



Improving Students' Tolerance Attitudes through Religious Education and Moral Education Learning in Building Interfaith Harmony at SMP Negeri 5 Hutaraja Tinggi

Zuhrotul Azizah ✉, SMP Negeri 5 Hutaraja Tinggi, Indonesia

Wahyu Nengsih, SMP Negeri 2 Hutaraja Tinggi, Indonesia

Nanda Ugig Wulandari, UIN Syekh Ali Hasan Ahmad Addary Padangsidempuan, Indonesia

Asyik Mustofa, UIN Syekh Ali Hasan Ahmad Addary Padangsidempuan, Indonesia

Ida Priyatni, UIN Syekh Ali Hasan Ahmad Addary Padangsidempuan, Indonesia

✉ azizahsupriyanto17@gmail.com

Abstract: This study aims to improve the attitude of tolerance of grade VIII students through Religious Education and Character Education learning in order to build harmony between religious communities at SMP Negeri 5 Hutaraja Tinggi, Padang Lawas Regency. The attitude of tolerance is a crucial aspect in a pluralistic society, especially in a school environment consisting of various religious and cultural backgrounds. The research method used is classroom action research (CAR) with a qualitative and quantitative approach. Data were collected through observation, interviews, questionnaires, and documentation. The results of the study showed that the application of learning strategies based on diversity values and interactive discussions in Religious Education and Character Education subjects was able to significantly improve students' attitudes of tolerance. Students became more open, appreciated differences, and were able to interact with friends who had different beliefs harmoniously. This improvement can be seen from changes in students' attitudes in everyday life, both inside and outside the classroom. Thus, Religious Education and Character Education learning can be an effective means of instilling tolerance values to create a harmonious and peaceful school environment.

Keywords: Tolerance attitude, Religious Education and Character, harmony, diversity, SMP Negeri 5 Hutaraja Tinggi

Received April 3, 2024; **Accepted** May 11, 2024; **Published** July 31, 2024

Published by Mandailing Global Edukasia © 2024.

INTRODUCTION

In the context of Indonesia, which is a country known for its vast cultural and religious diversity, promoting tolerance and harmony among students from different religious backgrounds is a critical challenge. Tolerance, defined as the willingness to accept and respect differences, particularly those in religion, culture, and personal beliefs, is an essential value in a pluralistic society. The role of education in fostering these values cannot be overstated, especially in a school environment where students are shaped for their future roles in society. SMP Negeri 5 Hutaraja Tinggi, located in the Kabupaten Padang Lawas, is no exception to this need. As a school situated in a region with diverse ethnic and religious backgrounds, ensuring that students learn to respect one another's beliefs and practices is fundamental.

Indonesia's national education system, guided by the Ministry of Education and Culture, aims to develop not only academic excellence but also the moral and ethical character of its students. This includes building a culture of tolerance and respect among students from various backgrounds. In this regard, the subject of Pendidikan Agama dan Budi Pekerti (Religious Education and Character Building) is seen as a key instrument in promoting these values. The curriculum is designed not only to provide knowledge about different religions but also to instill moral values and social ethics that encourage peaceful coexistence among diverse groups. However, the extent to which this subject influences the development of tolerance in students remains a point of concern.

At SMP Negeri 5 Hutaraja Tinggi, the presence of students from various religious denominations underscores the importance of developing a curriculum that fosters mutual respect and understanding. However, despite the curriculum's intention to promote tolerance, instances of intolerance and religious conflicts are not uncommon, both in schools and the broader society. These challenges are exacerbated by the lack of effective methods to engage students in meaningful discussions about religious differences and the importance of tolerance in their daily lives. The importance of fostering tolerance in schools cannot be overstated. As the future leaders of society, students must understand the significance of peaceful coexistence and the role that tolerance plays in maintaining harmony within a multi-religious and multi-cultural community. This is where the role of Pendidikan Agama dan Budi Pekerti becomes crucial. It has the potential to shape students' attitudes toward other religions and cultures, encouraging them to embrace diversity rather than fear or reject it. Through this subject, students are expected not only to learn about the tenets of their own faith but also to appreciate the beliefs of others.

The issue, however, lies in the effective implementation of this subject in a way that truly impacts students' attitudes and behaviors. While the curriculum includes components that aim to teach respect and understanding, the real challenge is in how these lessons are delivered and received by students. There is a need for a teaching approach that goes beyond the theoretical understanding of religious doctrines and instead emphasizes real-world application, where students can actively engage with the concepts of tolerance and mutual respect. The relationship between religious education and the development of tolerance is complex. Studies have shown that exposure to diverse religious perspectives can promote empathy and reduce prejudice. However, this depends significantly on how the material is presented and how it is integrated into students' daily interactions. If students are only taught about religious differences without being encouraged to reflect on their personal experiences and engage with others from different backgrounds, the lessons of tolerance may not be fully realized.

Moreover, the broader social context in which these students live must also be considered. Kabupaten Padang Lawas, like many other regions in Indonesia, is not free from tensions related to religious identity and ethnic diversity. These tensions, although often subtle, can influence students' attitudes toward others, even within the school environment. Therefore, the role of Pendidikan Agama dan Budi Pekerti in mitigating such tensions and building a more tolerant and harmonious school community is more important than ever. This research focuses on the importance of improving tolerance among students at SMP Negeri 5 Hutaraja Tinggi through the effective implementation of the Pendidikan Agama dan Budi Pekerti curriculum. By understanding the current state of religious education in the school and identifying areas where improvements can be made, this study aims to contribute to the creation of a more inclusive and harmonious school culture. The goal is not only to address the issues of religious intolerance that may exist but also to equip students with the tools necessary to build bridges across religious divides, thus fostering a culture of peace and mutual respect.

To address this issue, the study will examine the ways in which Pendidikan Agama dan Budi Pekerti is currently taught at SMP Negeri 5 Hutaraja Tinggi and the impact it has on students' attitudes toward religious diversity. This will involve assessing the teaching methods used, the engagement of students with the subject matter, and the extent to

which the lessons learned in class are applied in real-life situations. Additionally, the research will explore how teachers can improve their strategies to foster tolerance and respect among students, with a particular focus on how these lessons can be extended beyond the classroom and into students' everyday interactions.

In exploring these themes, this research will also consider the broader societal influences that impact students' attitudes. Family background, community norms, and the media all play a role in shaping how young people view religious diversity. By considering these external factors, the research will provide a more comprehensive understanding of how to best nurture tolerance in students. Furthermore, the study will explore how the school environment itself, including the relationships between students and teachers, can either promote or hinder the development of tolerance and respect. The need to promote tolerance through education is especially pressing in today's world, where religious and cultural misunderstandings often lead to conflicts. By fostering a more tolerant generation, SMP Negeri 5 Hutaraja Tinggi can contribute to the broader goal of creating a society where people of different faiths live together in harmony. This research aims to identify the most effective ways to integrate tolerance-building activities into religious education, ensuring that students are not only knowledgeable about their own beliefs but also respectful and understanding of others.

In conclusion, the need to enhance tolerance among students through the Pendidikan Agama dan Budi Pekerti curriculum is a matter of urgency in the context of SMP Negeri 5 Hutaraja Tinggi. By focusing on the role of religious education in shaping students' attitudes toward religious diversity, this study aims to provide valuable insights into how schools can contribute to fostering a more harmonious and tolerant society. Through a combination of effective teaching methods, curriculum development, and a supportive school environment, it is possible to create an atmosphere where tolerance and mutual respect are not only taught but also practiced on a daily basis. This will not only benefit the students of SMP Negeri 5 Hutaraja Tinggi but also contribute to the broader goal of national unity and peace in Indonesia.

METHODS

The study aims to explore how Religious Education and Character Education can enhance students' tolerance attitudes and contribute to building harmony among different religious communities at SMP Negeri 5 Hutaraja Tinggi, Kabupaten Padang Lawas. This research employs a qualitative approach to understand how educational programs can foster tolerance, respect, and peaceful coexistence in a religiously diverse school environment. The research will focus on students' perceptions, behaviors, and interactions in the context of religious tolerance as facilitated by their education. The research will be conducted in SMP Negeri 5 Hutaraja Tinggi, a school located in Kabupaten Padang Lawas, which serves a community with diverse religious backgrounds. The school's Religious Education and Character Education curricula serve as the foundation for fostering tolerance among students. The study will examine how these programs are implemented and how they impact students' attitudes towards religious tolerance and interfaith harmony.

The research will involve data collection through multiple methods to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon under study. The primary methods of data collection will be interviews, observations, and document analysis. These methods will allow for an in-depth exploration of how the educational programs affect students' attitudes and behaviors. First, interviews will be conducted with key stakeholders, including teachers, students, and school administrators. These interviews will provide insights into how Religious Education and Character Education are taught and their perceived impact on students' attitudes toward religious tolerance. The interview questions will be designed to capture both qualitative and quantitative data regarding the implementation of these programs and the outcomes observed in students.

Second, classroom observations will be carried out to observe the teaching methods used in Religious Education and Character Education lessons. Observations will focus on how teachers incorporate values of tolerance, respect, and peaceful coexistence in their lessons and whether students actively engage in discussions that promote interfaith harmony. The researcher will observe how students respond to these lessons and how they interact with each other, particularly in situations where different religious viewpoints may arise.

Third, the research will include document analysis of teaching materials, lesson plans, and any other educational resources used in the Religious Education and Character Education programs. This analysis will help determine how these materials integrate themes of tolerance and religious harmony. By examining the content and structure of these resources, the study will assess whether the curriculum supports the development of a tolerant and inclusive mindset among students. The study will also use a focus group discussion (FGD) as another method to gather data from students. The FGD will provide a platform for students to discuss their views on tolerance and how they feel about the role of education in promoting interfaith harmony. This will offer the researcher a deeper understanding of students' attitudes, perceptions, and experiences related to religious tolerance.

The research will be conducted over the course of one academic semester, allowing the researcher to observe the long-term effects of Religious Education and Character Education on students' tolerance attitudes. Data collection will be spread across the semester to capture a range of student experiences and responses. The researcher will also collect data at different points in time to track any changes in attitudes and behaviors regarding religious tolerance as a result of the educational interventions. In terms of data analysis, the researcher will use thematic analysis to identify key themes and patterns in the data. This approach is suitable for qualitative research as it allows for the identification of recurring ideas or concepts within the data set. The researcher will transcribe interviews, focus group discussions, and field notes from observations. The transcriptions will then be coded to identify themes related to tolerance, religious harmony, and the effectiveness of educational programs.

Thematic analysis will also allow the researcher to examine how different factors, such as teaching methods, student interactions, and curriculum content, contribute to the development of tolerance among students. The analysis will help identify any gaps in the current educational programs and suggest areas for improvement to better foster interfaith understanding and peaceful coexistence. Ethical considerations will be central to the research process. The researcher will ensure that participants' rights to privacy and confidentiality are respected throughout the study. Informed consent will be obtained from all participants, and they will be made aware of their right to withdraw from the study at any time without any consequences. All data collected will be kept secure and used solely for the purpose of the research.

The study will also address any potential biases that may arise during data collection and analysis. The researcher will strive to maintain objectivity and ensure that personal biases do not influence the interpretation of the data. Triangulation, through the use of multiple data collection methods, will also help ensure the validity and reliability of the findings. At the end of the research, the findings will be analyzed and presented in a comprehensive report. The report will include an overview of the research methodology, data collection procedures, and analysis techniques. It will also present the key findings regarding the role of Religious Education and Character Education in promoting religious tolerance and interfaith harmony in the school setting.

The implications of the findings will be discussed, and recommendations for improving the implementation of these educational programs will be provided. These recommendations will focus on how to better integrate tolerance education into the curriculum, how to train teachers to facilitate discussions on religious harmony, and how

to create a more inclusive school environment that fosters mutual respect among students of different religious backgrounds.

Finally, the research will contribute to the ongoing discourse on the role of education in promoting social harmony and tolerance in multicultural societies. It will provide valuable insights for policymakers, educators, and other stakeholders involved in education, especially in contexts where religious diversity is a significant aspect of social life. The outcomes of the study may also serve as a model for other schools in similarly diverse contexts to implement educational programs that promote tolerance and peaceful coexistence among students of different religious backgrounds. By understanding the factors that contribute to the development of tolerance, educational institutions can better prepare students for a harmonious and inclusive society.

RESULTS

The research conducted at SMP Negeri 5 Hutaraja Tinggi, Kabupaten Padang Lawas, aimed to explore how Religious Education and Character Education can foster attitudes of tolerance and promote harmony among students from different religious backgrounds. Based on the data collected through interviews, classroom observations, document analysis, and focus group discussions, several significant findings emerged regarding the effectiveness of these educational programs in enhancing students' tolerance towards religious diversity. The first key finding was that Religious Education and Character Education were integral components in shaping students' attitudes towards religious tolerance. Most teachers and school administrators emphasized that these subjects are designed not only to teach the principles of religious belief but also to instill values of respect, peace, and understanding between students of different faiths. The curriculum provided a structured approach to discussing religious diversity and promoting the importance of tolerance in a pluralistic society.

The interviews with teachers revealed that they were actively integrating tolerance and respect for diversity into their lesson plans, often linking the values of each religious tradition to broader ethical principles like kindness, compassion, and justice. This integration helped students appreciate the commonalities across religions, rather than focusing on their differences. Teachers also noted that through these discussions, students began to develop a deeper respect for the beliefs and practices of others, leading to more peaceful interactions within the school. Students, in their interviews, expressed a greater understanding of religious tolerance as a result of these educational programs. Many students mentioned that before participating in these lessons, they had little awareness of how different religions could coexist peacefully. However, through the discussions and activities in Religious Education and Character Education, they came to realize that mutual respect and understanding are essential for living harmoniously in a diverse society. Students reported feeling more open-minded and less likely to judge others based on their religious affiliations.

Classroom observations further supported these findings. The researcher observed that teachers used a variety of teaching methods, such as group discussions, role-playing activities, and case studies, to engage students in conversations about religious tolerance. These methods encouraged students to reflect on real-life situations and think critically about how to resolve conflicts that might arise from religious differences. In one observed lesson, for instance, students were asked to role-play scenarios where they had to negotiate with peers of different religious beliefs. This exercise helped them practice empathy and consider the perspectives of others.

Another important finding was that the focus on Character Education played a crucial role in promoting tolerance. The values taught through this program, such as respect, responsibility, and empathy, were consistently linked to fostering a positive and inclusive school environment. Teachers highlighted that Character Education emphasized the importance of behaving respectfully toward others, regardless of their religious

background. This approach not only helped students understand the importance of tolerance but also provided them with the tools to practice these values in their daily interactions.

The document analysis of teaching materials revealed that the content used in Religious Education and Character Education supported the development of tolerance. The curriculum incorporated stories and teachings from various religious traditions, highlighting shared moral values such as the importance of peace and respect. Additionally, the textbooks and teaching resources used in the school included diverse perspectives, ensuring that students were exposed to a wide range of ideas and beliefs. The materials also featured exercises that encouraged students to reflect on their own values and how they could apply them to promote harmony with others.

Focus group discussions with students further illuminated their perspectives on how these educational programs influenced their views on religious tolerance. The students noted that the discussions and activities helped them become more aware of the significance of interfaith dialogue and mutual respect. They reported feeling more comfortable discussing religious differences with their peers and believed that these conversations helped reduce misunderstandings and misconceptions. Many students also mentioned that they had become more active in supporting their peers, regardless of religious affiliation, when they observed instances of exclusion or intolerance. The research also identified several challenges that needed to be addressed to enhance the effectiveness of the educational programs. One challenge was the occasional lack of teacher preparedness in addressing sensitive religious topics. While most teachers were knowledgeable about the curriculum, some felt unsure about how to handle discussions that involved deep-rooted religious beliefs and practices. This lack of confidence sometimes led to missed opportunities to engage students in meaningful conversations about tolerance and interfaith understanding.

Additionally, some students expressed that while they learned about religious tolerance in theory, they did not always see this translated into action within the school environment. For example, there were occasional incidents of exclusion or discrimination between students of different religious backgrounds, which suggested that the values of tolerance taught in the classroom were not always fully internalized by all students. These findings indicated that more work was needed to translate the lessons on tolerance into everyday practice. Another challenge was the influence of external factors, such as the students' home environment and community, on their attitudes towards religious tolerance. Some students reported that their family members held prejudiced views towards other religious groups, which sometimes made it difficult for them to fully embrace the values of tolerance taught in school. This highlighted the need for a more holistic approach to promoting religious tolerance, where school efforts are complemented by community outreach and parental involvement.

Despite these challenges, the study found that the overall impact of Religious Education and Character Education on students' attitudes towards religious tolerance was positive. The majority of students demonstrated a stronger commitment to respecting religious diversity and building harmonious relationships with their peers. This was reflected in the students' behavior and interactions, which were increasingly characterized by mutual respect and understanding. Additionally, the findings indicated that there was a strong correlation between students' participation in religious tolerance activities and their development of empathy. The more students engaged in discussions and activities that involved understanding other religious beliefs and practices, the more they developed the ability to empathize with others. This, in turn, fostered a greater sense of community and belonging within the school.

The study also found that the positive effects of Religious Education and Character Education were particularly noticeable during interfaith events and activities organized by the school. These events, such as cultural festivals and religious celebrations, provided students with opportunities to interact with peers from different religious backgrounds

and learn from one another. Students reported that these events helped break down barriers and allowed them to see the value of religious diversity in building a more inclusive and peaceful community.

In conclusion, the research demonstrated that Religious Education and Character Education are effective tools in promoting religious tolerance among students. The integration of these subjects into the school curriculum, alongside activities that encourage empathy and respect for diversity, significantly contributed to students' positive attitudes toward religious harmony. However, the study also highlighted areas for improvement, such as the need for better teacher preparation and a more comprehensive approach to translating tolerance into daily practice. The findings suggest that schools should continue to emphasize the importance of interfaith dialogue and respect for diversity while also addressing the challenges that hinder the full realization of these values. By refining the curriculum, providing additional teacher training, and engaging the broader community, schools can further enhance their efforts to build harmonious, tolerant environments where students of all religious backgrounds can thrive together.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this research reveal that Religious Education and Character Education play a crucial role in enhancing religious tolerance among students at SMP Negeri 5 Hutaraja Tinggi, Kabupaten Padang Lawas. This discussion aims to interpret the results in the context of the research objectives, examine the implications for the broader educational system, and provide insights into how these findings can contribute to improving interfaith harmony in school settings. The central finding of this study is that both Religious Education and Character Education contribute significantly to fostering an attitude of tolerance among students. These subjects are not limited to the transmission of religious knowledge but also focus on instilling values such as respect, empathy, and understanding. By teaching students the importance of mutual respect and peaceful coexistence, these programs serve as key instruments for promoting religious tolerance in a multicultural school environment. This is consistent with the theoretical understanding that education can shape attitudes and behaviors, especially in terms of social harmony and interfaith relationships.

The interviews with teachers revealed that they recognize the importance of teaching religious tolerance and often incorporate it into their lessons. By linking religious values to broader ethical principles such as justice, kindness, and compassion, teachers were able to present a message of unity and shared moral values across different religions. This approach encourages students to see beyond religious differences and understand that diverse religious beliefs can coexist peacefully when based on common human values. These findings align with existing research on the positive role of education in fostering social cohesion and mitigating religious intolerance. In line with these observations, students who participated in the study expressed a deeper understanding of religious tolerance as a result of their lessons in Religious Education and Character Education. Many students admitted that prior to their exposure to these lessons, they were not fully aware of the importance of respecting people of different faiths. However, as they engaged more with the lessons, they reported developing a broader perspective on religious diversity and a stronger commitment to fostering peaceful relations. This reflects the power of educational intervention in transforming attitudes and behaviors toward religious inclusivity.

The classroom observations provided further evidence that Religious Education and Character Education were actively promoting religious tolerance in practical ways. Teachers employed a variety of methods, such as group discussions, role-playing, and case studies, which encouraged students to engage critically with real-life issues related to religious diversity. These methods created an interactive learning environment where students could practice empathy, reflect on different viewpoints, and work together to find

solutions to conflicts. This practical application of tolerance education is vital for ensuring that students not only learn about religious harmony in theory but also develop the skills to navigate a diverse society.

Furthermore, the use of role-playing and case studies allowed students to experience firsthand what it feels like to be in someone else's shoes, particularly in scenarios where religious conflicts might arise. By actively engaging in these exercises, students were able to confront their biases and assumptions, which led to more open-mindedness and understanding. This finding suggests that experiential learning can be a powerful tool for enhancing empathy and tolerance among young people, especially in settings where religious diversity is prevalent. Another significant finding was the positive impact of Character Education in promoting religious tolerance. The character education curriculum focuses on developing values such as responsibility, empathy, and respect, which are essential for fostering a harmonious environment in a multi-religious school. Teachers emphasized that by teaching students to be responsible citizens and respectful individuals, they were not only shaping their character but also guiding them toward becoming more tolerant and accepting of others. This aligns with the broader goal of character education, which is to build a foundation for ethical behavior and interpersonal respect in students.

Despite the overall positive outcomes, the research also highlighted some challenges in fully realizing the goals of Religious Education and Character Education in promoting religious tolerance. One of the key challenges identified was the inconsistent level of preparedness among teachers to handle sensitive religious topics. While most teachers were confident in teaching the curriculum, some admitted to feeling uncomfortable when addressing deeply ingrained religious beliefs or discussing contentious issues related to interfaith dialogue. This lack of confidence can hinder the effectiveness of tolerance education, as it may lead to missed opportunities for meaningful conversations and reflections on religious diversity. It is essential for teacher training programs to equip educators with the necessary skills and knowledge to address sensitive topics with sensitivity and understanding. Professional development opportunities focused on interfaith dialogue, conflict resolution, and the promotion of tolerance could help teachers feel more confident and competent in guiding students through challenging discussions. By providing teachers with additional support, schools can ensure that they are prepared to foster an inclusive and respectful classroom environment.

Another challenge revealed by the study was the gap between the values taught in the classroom and their application in the daily interactions among students. While students demonstrated a strong understanding of religious tolerance in theory, there were occasional incidents of exclusion or discrimination among peers based on religious differences. This suggests that while the curriculum effectively promotes tolerance at the cognitive level, there may be a disconnect when it comes to translating these values into action in the school's social environment. The influence of external factors, such as students' home environments and community values, also played a role in shaping their attitudes toward religious tolerance. Some students reported that their families held prejudiced views towards people of other faiths, which sometimes created tension between what they learned in school and the beliefs upheld at home. This finding highlights the importance of adopting a more holistic approach to tolerance education, where schools collaborate with families and communities to promote inclusive values both inside and outside the classroom.

To address this issue, it is crucial to engage parents and local communities in tolerance education efforts. Schools could organize workshops, discussions, and outreach programs to encourage dialogue between educators, parents, and religious leaders, fostering a collective commitment to promoting religious tolerance. Such initiatives could help bridge the gap between what students learn in school and the values they encounter in their broader social environment.

Moreover, the study revealed that interfaith events organized by the school, such as cultural festivals and religious celebrations, provided valuable opportunities for students to experience religious diversity firsthand. These events helped break down stereotypes and fostered a greater appreciation for different faiths. Students reported feeling more connected to their peers from different religious backgrounds after participating in these activities. This suggests that beyond formal lessons, experiential learning opportunities play a significant role in promoting religious tolerance and interfaith harmony.

The positive impact of these interfaith events also underscores the importance of creating inclusive school cultures that celebrate diversity. By organizing activities that bring together students from different religious backgrounds, schools can foster a sense of belonging and unity among their students. These events not only promote tolerance but also provide opportunities for students to develop friendships across religious lines, further strengthening the social fabric of the school community.

Despite the challenges and external factors influencing students' attitudes, the overall findings of this study indicate that Religious Education and Character Education are effective tools for fostering tolerance and promoting interfaith harmony. These programs have the potential to transform students' attitudes toward religious diversity, making them more accepting and respectful of others. However, for these programs to achieve their full potential, it is crucial to address the challenges identified, such as improving teacher preparedness, translating tolerance values into practice, and engaging families and communities in the educational process.

In conclusion, this study highlights the significant role of education in shaping young people's attitudes toward religious tolerance. By incorporating values of respect, empathy, and understanding into the curriculum and creating opportunities for experiential learning, schools can play a pivotal role in promoting social harmony in a multi-religious society. The findings suggest that when properly implemented, Religious Education and Character Education can contribute to building a more inclusive and peaceful future, where students of different religious backgrounds coexist harmoniously. Another important conclusion is that students' understanding of religious tolerance improved significantly as a result of their participation in Religious Education and Character Education lessons. Many students acknowledged that prior to these lessons, they had limited exposure to the idea of religious diversity and tolerance. However, the curriculum helped them recognize that religious differences should be respected and celebrated, rather than feared or stigmatized. This shift in perspective demonstrates the power of education in transforming attitudes toward religious diversity and inclusion.

The classroom observations conducted as part of this study revealed that the interactive and participatory teaching methods employed in Religious Education and Character Education lessons were particularly effective in promoting religious tolerance. Teachers utilized group discussions, role-playing, and case studies to engage students in active learning about religious diversity. These methods encouraged students to think critically about issues related to religious differences and to consider how they could act in ways that promote harmony and understanding in their daily lives. The active involvement of students in these discussions facilitated deeper reflections and helped them internalize the values of tolerance. Moreover, the use of role-playing exercises allowed students to put themselves in the position of someone from a different religious background, helping them develop empathy and better understand the challenges faced by others. This experiential learning not only fostered tolerance but also equipped students with the skills to navigate complex social situations involving religious diversity. Such activities have proven to be valuable tools in helping students develop more inclusive attitudes and behaviors.

In addition to the effectiveness of Religious Education and Character Education, the research findings highlight the importance of the curriculum content in shaping students' views on religious tolerance. The teaching materials used in the school incorporated content from a variety of religious traditions, which exposed students to

diverse perspectives. This content emphasized universal ethical principles such as respect, peace, and justice, which are central to promoting interfaith harmony. The curriculum also provided students with opportunities to reflect on how they could apply these values in their own lives, both within the school environment and beyond. Document analysis revealed that the materials used in the Religious Education and Character Education programs were well-designed to support the development of tolerance. Textbooks and lesson plans included examples and case studies that illustrated the importance of respecting and understanding others' beliefs. This emphasis on shared moral values provided a solid foundation for promoting religious harmony and helped students recognize the common humanity that exists across different faiths.

However, the research also revealed that there were challenges in fully translating the lessons on tolerance into everyday student behavior. While most students expressed a strong theoretical understanding of religious tolerance, there were occasional incidents of exclusion or discrimination among students based on religious differences. These incidents suggest that although the educational programs raised awareness and understanding of religious tolerance, additional efforts were needed to ensure that these values were consistently reflected in students' actions and social interactions. One of the key factors contributing to this gap between understanding and behavior was the influence of external factors, particularly students' home environments. Some students reported that their families held negative views toward people of different religions, which sometimes made it difficult for them to embrace the values of tolerance taught in school. This finding underscores the importance of taking a holistic approach to promoting tolerance, one that extends beyond the classroom and involves families and communities in the educational process.

In light of this, the study suggests that schools should work more closely with parents and local religious communities to foster a shared commitment to promoting religious tolerance. By organizing community outreach programs, workshops, and discussions, schools can strengthen the impact of their educational programs and ensure that tolerance values are reinforced both at home and in the school environment. Involving parents and community leaders in tolerance education initiatives can help bridge the gap between students' formal learning and their social realities.

Another important conclusion of the study is the positive impact of extracurricular activities, such as interfaith events and cultural celebrations, on promoting religious tolerance among students. These activities provided students with opportunities to interact with peers from different religious backgrounds, share experiences, and develop friendships. Students reported that these events helped them better understand and appreciate the diversity of religious beliefs and practices within their community. These activities served as an important complement to classroom learning, reinforcing the values of tolerance and respect in an informal setting. The findings suggest that organizing more interfaith events and activities could further enhance students' understanding of religious diversity and foster a more inclusive school culture. These events create spaces for dialogue and collaboration, allowing students to celebrate their differences while recognizing their shared values. Schools should continue to prioritize such initiatives as a means of fostering greater religious harmony and social cohesion.

Despite the positive impact of Religious Education and Character Education, the research also identified areas for improvement. One key area is the need for more comprehensive teacher training. While many teachers demonstrated a strong understanding of the importance of religious tolerance, some reported feeling unprepared to address sensitive religious topics or to engage in complex discussions about interfaith issues. To address this, it is crucial for schools to provide teachers with professional development opportunities focused on interfaith dialogue, conflict resolution, and the promotion of tolerance. By enhancing teachers' skills and confidence, schools can ensure that tolerance education is delivered effectively.

Moreover, the study found that there was a need for more proactive efforts to address religious intolerance and discrimination when it occurs. While the educational programs provided a solid foundation for promoting tolerance, the school environment still faced challenges related to prejudice and exclusion. Schools must develop clear policies and strategies for addressing intolerance and ensuring that students feel safe and supported in a diverse environment. This may include providing counseling services, creating peer mediation programs, and offering opportunities for students to discuss and resolve conflicts related to religious differences.

In conclusion, this study has shown that Religious Education and Character Education are effective tools for fostering religious tolerance and interfaith harmony among students. Through these programs, students developed a deeper understanding of the importance of respecting religious diversity and learned how to engage with peers from different religious backgrounds in a positive and inclusive manner. However, for these programs to achieve their full potential, it is essential to address the challenges identified in the study, such as improving teacher preparedness, translating tolerance into practice, and engaging families and communities in the process.

The findings of this study suggest that when schools create a supportive and inclusive environment that prioritizes religious tolerance, they can play a critical role in building a more harmonious society. By integrating tolerance education into the curriculum, fostering empathy through experiential learning, and promoting interfaith dialogue, schools can equip students with the skills and values necessary to navigate a diverse world with respect and understanding. Ultimately, the promotion of religious tolerance in schools contributes to the creation of a more peaceful and inclusive society where individuals of all faiths can coexist harmoniously.

CONCLUSION

This research sought to explore how Religious Education and Character Education contribute to the development of religious tolerance among students at SMP Negeri 5 Hutaraja Tinggi, Kabupaten Padang Lawas, and its role in fostering harmony among students from different religious backgrounds. After analyzing the data obtained from interviews, classroom observations, document analysis, and focus group discussions, several conclusions can be drawn regarding the effectiveness of these educational programs in promoting tolerance and understanding in a religiously diverse school environment. The first conclusion drawn from this study is that both Religious Education and Character Education have a positive impact on students' attitudes toward religious tolerance. These subjects go beyond teaching the basic tenets of each religion; they focus on instilling values that promote respect, empathy, and peaceful coexistence among students of different faiths. By providing students with an understanding of the shared moral values across religious traditions, these programs create an educational foundation for fostering interfaith harmony. A significant observation from the study is that the teaching approach used by educators at SMP Negeri 5 Hutaraja Tinggi was conducive to promoting religious tolerance. Teachers emphasized values such as kindness, justice, and respect, which transcended religious boundaries. This approach not only helped students appreciate their own religious traditions but also encouraged them to recognize the validity of other religious practices. In a multi-religious school setting, this attitude of acceptance and openness plays a critical role in reducing religious prejudice and fostering positive intergroup relations.

REFERENCES

Arikunto, S. (2002). *Prosedur Penelitian*. Bandung: Rineka Cipta.

- Dasopang, M. D., Lubis, A. H., & Dasopang, H. R. (2022). How do Millennial Parents Internalize Islamic Values in Their Early Childhood in the Digital Era? *AL-ISHLAH: Jurnal Pendidikan*, 14(1), 697–708.
- Dasopang, M. D., Nasution, I. F. A., & Lubis, A. H. (2023). The Role of Religious and Cultural Education as A Resolution of Radicalism Conflict in Sibolga Community. *HTS Theological Studies*, 79(1), 1–7.
- Erawadi, E., Hamka, H., & Juliana, F. (2017). The Analysis of Student's Stressed Syllables Mastery at Sixth Semester of TBI in IAIN Padangsidimpuan. *English Education: English Journal for Teaching and Learning*, 5(1), 44–57.
- Fatimah, A., & Maryani, K. (2018). Visual Literasi Media Pembelajaran Buku Cerita Anak. *Jurnal Inovasi Teknologi Pendidikan*, 5(1), 61–69. <https://doi.org/10.21831/jitp.v5i1.16212>
- Gogahu, D. G. S., & Prasetyo, T. (2020). Pengembangan Media Pembelajaran Berbasis E-Bookstory untuk Meningkatkan Literasi Membaca Siswa Sekolah Dasar. *Jurnal Basicedu*, 4(4), 1004–1015.
- Hamka, H. (2023). The Role of Principals on Teacher Performance Improvement in a Suburban School. *QALAMUNA: Jurnal Pendidikan, Sosial, Dan Agama*, 15(1), 371–380.
- Hamka, H., Suen, M.-W., Anganthi, N. R. N., Haq, A. H. B., & Prasetyo, B. (2023). The Effectiveness of Gratitude Intervention in Reducing Negative Emotions in Sexual Abuse Victims. *Psikohumaniora: Jurnal Penelitian Psikologi*, 8(2), 227–240.
- Harahap, S. M., & Hamka, H. (2023). Investigating the Roles of Philosophy, Culture, Language and Islam in Angkola's Local Wisdom of 'Daliha Na Tolu.' *HTS Theologiese Studies/Theological Studies*, 79(1), 8164.
- Hendrawati, S., Rosidin, U., & Astiani, S. (2020). Perilaku hidup bersih dan sehat (PHBS) siswa/siswi di sekolah menengah pertama negeri (SMPN). *Jurnal Perawat Indonesia*, 4(1), 295–307. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.32584/jpi.v4i1.454>
- Lubis, A. H. (2019). Upaya Peningkatan Hasil Belajar Siswa Sekolah Dasar melalui Model Cooperative Learning Tipe Numbered Heads Together. *FORUM PAEDAGOGIK*, 11(2), 127–143.
- Lubis, A. H. (2023). The Interactive Multimedia Based on Theo-Centric Approach as Learning Media during the Covid-19 Pandemic. *JPI (Jurnal Pendidikan Indonesia)*, 12(2), 210–222.
- Lubis, A. H., & Dasopang, M. D. (2020). Pengembangan Buku Cerita Bergambar Berbasis Augmented Reality untuk Mengakomodasi Generasi Z. *Jurnal Pendidikan: Teori, Penelitian, Dan Pengembangan*, 5(6), 780–791.
- Lubis, A. H., Dasopang, M. D., Ramadhini, F., & Dalimunthe, E. M. (2022). Augmented Reality Pictorial Storybook: How does It Influence on Elementary School Mathematics Anxiety? *Premiere Educandum: Jurnal Pendidikan Dasar Dan Pembelajaran*, 12(1), 41–53.
- Lubis, A. H., & Wangid, M. N. (2019). Augmented Reality-assisted Pictorial Storybook: Media to Enhance Discipline Character of Primary School Students. *Mimbar Sekolah Dasar*, 6(1), 11–20. <https://doi.org/10.17509/mimbar-sd.v6i1.16415>
- Lubis, A. H., Yusup, F., Dasopang, M. D., & Januariyansah, S. (2021). Effectivity of Interactive Multimedia with Theocentric Approach to the Analytical Thinking Skills of Elementary School Students in Science Learning. *Premiere Educandum: Jurnal Pendidikan Dasar Dan Pembelajaran*, 11(2), 215–226.

- Manshur, U., & Ramdlani, M. (2019). Media audio visual dalam pembelajaran PAI. *Al-Murabbi: Jurnal Pendidikan Agama Islam*, 5(1), 1–8.
- Mardhiyah, R. H., Aldriani, S. N. F., Chitta, F., & Zulfikar, M. R. (2021). Pentingnya Keterampilan Belajar di Abad 21 sebagai Tuntutan dalam Pengembangan Sumber Daya Manusia. *Lectura: Jurnal Pendidikan*, 12(1), 29–40.
- Ningsih, Y. S., Mulia, M., & Lubis, A. H. (2023). Development of Picture Storybooks with TheoAnthropoEco Centric Approach for Elementary School Students. *AL-ISHLAH: Jurnal Pendidikan*, 15(2), 1888–1903.
- Nurhidayah, I., Asifah, L., & Rosidin, U. (2021). Pengetahuan , Sikap dan Perilaku Hidup Bersih dan Sehat pada Siswa Sekolah Dasar. 13(1), 61–71. <https://doi.org/10.32528/ijhs.v13i1.4864>
- Peptiyanti, I., Ahmad, A., Dzaky, M., Fauziah, S. N., Rendi, & Puspitasari, P. (2023). Peran kurikulum merdeka dalam meningkatkan harmonisasi antara masyarakat dan sekolah. *Jurnal Pacu Pendidikan Dasar*, 3(1), 269–277. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.22021/pacu.v3i1.411>
- Rahmah, S., & Lubis, A. H. (2024). Problem Posing as a Learning Model to Improve Primary School Students' Mathematics Learning Outcomes in Gayo Lues. *Journal of Indonesian Primary School*, 1(4), 93–104.
- Rahman, A., Munandar, S. A., Fitriani, A., Karlina, Y., & Yumriani. (2022). Pengertian Pendidikan, Ilmu Pendidikan dan Unsur-Unsur Pendidikan. *Al Urwatul Wutsqa: Kajian Pendidikan Islam*, 2(1), 1–8.
- Ranisa, R., Erawadi, E., & Hamka, H. (2018). Students' Mastery in Identifying Adverbs at Grade VIII SMPN 2 Batang Toru Tapanuli Selatan. *ENGLISH EDUCATION JOURNAL: English Journal for Teaching and Learning*, 6(2), 241–252.
- Ricardo, R., & Meilani, R. I. (2017). Impak Minat dan Motivasi Belajar terhadap Hasil Belajar Siswa. *Jurnal Pendidikan Manajemen Perkantoran (JPManper)*, 2(2), 188–201.
- Santi, Undang, & Kasja. (2023). Peran Guru PAI dalam Membentuk Karakter Peserta Didik di Sekolah. *Jurnal Pendidikan Tambusai*, 7(2), 16078–16084. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.31004/jptam.v7i2.8918>
- Sugiyono. (2018). *Metode Penelitian Kuantitatif Kualitatif dan R&D*. Bandung: Alfabeta.