



Strengthening Students' Attitudes of Tolerance Through Diversity-Based Civic Education in Elementary Schools

Ahmad Syarif¹, Tiara Trirahmayati¹, Putri Rahma Dani¹, Zulhidah¹

¹Universitas Islam Negeri Sultan Syarif Kasim Riau, Indonesia

✉ ariefpoenya27@gmail.com*

Abstract

Civic education plays a strategic role in shaping students' character, especially in terms of tolerance as a manifestation of diversity values since elementary school. The challenges of social diversity, the spread of digital information that often gives rise to stereotypes, and the tendency for intolerant attitudes to emerge at an early age make it necessary to systematically internalize tolerance education through the learning process at school. This study aims to describe how students' attitudes of tolerance are strengthened through diversity-based Civic Education in Islamic Elementary Schools. The research used a descriptive qualitative method with data collection techniques through observation of learning activities, interviews with teachers and students, and documentation of learning tools. Data analysis was carried out through the stages of data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing with validation through triangulation of techniques and sources. The results of the study show that teachers integrate diversity values through group discussions, inspirational stories of national figures, collaborative games, and social habits in classroom interactions. Students' tolerance attitudes are demonstrated through behaviors such as respecting opinions, accepting differences, and the ability to work together in heterogeneous groups. However, time constraints and variations in methods pose obstacles to implementation. This study concludes that tolerance can be strengthened optimally if citizenship education is designed to be experience-based, collaborative, and contextual to students' lives.

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INTRODUCTION

Civics education plays a strategic role in shaping citizens who have character, are socially intelligent, and are able to live harmoniously in diversity from elementary school age onwards. Through civic education, students are guided to understand national values based on Pancasila and awareness of living together in social diversity as the identity of the Indonesian nation (Anggraeni et al., 2022; Kusdarini et al., 2020; Maskur et al., 2021). This educational process is not only intended to build the knowledge of citizens, but also attitudes of humanity, tolerance, and the ability to work together as an important part of character-oriented citizenship education (Santoso et al., 2023; Siregar & Tarigan, 2022).

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As a multicultural country with ethnic, linguistic, cultural, and religious diversity, Indonesia needs tolerance education that can strengthen the spirit of diversity from an early age. Without the internalization of tolerance values, children can grow up with social prejudices, exclusive tendencies, and resistance to differences (Safitri et al., 2024). Therefore, instilling tolerance through citizenship education is an important requirement to ensure that future generations are able to maintain national unity while appreciating diversity as a social strength of the Indonesian nation (Sholeh et al., 2025).

The biggest challenge to tolerance education today comes from the development of digital media, which accelerates the spread of information without control. Much digital content displays hate speech, discriminatory attitudes, and negative judgments toward different groups, thereby influencing the formation of children's identities and social attitudes (Halimah et al., 2020). This situation shows that the practice of tolerance cannot be separated from the context of digital society and requires schools to internalize the value of diversity through meaningful and dialogical learning processes (Santoso, 2022).

Civics education at the elementary school level is even believed to be a space for building tolerant character through contextual learning experiences, civic discussions, and social reflection on diversity. Through activities such as group discussions, sharing experiences, collaborative games, and activities that bring differences together, students directly practice understanding the diversity that exists in everyday life (Fathurrohman, 2023). Thus, civic education is not enough to just teach concepts, but requires learning strategies and media that can create an inclusive classroom atmosphere.

The Merdeka Curriculum provides a new direction that strengthening the Pancasila Student Profile must be realized through the holistic development of the values of global diversity, mutual cooperation, and tolerance. This means that citizenship education no longer focuses on memorizing material, but rather on the ability to apply national values in real-life situations (Asrar, 2019). This needs to be developed as a form of recontextualization of citizenship education that is more dialogical, reflective, and capable of strengthening students' social skills in line with the demands of 21st-century learning.

In religious-based schools such as Integrated Islamic Elementary Schools, character education orientation becomes increasingly complex because religious values must be integrated with national values. However, this actually presents a strategic opportunity, because Islamic values normatively place a strong emphasis on the principles of mutual respect and harmonious coexistence in diversity (Serevina et al., 2022). Thus, tolerance education does not conflict with religious values, but rather reinforces the moral teachings that originate from religion and social practices in the real lives of students.

However, the implementation of tolerance education does not always run ideally, because there is still teacher-centered citizenship learning, which lacks involvement of experience and does not provide space for dialogue on differences. Indoctrinative learning has the potential to make students understand tolerance material only verbally or cognitively, without the ability to act in social situations (Rahmawati & Hasan, 2023). Therefore, teachers need learning models that are oriented towards experience and social interaction so that students have the opportunity to develop tolerance in a real way.

Several studies explain that at the elementary school level, intolerant attitudes begin to emerge in the form of teasing, stereotyping of friends, refusal to work in groups, and differences in identity (Amalia, 2022). Such social practices serve as a warning that tolerance education in elementary schools should not merely be a discourse, but must be realized through learning methods that provide direct

experiences to students. Therefore, elementary schools are strategic spaces for building healthy and inclusive social relationships.

Al Fityah Integrated Islamic Elementary School is an important context in this study because the school implements social habits, integration of Islamic values, and strengthening of national character simultaneously in Citizenship education. These conditions provide a relevant research space to understand the form of integration of diversity values in Citizenship education and how the practice of tolerance develops through classroom activities, school culture, and interactions between students.

Based on this background, this study was conducted to describe the strengthening of tolerance attitudes through diversity-based citizenship education at Al Fityah Integrated Islamic Elementary School. This study is expected to not only contribute theoretically to the study of tolerance education, but also provide practical information on civic education learning strategies, supporting factors, inhibiting factors, and recommendations for improving the effectiveness of tolerance education in elementary schools so that it is in line with the objectives of civic education in the context of a diverse Indonesia.

METHODS

This study uses a qualitative approach with a descriptive research type. This approach was chosen because the study sought to gain an in-depth understanding of the process of strengthening tolerance through learning experiences, classroom dynamics, social interactions, and natural learning practices at Al Fityah Integrated Islamic Elementary School. Qualitative research allows researchers to describe phenomena in their entirety according to the context in the field, so that the data obtained is more comprehensive and empirically meaningful (Aryasutha et al., 2025; Engkizar et al., 2022, 2023; Mutiaramses et al., 2025).

The research subjects consisted of fourth and fifth grade civics teachers, school principals, and a number of students who were actively involved in the learning process. Informants were selected purposively based on their relevance, involvement, and ability to provide information related to the implementation of diversity-based civics education. The research location was at Al Fityah Integrated Islamic Elementary School in Pekanbaru, which was chosen because of its characteristic as an integrated Islamic school that integrates religious and national values through character learning.

Research data was collected through observation, interviews, and documentation. Observations were conducted to observe students' learning activities and social interactions during the civic education process. Interviews were conducted with teachers, principals, and several students to obtain in-depth information related to learning strategies, tolerant behavior, and forms of diversity integration. Documentation was used to examine learning tools such as lesson plans, videos of learning activities, photos of activities, and school program documents (Abishev et al., 2025; Engkizar et al., 2025).

Data analysis was conducted through the stages of data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. In the reduction stage, data from interviews, observations, and documentation were selected, classified, and presented in specific themes according to the research focus. The presentation stage was carried out by presenting the findings through narrative descriptions and quotations from informants. The conclusion drawing stage was carried out inductively based on field findings and data interpretation relevant to the theory (Engkizar et al., 2024; Rosyadi & Athari, 2025).

Data validity was tested through technical triangulation and source triangulation. Technical triangulation was conducted by comparing observational data, interviews, and documentation, while source triangulation was conducted by

confirming information between teachers, students, and the principal. In addition, the validation process was carried out through member checking by asking informants to reconfirm the researcher's interpretations so that the findings obtained were in accordance with the reality in the field.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The results of the study show that the implementation of diversity-based civic education at Al Fityah Integrated Islamic Elementary School is structured through the organization of learning materials and activities aimed at strengthening students' attitudes of tolerance. Based on classroom observations during three meetings, Civics teachers consistently began lessons with an introduction to religious, cultural, and ethnic diversity in Indonesia, then linked this to everyday conditions in the school environment and society. At this stage, students appeared very enthusiastic in giving examples of differences they encountered in real life, such as the use of regional languages, clothing styles, and different family customs.

Interview data with classroom teachers showed that teachers deliberately instilled the value of diversity through small group discussions and value reflections at the end of the lesson. Teachers said that this strategy was chosen to provide space for dialogue, encourage empathy, and accustom students to listening to other people's views. Teachers also explained that the program of greeting, saying hello, and smiling every morning was linked to the formation of tolerant character and respect for differences.

Interviews with fifth-grade students showed that most students understood the concept of tolerance as "respecting differences" and "not forcing friends to follow our beliefs or habits." When asked follow-up questions, students mentioned concrete actions such as not mocking their friends' accents, giving them a chance to speak during discussions, and choosing to work in groups with friends from different backgrounds. This shows that the value of tolerance has been internalized not only cognitively but also in terms of everyday behavior.

Analysis of documents such as lesson plans, school programs, and visual documentation of classroom activities shows that the implementation of diversity values is not only evident in civics lessons but also in school activities such as national holiday celebrations, Kartini Day activities, and Nusantara cultural projects. These activities convey messages of diversity through assignments, regional art performances, and mini exhibitions of local culture.

In addition, observations of group discussions showed that some students still dominated the conversation, but teachers actively intervened through dialogic feedback, such as giving students turns to speak and guiding them to respect different perspectives. This dynamic shows that values-based learning can be effective when supported by dialogic classroom management strategies.

In general, the data shows an increase in students' tolerance, as seen in indicators such as respecting opinions, cooperating with students from different backgrounds, and avoiding teasing or discriminating against friends. However, teachers acknowledge that developing tolerance is a long and continuous process that requires support from the home environment, school culture, and collaboration among the entire school community.

The findings show that citizenship education at Al Fityah Integrated Islamic Elementary School successfully bridges students' conceptual understanding of diversity with concrete experiences in the school environment. Theoretically, citizenship is not merely the transfer of knowledge about state norms but is a field of social practice for shaping civic values, which include respect for differences, social responsibility, and participation that must be practiced from an early age (Amaliasyah, 2020; Fathurrohman, 2023; Halimah et al., 2020). At the pedagogical

level, strategies that emphasize everyday contexts, such as perceptions of family habits, simple case discussions, and cultural project assignments, enable students to connect the abstract concept of diversity with their personal experiences, resulting in meaningful learning according to social constructivism (Hidayat et al., 2022; Jacobus et al., 2024; Setiawan, 2022). The practical implication is that civics teachers need to design activities that are authentic and contextual so that normative knowledge about tolerance is transformed into a repertoire of social actions by students, rather than merely memorizing values (Fathurrohman, 2023).

Field data indicates a shift from merely mastering the concept of tolerance to manifesting it in behavior, e.g., taking turns to speak, avoiding ridicule, and respecting differences in dialect, which demonstrates the process of internalizing values. In character education studies, this kind of internalization requires three domains simultaneously: cognitive (understanding values), affective (feeling the importance of values), and conative/behavioral (demonstrating consistent behavior) (Errohman & Wahyudi, 2021; Lickona, 2013; Lubis, 2023). Schools successfully facilitate these domains through routine practices (greetings, salutations, smiles), brief reflections at the end of lessons, and collaborative assignments that require cooperation between identities. Theoretically, these actions form habitual moral practices that are more enduring than verbal instructions alone (Anggraeni et al., 2022). Therefore, the practical recommendation is to strengthen the cycle of habit formation and reflection appreciation so that behavioral changes become stable and internalized.

The analysis shows that teachers play a central role not only as conveyors of material, but also as facilitators of dialogue and role models in the practice of tolerance. Effective teachers use open-ended questions, moderate minor conflicts, and provide feedback that guides students toward perspective taking, thereby successfully fostering empathy and self-restraint in students (Istianah et al., 2024; Rahmawati & Hasan, 2023; Waman & Dewi, 2021). The civic pedagogy perspective emphasizes that learning democracy in the classroom requires direct experience in polite debate, negotiation of differences, and collective decision-making all practices that foster tolerance (Khairullina & Zarkasih, 2025). In addition, the role of teachers as models of tolerant behavior (e.g., respecting other students' traditions, using inclusive language) contributes to the hidden curriculum, which is often more effective than formal material in shaping social behavior (Suryana et al., 2022). For this reason, developing teachers' professional capacity in conflict moderation techniques and dialogic learning is an important necessity.

Cultural projects, mini exhibitions, and cross-theme assignments that highlight local identity are effective mediums for students to experience diversity in a positive way. The multicultural education approach emphasizes the integration of diverse cultural content into the curriculum so that students not only learn about differences but also appreciate the aesthetic value and cultural significance of other groups (Gunawan et al., 2022; Qondias et al., 2025). Data from Al Fityah Integrated Islamic Elementary School shows that when students work on projects that require them to showcase or present aspects of their family culture, there is an increase in empathy and recognition of the legitimacy of different cultural practices. From an instructional design perspective, such activities are effective because they involve information seeking, dialogue between students, and publication of results that trigger a sense of pride and appreciation for other friends, a combination that, according to the literature, increases positive intergroup contact and reduces stereotypes (Ibrahim, 2023).

Despite real progress, the research results also reveal structural barriers that hinder the optimization of tolerance learning: limited learning time, a dense curriculum, uneven variation in teaching methods, and external influences (digital

media, unsupportive family practices). From an educational system perspective, the development of tolerance cannot be solely attributed to one subject; it requires a whole-school approach and synergy with families and communities (Lestari et al., 2025). In practical terms, this means the implementation of comprehensive programs: the integration of diversity values across all subjects, ongoing training for teachers on multicultural pedagogy and inclusive classroom management, and digital literacy programs to increase students' moral resilience against narratives of intolerance. This approach is supported by evidence that multi-level interventions (school-home-community) are more effective in consolidating values of tolerance than partial interventions.

The results of the observation show that dialogic learning conducted by teachers not only improves students' ability to convey ideas but also fosters civic habitus, namely the habit of respecting opinions, weighing arguments, and avoiding coercion through polite discussion mechanisms. In the framework of contemporary civic education, civic habitus is a prerequisite for the development of a democratic civic culture from elementary school age (Setiawan, 2022). When students learn to listen to and consider their friends' views, they are actually building a mental structure that encourages tolerance in resolving simple social conflicts. Recent research shows that the habit of polite discussion at an early age has a significant correlation with inclusive attitudes in adolescence (Amalia, 2022). Therefore, the dialogical approach is not just a classroom technique, but a strategy for forming the foundations of civic democracy.

The documentation data shows that tolerance values are not only instilled through civic education materials, but also through school culture, which is manifested in greeting programs, joint discipline practices, and ceremonial activities based on nationalism and diversity values. This approach is in line with the concept of the hidden curriculum, which is a set of values that students learn through social experiences and interaction structures without being explicitly conveyed (Y. Santoso, 2022). The hidden curriculum has been proven to play an important role in modifying behavior because students directly experience how teachers, staff, and friends practice the principle of tolerance in their daily lives. In the context of Al Fityah Integrated Islamic Elementary School, this habit formation serves as social scaffolding that reinforces respectful behavior toward differences in real-life situations. This is relevant to the finding that strong character education always occurs through long-term habit formation (Hidayat et al., 2022).

Student involvement in heterogeneous group discussions and cultural projects broadens their interactions with friends from different ethnic and cultural backgrounds, which psychologically reduces stereotypes and initial biases. Recent multicultural research confirms that positive, equal, and sustained intergroup contact has been shown to reduce prejudice and increase empathy in the context of basic education. In field observations, students began to avoid regional dialect-based teasing, acknowledge the cultural uniqueness of their friends, and show curiosity about different traditions, indicating an increase in social inclusion. This condition shows that citizenship education can function as a strategic social instrument in building norms of tolerance in modern Islamic schools, including Al Fityah Integrated Islamic Elementary School.

Teacher intervention in resolving opinion dominance in group discussions is an important indicator of the success of tolerance pedagogy. The ability of teachers to moderate conflicts through dialogue, for example by giving students turns to speak or asking them to repeat their arguments in more empathetic language, is a form of civic mediation, which is a strategy for teachers to become social mediators who instill mechanisms for peaceful resolution of differences (Lestari et al., 2025). This strategy helps students learn negotiation and conflict resolution techniques

directly in the classroom without having to experience major conflicts. Such experiences encourage the instillation of tolerance values that are practical and applicable, rather than merely normative.

Despite positive developments, teachers acknowledge implementation challenges such as the low duration of citizenship education, student concentration, and the infiltration of intolerant content from digital media. This reality is consistent with research findings that primary school children today absorb many representations of identity from social media, making them vulnerable to new biases and stereotypes (Hakim & Darojat, 2023). On the other hand, elementary school civics teachers are often burdened with administrative tasks, leaving them with little time to design innovative multicultural learning models. These challenges reinforce the idea that fostering tolerance requires systemic intervention, including increasing teachers' capacity in digital pedagogy and tolerance literacy in the context of modern multicultural societies.

The results of the study show that the integration of diversity values carried out by civics teachers encourages the formation of civic culture, namely social habits that place equality, respect for differences, and openness as common norms in the classroom. Civic culture at the elementary school age is the initial foundation for the formation of an inclusive and democratic civic identity (Setiawan, 2022). In the context of Al Fityah Integrated Islamic Elementary School, the success of internalizing values stems from a combination of social habits, dialogic learning, and teacher role modeling that makes tolerance a daily practice. Thus, tolerance character education is not merely a curricular task but a process of cultivating values in the school environment so that students are accustomed to practicing empathy and respect without having to be formally instructed to do so (Amalia, 2022; Gunawan et al., 2022).

Observations and interviews show that citizenship education helps reduce stereotypes among students through collaborative dialogue, cultural projects on the archipelago, and reflective discussions about differences in identity. These pedagogical strategies are in line with the principles of multicultural education, which state that positive interactions across groups are the most effective means of reducing prejudice and increasing social acceptance. At the same time, teachers' emphasis on inclusive language helps students construct a national narrative that recognizes diversity rather than merely tolerating differences. This reflects a transition from minimal tolerance (merely accepting the existence of differences) to active tolerance (respecting and appreciating diversity as part of a shared identity) (Yuliana, 2023).

These findings also show that tolerance cannot be fostered in schools alone. Interviews with teachers confirm that children's attitudes toward tolerance are greatly influenced by family narratives, digital media preferences, and social environments outside of school. In the digital age, students are exposed to values, opinions, and representations of cross-cultural identities that have the potential to strengthen or weaken attitudes toward tolerance. Civic education at the elementary level needs to develop digital civic literacy so that students are able to critically assess, filter, and respond to intolerant content. Thus, collaboration between schools and parents is a key requirement to ensure that the values of tolerance instilled by schools are not lost due to conflicting information from the digital world.

Field findings indicate that the implementation of diversity-based tolerance values requires comprehensive support from the school system, including internal policies, school culture, co-curricular activities, and consistent habit-forming programs. The formation of tolerance character does not occur through a single meeting, but through a repetitive process that requires long-term consistency (Hidayat et al., 2022). Therefore, the strategic recommendation is to strengthen

teacher capacity through tolerance pedagogy training, cultural literacy improvement, and strengthening dialogic classroom management so that the quality of diversity implementation can be improved among all teachers, not just Civics teachers. This systemic approach has proven to be more effective than a partial approach in certain classes (Santoso, 2022).

Based on the overall discussion, it can be confirmed that diversity-based civic education at Al Fityah Integrated Islamic Elementary School is able to strengthen students' conceptual and affective understanding as well as tolerant behavior through a dialogical approach, social habituation, and cross-cultural interaction. This implementation not only improves social skills but also builds an inclusive civic identity in the context of Indonesia's pluralistic society. Theoretically, these findings support the view that citizenship education has a significant contribution in developing civic values and civic culture from primary education onwards. Practically, diversity-based learning models can serve as a reference for elementary schools, especially in facing the challenges of intolerance in today's digital and global society. Thus, this discussion concludes that citizenship is a strategic space for strengthening tolerance and diversity among the younger generation in a sustainable manner.

CONCLUSION

The results of the study indicate that diversity-based civic education at Al Fityah Integrated Islamic Elementary School can contribute significantly to strengthening students' attitudes of tolerance. The process of internalizing values occurs through dialogic learning strategies, heterogeneous group discussions, collaborative activities, and teachers' exemplary behavior in classroom interactions. Students' tolerant behavior is reflected in their increased willingness to respect differences of opinion, accept their friends' diverse backgrounds, and work together in group assignments. In addition to the process aspect, it was also found that the main supporting factors came from a conducive school culture, the integration of values into daily activities, and the continuity of habit formation through religious and social activities. However, this study also identified obstacles, namely the limited allocation of time for Civics lessons, variations in teachers' pedagogical competencies, and a lack of family involvement in reinforcing tolerance values outside of school.

This study concludes that strengthening tolerance does not only depend on Civics material, but requires a comprehensive approach through experience-based learning design, integration of diversity values in all school activities, and collaboration between teachers, schools, and parents so that changes in student attitudes are more sustainable. If this learning model is implemented consistently, citizenship education can become a strategic instrument in building a culture of tolerance from the primary education level onwards.

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