may diminish and could even contribute to exclusive attitudes toward different groups. Therefore, learning strategies that are systematic, well-planned, and contextually relevant are needed to optimize the development of tolerance values in early childhood education.

Considering the important role of teachers in creating inclusive and tolerant learning environments, further research is needed to examine the strategies teachers use in managing early childhood learning among children from different religious backgrounds. Such research is important because it can provide insights into the learning practices employed by teachers when dealing with religious diversity in schools. Furthermore, it can reveal the challenges teachers face and the efforts they undertake to overcome these obstacles.

TK Kalibening 2 was selected as the research site because it represents a real example of an early childhood education institution situated within a religiously diverse community. Teachers' experiences in managing learning within this setting can provide valuable information regarding educational practices that support the development of tolerance from an early age. The findings of this study are expected to contribute to the advancement of early childhood education, particularly in the fields of multicultural education and inclusive learning. In addition, the results may serve as references for teachers, educational institutions, parents, and policymakers in developing learning strategies that are more responsive to religious diversity.

Based on theoretical studies and empirical conditions identified in the field, a research gap exists in the limited number of studies specifically examining teachers' strategies for managing early childhood learning in school environments characterized by direct religious diversity. Most previous studies have focused on character education and tolerance in general, while aspects such as planning,

implementation, challenges, and teacher strategies in managing religious diversity within classrooms have not been extensively explored.

Therefore, this study aims to investigate teachers' strategies in managing early childhood learning among children from different religious backgrounds at TK Kalibening 2 Wonosobo. The novelty of this research lies in its specific focus on exploring how teachers plan, implement, and address challenges in learning environments characterized by religious diversity. This study is expected to provide a comprehensive understanding of inclusive learning practices based on religious diversity and serve as a reference for developing tolerance-based learning models in early childhood education.

## **METHODS**

This study employed a qualitative approach with a descriptive research design. This approach was selected because it aims to gain an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon related to teachers' strategies in managing early childhood learning among children from different religious backgrounds at TK Kalibening 2 Wonosobo. The study was conducted at TK Kalibening 2, located in Prumasan Hamlet, RT 01/RW 01, Kalibening Village, Sukoharjo District, Wonosobo Regency, Indonesia, from April to May 2026. The research site was chosen because the school has students from diverse religious backgrounds, making it highly relevant to the focus of the study.

The research participants consisted of the principal, two teachers, two non-Muslim parents, and two non-Muslim students from Class B. Participants were selected using purposive sampling based on their direct involvement in the learning process and their experiences with religious diversity within the school environment. The principal was selected due to his or her role in formulating school policies, teachers were included as learning facilitators, parents were involved as educational partners within the family setting, and students were selected because they directly experienced the learning activities implemented at school.

Data were collected through structured interviews, passive participatory observation, and documentation. Interviews were conducted to obtain information regarding learning strategies, planning, implementation, and challenges encountered by teachers in managing religious diversity in the classroom. Observations were carried out to directly examine the learning process and interactions between teachers and students, while documentation was used to support the data collection process through school profiles, teacher and student records, lesson planning documents, and photographs of activities relevant to the study.

The research instruments consisted of interview guidelines, observation guidelines, and supporting documents developed based on the research focus, namely planning, organizing, implementation, supervision, and challenges faced by teachers in managing learning within a religiously diverse environment. Prior to data collection, the instruments were developed based on

theoretical frameworks and the research objectives to ensure that they effectively guided the researcher in obtaining relevant and meaningful data.

To ensure the trustworthiness of the data, source triangulation was employed by comparing information obtained from the principal, teachers, parents, and field observations. In addition, methodological triangulation was applied by comparing data collected through interviews, observations, and documentation. The use of triangulation enhanced data credibility and ensured the consistency of information obtained from different sources and data collection techniques.

The collected data were analyzed using the interactive analysis model proposed by Miles and Huberman, which consists of three stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing or verification. During the data reduction stage, the researcher selected and focused on information relevant to the research objectives. The data were then presented in the form of descriptive narratives to facilitate the identification of patterns and relationships among the findings. Data analysis was conducted continuously throughout the research process, beginning with data collection and continuing until the completion of the study, allowing for ongoing verification of the findings. The final stage involved drawing conclusions and conducting continuous verification by comparing interview, observation, and documentation data. This process ensured the validity of the findings and enabled the study to address its main focus concerning teachers' strategies in managing early childhood learning among children from different religious backgrounds at TK Kalibening 2 Wonosobo.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **3.1 Analysis of Teachers' Strategies in Managing Early Childhood Learning Among Children from Different Religious Backgrounds at TK Kalibening 2 Wonosobo**

Based on the results of observations, interviews, and documentation, it was found that teachers at TK Kalibening 2 Wonosobo have implemented various strategies to manage learning in an environment characterized by religious diversity. These strategies are aimed at creating an inclusive, harmonious, and respectful learning atmosphere in which all students can participate comfortably without feeling differentiated based on their religious beliefs. The findings indicate that the most dominant strategies employed by teachers include habituation, role modeling, collaborative play, storytelling, singing, and intensive communication with parents.

Habituation emerged as the primary strategy used by teachers to instill tolerance among students. Every day, children are encouraged to play together, share learning materials and toys, cooperate in groups, help peers who encounter difficulties, and respect one another regardless of religious affiliation. These practices are carried out repeatedly until they become part of the children's daily behavior. Habituation was considered effective because young children learn primarily through direct experiences and repeated behavioral patterns. This finding is consistent with Lickona (2013), who argued that character development cannot be achieved solely through the transmission of

knowledge but must be reinforced through continuous habituation so that values become integrated into individual behavior.

The findings suggest that habituation functions as a natural process of internalizing tolerance values through children's everyday activities. During early childhood, experiential learning exerts a stronger influence than verbal instruction because children are in a stage of development characterized by concrete operational thinking. Therefore, consistent habituation serves as an effective means of fostering respect for differences and promoting positive social relationships among students.

In addition to habituation, teachers also applied role-modeling strategies. Teachers attempted to demonstrate directly how to respect differences, communicate politely, help others, and treat all students fairly. In their daily interactions, teachers avoided showing preferential treatment based on students' religious backgrounds. Such behavior became a model that children tended to imitate. This finding aligns with the developmental characteristics of young children, who frequently learn by observing and imitating adults around them.

From the perspective of Bandura's Social Learning Theory, the tolerant behaviors displayed by teachers function as models that are observed and imitated by students. Role modeling is particularly important because tolerance is not merely a concept to be understood but a value that must be demonstrated through observable actions. These findings highlight the strategic role of teachers as agents in establishing an inclusive culture within the school environment.

Other strategies employed by teachers included storytelling, singing, and simple question-and-answer activities. Teachers utilized stories about kindness, friendship, cooperation, and mutual respect as tools for introducing tolerance values to children. Through storytelling, children were able to understand moral messages more easily because the content was delivered in a manner appropriate to their developmental stage. In addition, songs and group games were used to promote positive interactions among students from different religious backgrounds.

The findings also revealed that teachers implemented inclusive strategies in various learning activities. When activities related to Islamic practices were conducted, such as memorizing prayers, practicing ablution (wudu), performing prayer rituals, or participating in Islamic boarding school programs (pesantren kilat), Christian students were not required to participate. Instead, teachers provided alternative activities of a more general educational nature, such as drawing, reading storybooks, engaging in educational games, or participating in other learning activities that remained meaningful and developmentally appropriate.

The provision of alternative activities demonstrates that teachers have applied the principles of inclusive education by considering the rights and needs of every student. This approach not only ensures the comfort of non-Muslim students but also strengthens their sense of acceptance and belonging within the school environment. Such practices are consistent with multicultural education

principles, which emphasize accommodating diversity as an integral component of the learning process

The study further revealed that the strategies implemented by teachers had a positive impact on social relationships among students. Observational data showed that children played together without distinguishing one another based on religion, helped peers experiencing difficulties, and interacted harmoniously. No evidence of discriminatory behavior or religiously based grouping was observed.

These findings indicate that the learning strategies implemented by teachers not only created a conducive learning environment but also contributed to the development of children's social competencies. The ability to cooperate, respect others, and accept differences represents essential indicators of early childhood social-emotional development that serve as foundations for future participation in society.

Overall, the findings suggest that the strategies employed by teachers at TK Kalibening 2 can be considered effective in creating an inclusive learning environment that values religious diversity.

### **3.2 Analysis of Learning Planning in Addressing Religious Diversity at TK Kalibening 2 Wonosobo**

Learning planning constitutes a critical stage that significantly influences the success of the educational process. Based on the findings, teachers at TK Kalibening 2 designed learning plans while considering the religious diversity of their students. In preparing the Daily Lesson Plan (RPPH), teachers predominantly selected universal learning activities that could be participated in by all students without causing discomfort to any particular group.

The learning materials selected by teachers primarily focused on the development of moral and social values, including honesty, responsibility, cooperation, discipline, helpfulness, and mutual respect. This selection demonstrates teachers' efforts to promote character values that are universally acceptable regardless of students' religious affiliations.

These findings indicate that teachers have implemented the principle of equity in educational planning. Equity in education does not necessarily mean providing identical treatment to all students; rather, it involves ensuring that each child has equal opportunities to develop according to their needs and characteristics. Consequently, adapting learning activities to accommodate diversity becomes a crucial step in creating an inclusive educational environment.

Learning planning at TK Kalibening 2 also involved communication and deliberation between teachers and the school principal. Prior to implementing specific activities, particularly those related to religion, teachers and the principal engaged in discussions to ensure that the planned activities would not create misunderstandings or discomfort among students or parents.

Beyond internal school communication, teachers also maintained active communication with parents by informing them about upcoming activities. This practice fostered cooperation between the school and families.

Parental involvement in the planning process demonstrates that the success of tolerance education cannot be solely attributed to schools. Collaboration between schools and families is essential because tolerance values must be consistently reinforced both at school and at home. This finding supports Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory, which emphasizes that child development is influenced by interactions among multiple interconnected environments.

Therefore, learning planning at TK Kalibening 2 functions not merely as an administrative requirement but also as a strategic instrument for accommodating student diversity and preventing discriminatory practices within the learning process.

### **3.3 Analysis of Challenges and Solutions in Managing Early Childhood Learning Among Children from Different Religious Backgrounds at TK Kalibening 2 Wonosobo**

The findings indicate that teachers continue to encounter several challenges in managing learning environments involving students from diverse religious backgrounds. The primary challenges include limited teacher knowledge regarding non-Muslim religions, the absence of specialized training on diversity-based learning management, and limited school resources.

These findings suggest that managing religious diversity in early childhood education remains challenging, particularly in relation to teachers' professional competencies. Although teachers demonstrated strong commitment to creating inclusive learning environments, additional support through systematic training programs and educational policies is needed to enhance the implementation of multicultural education within schools.

In addition to challenges associated with teachers and institutional factors, obstacles were also related to the developmental characteristics of young children. At this stage of development, children primarily engage in concrete thinking and therefore may not fully comprehend abstract concepts such as religious differences.

This condition suggests that tolerance education in early childhood should be implemented through approaches that align with children's developmental characteristics. The use of games, storytelling, direct experiences, and social interaction was found to be more effective than theoretical explanations alone. Consequently, learning strategies should be designed according to developmental principles to ensure that tolerance values are understood in meaningful ways.

To address these challenges, the school implemented several solutions, including individualized student support, intensive communication with parents, and regular discussions between teachers and the school principal.

The effectiveness of these solutions demonstrates that managing religious diversity requires a collaborative approach involving schools, families, and the broader social environment of students. These findings reinforce the view that tolerance education is a shared responsibility and cannot be optimally achieved if it is entrusted solely to teachers or educational institutions.

Overall, the findings indicate that religious diversity within the school environment can be managed positively through inclusive learning strategies, responsive educational planning, and strong collaboration between schools and families.

## **CONCLUSION**

Based on the findings of this study on teachers' strategies for managing early childhood learning among children from different religious backgrounds at TK Kalibening 2 Wonosobo, it can be concluded that teachers have implemented various strategies that support the creation of an inclusive, harmonious, and tolerant learning environment. These strategies are reflected in daily habituation practices, role modeling, collaborative play activities, storytelling, singing, and the provision of simple advice aimed at fostering mutual respect among students. In the planning stage, teachers adapted learning activities to accommodate the religious diversity of students by designing general activities that could be participated in by all children regardless of their religious affiliation. During specific religious activities, students from different religious backgrounds were provided with alternative activities under the supervision of teachers to ensure that they felt comfortable, included, and respected. Although several challenges were identified, including teachers' limited knowledge of non-Muslim religions, the absence of specialized training on diversity-based learning, and young children's limited understanding of religious differences, teachers attempted to address these challenges through communication with parents, individualized student support, and collaborative discussions with the school principal regarding activities related to religious diversity.

The findings indicate that successful learning management in the context of religious diversity is determined not only by teachers' ability to deliver instructional content but also by their ability to create an inclusive school culture that respects differences. Habituation, role modeling, effective communication with parents, and the provision of learning activities that respond to students' needs were found to be essential factors in fostering tolerance from an early age. Therefore, religious diversity within the school environment should not be viewed as a barrier to learning; rather, it can serve as an effective educational resource for developing tolerance, empathy, and respect for differences among young children.

From a theoretical perspective, the results of this study reinforce the principles of multicultural and inclusive education, which emphasize the importance of respecting diversity within the learning process. The findings also demonstrate that the development of tolerant character traits in early childhood is more effectively achieved through direct experiences, habituation, and social interaction than through the mere verbal transmission of concepts. From a practical perspective, this study

provides insights into strategies that can be adopted by teachers and early childhood education institutions in managing learning environments that include students from diverse religious backgrounds.

Based on these findings, teachers and school administrators are encouraged to continuously enhance their competencies in managing diversity-responsive learning through relevant professional development programs and training opportunities. Schools should also maintain and strengthen collaboration with parents in fostering tolerance and mutual respect from an early age. Furthermore, parents are expected to play an active role in encouraging children to appreciate differences within both family and community settings.

This study has several limitations. It was conducted in only one early childhood education institution and involved a limited number of participants; therefore, the findings cannot be generalized to all early childhood education settings with different characteristics. Future studies are recommended to include a larger number of educational institutions, participants, and research locations to obtain a more comprehensive understanding of diversity-based learning management in early childhood education.

The novelty of this study lies in its in-depth analysis of teachers' strategies for managing learning in an early childhood education environment where students from different religious backgrounds learn together in the same classroom. Unlike previous studies that have primarily focused on character education or tolerance in general, this study specifically explores instructional strategies, planning processes, challenges, and solutions implemented by teachers within the context of religious diversity. Consequently, the findings are expected to contribute to the development of inclusive, tolerant, and equitable early childhood education practices within Indonesia's multicultural society.

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