Strengthening Tolerance Character in Aqidah Akhlak Learning at MTs Kayu Aro Lindung Jaya
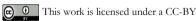
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Abstract. This study aims to analyze the role of teachers in strengthening students' tolerance character through *Akidah Akhlak* learning at MTsS Kayu Aro Lindung Jaya. The urgency of this research lies in the increasing importance of tolerance education in multicultural societies, particularly in schools where students from different cultural and ethnic backgrounds interact on a daily basis. Tolerance is not only a social necessity but also a moral value that must be systematically cultivated through education. A qualitative descriptive approach was employed to explore this phenomenon in depth. Data were collected using observations, interviews, and documentation to capture comprehensive perspectives from multiple stakeholders. The research participants consisted of one *Akidah Akhlak* teacher, the school principal, the deputy of curriculum, and ten students representing different ethnic backgrounds. The results indicate that *Akidah Akhlak* learning was implemented through an integrative and holistic approach that combined theoretical knowledge with practical moral guidance. The tolerance values emphasized include respect for religious, cultural, and ethnic differences, appreciation of diverse opinions, recognition of others' beliefs, and collaboration across diversity. These values were reinforced through classroom activities, group discussions, and extracurricular programs. Strengthening tolerance was supported by teachers' role modeling, family upbringing, the school environment, and social experiences. The internal impacts included students' self-awareness, empathy, and conflict resolution skills, while the external impacts contributed to creating a peaceful, harmonious, and inclusive school climate. The findings highlight the strategic role of religious education as a powerful medium for cultivating tolerance and social cohesion in multicultural contexts.

Keywords: Character Education, Tolerance, Akidah Akhlak Learning.

Introduction

In the era of globalization and rapid social transformation, modern societies are increasingly characterized by multiculturalism. This condition reflects the coexistence of people from diverse cultural, ethnic, linguistic, and religious backgrounds in a single community (Banks, 2010; Tilaar, 2004). Multicultural realities not only enrich cultural experiences but also generate potential sources of misunderstanding and conflict when not managed properly (Tolera, M, 2019). Consequently, education is recognized as one of the

most strategic instruments in cultivating tolerance, mutual respect, and peaceful coexistence among individuals of different backgrounds (UNESCO, 2018; Aderibigbe, 2023).

Tolerance has long been acknowledged as a universal value essential for sustaining peace and stability in society (Tanyel, S. S., & Kıralp, F. S. Ş., 2021; Peterson & Seligman, 2004). In the Indonesian context, this principle is embedded in the national motto *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* (Unity in Diversity), which emphasizes harmony despite differences in ethnicity, religion, or culture (Khairani, A., Syachruroji, A., & Rokmanah, S., 2023). With over 300 ethnic groups and six officially recognized religions, Indonesia stands as one of the most diverse nations in the world, where tolerance is not only a moral value but also a social necessity (Rahmadi, R., & Hamdan, H., 2019).

The government has formally recognized tolerance as one of the 18 character values that must be developed through national education (Susilo, M. J., Dewantoro, M. H., & Yuningsih, Y., 2022). These values are expected to shape learners into not only academically competent individuals but also morally responsible citizens who can live harmoniously within a pluralistic society (Akhwan, M, 2014; Muslich, M, 2022). Among the subjects in Islamic Religious Education, *Akidah Akhlak* plays a central role in fostering noble character (*akhlaq al-karimah*), including respect, empathy, justice, and tolerance (Suciati, I., Idrus, I., Hajerina, H., Taha, N., & Wahyuni, D. S., 2023; Yulindaputri, T., Arifi, A., & Anam, K, 2024).

Tolerance, in its broadest sense, refers to the capacity to respect, accept, and appreciate differences without imposing one's own beliefs on others (Supriyanto, A., Hartini, S., & Wahyudi, A., 2019; Valentine, S., & Fleischman, G., 2002). It is not limited to passive acceptance but also includes active engagement in creating harmonious interactions (Lickona, T, 2004; Hopkins, K., 2021). From a sociological perspective, tolerance is vital in preventing discrimination and promoting social inclusion (Satter, A., Meisenheimer, J., & Sailor, W., 2019). From a psychological perspective, it relates to emotional regulation, empathy, and openness toward others' perspectives (Sánchez, S., & Gaeta, M. L., 2023; Esmaeilinasab, M., et. Al,2014). From a religious perspective, especially in Islam, tolerance is embedded in the Qur'anic teaching of respecting human dignity and diversity as part of God's will (Yulindaputri, T., Arifi, A., & Anam, K,2024).

Previous research has shown that tolerance is a critical factor in enhancing social cohesion in multicultural classrooms (Rafdinal, W., et. Al, 2025; Budnyk, O., et.al, 2022). Students who are exposed to inclusive pedagogies, such as cooperative learning and heterogeneous group activities, demonstrate higher levels of tolerance and empathy compared to those taught with traditional, teacher-centered methods (Zhou, T., & Colomer, J., 2024; Dharma, Y., Seneru, W., & Obi, S. N., 2025). Moreover, Pigozzi (2016) and Alnaji et al (2016) emphasize tolerance education as a global priority in achieving sustainable peace and global citizenship.

Indonesian schools serve as both academic institutions and cultural arenas where values of unity and diversity must be lived out. Character education has been mainstreamed into the curriculum, with tolerance considered a key value to be nurtured across subjects (Komalasari, K., & Indrawadi, J., 2023; Khotimah, R. H., & Hidayat, M. T., 2023). However, the reality often shows challenges in practice. Cases of intolerance, exclusivity, and prejudice among students have been reported in various regions (Khodijah, A., & Supriadi, U., 2024).

This indicates that tolerance must not only be formally taught but also internalized through authentic experiences, reflective practices, and role modeling by teachers (Voronchenko, T., Klimenko, T., & Kostina, I. 2015; Staiti, A.,2022).

Akidah Akhlak has a unique position because it integrates theological knowledge with moral practice. The subject does not merely focus on religious rituals but also on moral virtues such as justice, honesty, empathy, and tolerance (Ismail, I., 2016). This makes it highly relevant to fostering intercultural and interreligious understanding in pluralistic societies. Studies (Kawakip, A. N., & Sulanam, S., 2023; Budnyk, O., et. al, 2022) confirm that tolerance values taught through Islamic education significantly contribute to reducing prejudice and building harmonious school climates.

Numerous studies have investigated tolerance education. Supriyanto, A., Hartini, S., & Wahyudi, A. (2019) examined tolerance as a pathway to peace education, while Tanyel, S. S., & Kıralp, F. S. Ş. (2021) discussed its role in global peace-building. Komalasari, K., & Indrawadi, J., (2023) highlighted the positive impact of character education programs on students' tolerance in Indonesian schools. Similarly, Suciati, I., Idrus, I., Hajerina, H., Taha, N., & Wahyuni, D. S., (2023) demonstrated that moral education is a strong foundation for character building.

However, gaps remain in the literature. First, many studies focus on tolerance as a broad educational outcome but provide limited analysis of its integration into specific religious subjects such as *Akidah Akhlak*. Second, empirical evidence on how tolerance is practically nurtured in rural or semi-rural Indonesian madrasahs remains scarce. Third, while international studies (Banks, 2010; Tolera, M, 2019; Pigozzi, 2006) highlight the global importance of tolerance, there is insufficient localized understanding of how tolerance values are contextualized in small communities with strong ethnic identities.

The case of MTsS Kayu Aro Lindung Jaya offers a valuable context for exploration. The school accommodates students from diverse ethnic groups, particularly Javanese and Kerinci, within a rural setting. Preliminary observations reveal that while inter-ethnic interaction generally occurs harmoniously, students still tend to form exclusive groups based on ethnicity or family background. This phenomenon, if left unaddressed, may hinder the cultivation of holistic tolerance (Voronchenko, T., Klimenko, T., & Kostina, I.,2015). Therefore, the school represents a microcosm of Indonesia's broader challenge in managing diversity through education.

Building on the theoretical and empirical background, this study aims to analyze how tolerance character is strengthened through *Akidah Akhlak* learning at MTsS Kayu Aro Lindung Jaya. Specifically, it seeks to explore the strategies used by teachers in integrating tolerance values into *Akidah Akhlak* lessons. Identify the internal and external factors influencing tolerance development among students. Assess the impact of tolerance character strengthening on individual students and the overall school climate.

This study contributes to the academic discourse in several ways. First, it provides empirical evidence on tolerance education in rural Indonesian madrasahs, an under-researched context. Second, it highlights the role of Islamic religious subjects, particularly *Akidah Akhlak*, as vehicles for character education beyond doctrinal learning. Third, it offers insights for policymakers and educators in designing more effective strategies for embedding

tolerance into curricula, thereby supporting the broader agenda of peace and social harmony in Indonesia and beyond.

Method

This study employed a qualitative research design with a descriptive approach. The aim was to provide an in-depth understanding of how tolerance character was strengthened in *Akidah Akhlak* learning. A qualitative approach was chosen because it allows researchers to explore participants' perceptions, experiences, and practices in a natural setting without manipulating the variables (Creswell, 2018). The study focused on exploring teachers' roles, strategies, and challenges in cultivating tolerance through religious education.

The participants in this study were drawn from MTsS Kayu Aro Lindung Jaya, a rural Islamic junior high school located in Kerinci, Jambi Province, Indonesia. They consisted of key stakeholders who were directly involved in the teaching and learning of *Akidah Akhlak* and in the cultivation of tolerance values within the school environment. Specifically, the participants included one *Akidah Akhlak* teacher, who was responsible for designing and implementing instructional activities that integrated tolerance character; the school principal, who oversaw the institutional culture and policies related to character education; and the deputy head of curriculum, who ensured that tolerance values were embedded in curriculum planning and practice. In addition, ten students from diverse ethnic and cultural backgrounds were selected to represent the learner perspective and to provide insights into how tolerance was experienced and practiced in everyday school life. This composition of participants was considered adequate to capture a holistic understanding of tolerance strengthening at both the institutional and classroom levels.

Table 1. Characteristics of Participants

Category	Role/Position	Characteristics
Teacher	1 person (*Akidah Akhlak*)	Experienced in teaching Islamic character values; serves as role model.
Principal	1 person	Provides leadership and policy direction for school character education.
Deputy of Curriculum	1 person	Oversees curriculum design and integration of tolerance values.
Students	10 persons	Age: 13–15 years old Grade: VII, VIII, IX Ethnicity: Kerinci (4), Javanese (3), Minangkabau (3) Cultural background: rural, with family traditions influencing daily interactions. Students were selected purposively to represent gender balance, ethnic diversity, and variation in academic level.

The recruitment process applied a purposive sampling technique, where participants were selected based on their relevance to the research objectives (Patton, 2015). Permission to conduct the study was obtained from the principal of MTsS Kayu Aro Lindung Jaya. Teachers and administrators were invited directly by the researcher, while students were recommended by the *Akidah Akhlak* teacher to represent different ethnic and cultural

groups. Prior to participation, informed consent was obtained from both the students and their parents/guardians. Ethical considerations were followed to ensure confidentiality and voluntary participation.

Three instruments were used in collecting data: Observation Sheet – to record classroom interactions, teaching practices, and student behavior related to tolerance. Observations focused on how the teacher integrated tolerance values into learning activities. Semi-structured Interview Guide – used to obtain detailed insights from teachers, administrators, and students regarding their experiences, perceptions, and practices of tolerance education. Interviews provided flexibility to explore participants' responses in depth. Documentation Checklist included school documents such as vision and mission statements, lesson plans, extracurricular activity records, and photographs of school activities. Documentation helped triangulate data obtained from observations and interviews.

The data analysis process followed Miles and Huberman's (1994) interactive model, which includes four stages: Data Collection – gathering information through observation, interviews, and documentation. Data Reduction – selecting, simplifying, and focusing the data relevant to tolerance education. Data Display – organizing the data into matrices, narrative descriptions, and thematic charts to facilitate interpretation. Conclusion Drawing and Verification – interpreting the findings to identify recurring themes, patterns, and factors influencing the strengthening of tolerance character.

To ensure credibility, the researcher employed triangulation of data sources (teachers, administrators, students) and methods (observation, interview, documentation). Member checking was conducted by confirming the interpretations with participants to validate accuracy.

Results

This study explored the implementation of tolerance character strengthening through *Akidah Akhlak* learning at MTsS Kayu Aro Lindung Jaya. To complement the findings from classroom observations and documentation, this study also relied on interviews with key stakeholders, namely the *Akidah Akhlak* teacher, the school principal, the deputy head of curriculum, and ten students from different ethnic and cultural backgrounds. The interviews provided deeper insights into how tolerance values were taught, institutionalized, and experienced in the daily life of the school community. Through these conversations, it became clear that tolerance was not only integrated into lesson content but also reflected in school policies, extracurricular activities, and interpersonal relationships among students. The *Akidah Akhlak* teacher highlighted instructional strategies, the principal emphasized the school's vision and cultural programs, the deputy explained curriculum integration, and students described their personal experiences of becoming more open and collaborative. A summary of the interview findings is presented in the following table:

Table 2. Summary of Interview Findings

Informant	Focus of Interview	Key Findings / Statements
Akidah Akhlak Teacher	Role in strengthening tolerance	Emphasized tolerance as both a religious obligation and social necessity; applied strategies such as heterogeneous group work and role modeling. *"In Akidah Akhlak, tolerance is not only about respecting*

		differences but also about practicing empathy and cooperation in daily life."
Principal	School vision and institutional support	Highlighted tolerance as part of the school's vision and mission; promoted extracurricular activities (cultural festivals, community service) to foster tolerance. *"We want MTsS Kayu Aro Lindung Jaya to be known as a school that upholds harmony."*
Deputy Head of Curriculum	Curriculum design and assessment	Explained integration of tolerance into lesson plans, classroom activities, and student assessments; character development valued equally with cognitive outcomes. *"We ensure that tolerance is embedded in all aspects of curriculum implementation."*
Students (10 persons)	Daily experiences of tolerance in learning	Initially formed groups based on ethnicity; later became more open and collaborative after heterogeneous grouping. *"At first, I only wanted to work with my Kerinci friends. But after being grouped with Javanese and Minang classmates, I realized we could learn more from each other."* Also acknowledged improved respect for other religions. *"Respecting others' beliefs is also part of being a good Muslim."*

The findings are presented in three major sections: (1) the forms of tolerance values applied, (2) the strategies and processes of strengthening tolerance in *Akidah Akhlak* lessons, and (3) the impacts of tolerance education on students and the school environment.

Forms of Tolerance Values Practiced

Based on observations, interviews, and documentation, several forms of tolerance values were consistently applied in the school context. The values were both explicitly taught through *Akidah Akhlak* lessons and implicitly practiced in daily interactions among students and teachers.

The tolerance values identified include:

1. Respect for differences: Students were taught to appreciate religious, cultural, and ethnic diversity. Teachers consistently reminded students that differences are a natural part of life and must be respected.
2. Appreciation of opinions: During class discussions, students were encouraged to listen attentively and not interrupt or ridicule differing views.
3. Religious tolerance: Although the school is an Islamic institution, teachers emphasized respect for people of other faiths, which was integrated into lessons on *akhlaq*.
4. Cooperation in diversity: Students from different ethnic backgrounds were intentionally placed into heterogeneous groups to foster collaboration and mutual respect.

Table 3. Forms of Tolerance Values Observed in MTsS Kayu Aro Lindung Jaya

Forms of Tolerance Values	Indicators in Practice
Respect for differences	Students accept peers from different ethnic groups (Kerinci, Javanese, Minang, etc.)
Appreciation of opinions	Students listen to diverse perspectives during group discussions

Forms of Tolerance Values	Indicators in Practice
Religious tolerance	Students respect classmates' religious practices and family backgrounds
Cooperation in diversity	Group assignments encourage collaboration across different cultural identities

Strategies Applied in *Akidah Akhlak* Learning

The *Akidah Akhlak* teacher employed a variety of instructional strategies to instill tolerance values in students. These strategies combined pedagogical approaches, role modeling, and extracurricular activities.

1. Integrative teaching: Theoretical lessons were linked to students' real-life experiences. For example, when teaching about *akhlaq mahmudah* (commendable character), the teacher used tolerance as a case study and encouraged students to share experiences of living harmoniously with others.
2. Role modeling: Teachers consistently demonstrated tolerant behavior, such as fairness in evaluating students and respectful communication with all parties.
3. Dialogic learning: Students were engaged in discussions where they were free to express opinions, provided they did so respectfully.
4. Collaborative learning: Students were grouped heterogeneously by ethnicity and academic ability to foster cooperation.
5. Extracurricular activities: Activities such as religious assemblies, community service, and cultural festivals became practical arenas for students to exercise tolerance.

Table 4. Strategies for Strengthening Tolerance in *Akidah Akhlak* Learning

Strategy	Implementation Example
Integrative teaching	Linking Qur'anic verses on humanity with students' daily experiences
Role modeling	Teacher demonstrates fairness and respect toward all students
Dialogic learning	Group discussions encourage listening to others without judgment
Collaborative learning	Group tasks assigned across ethnic and ability lines
Extracurricular activities	Community service and cultural events enhance cooperation and inclusivity

Impacts of Tolerance Strengthening

The strengthening of tolerance character had significant impacts on both the students (internal impacts) and the school environment (external impacts).

Internal Impacts (Students) Growth of self-awareness: Students recognized the importance of mutual respect and began to practice it spontaneously. Empathy development: Students showed increased concern for peers from different cultural and religious backgrounds. Improved collaboration: Students were more willing to work in diverse teams without prejudice. Conflict resolution skills: Students learned to resolve disagreements peacefully, rather than through confrontation.

External Impacts (School Environment), Peaceful school climate: The frequency of conflicts among students decreased significantly. Inclusive culture: The school became known as an environment that valued diversity. Positive reputation: Parents and the local community perceived the school as a model of harmonious education.

Table 5. Internal and External Impacts of Tolerance Strengthening

Impact Type	Findings
Internal (Students)	Self-awareness, empathy, collaboration, conflict resolution
External (School)	Peaceful climate, inclusive culture, positive reputation

Supporting and Inhibiting Factors

The implementation of tolerance strengthening was influenced by several supporting and inhibiting factors.

Supporting Factors, Teachers: Served as role models and facilitators of tolerance education. Family background: Families reinforced tolerance values at home. Educational system: Curriculum and school vision supported the integration of tolerance. Social interactions: Daily interaction with peers from different backgrounds provided real-life contexts.

Inhibiting Factors, Exclusive peer groups: Some students still tended to form groups based on ethnicity. Limited resources: Lack of adequate teaching materials focusing on multiculturalism. Community influence: External community tensions sometimes influenced students' perspectives.

Table 6. Supporting and Inhibiting Factors

Category	Factors Identified
Supporting Factors	Teachers as role models, family reinforcement, curriculum support, peer interactions
Inhibiting Factors	Exclusive student groups, lack of resources, external community influence

Narrative Illustration from Student Interviews

One student mentioned that initially, they felt more comfortable working only with peers from the same ethnic background. However, after being assigned to heterogeneous groups, they realized that collaboration with classmates from other ethnicities not only improved their learning outcomes but also deepened their friendships. Another student emphasized that lessons in *Akidah Akhlak* made them more aware of the need to respect differences in religious practices within their neighborhood, especially when interacting with non-Muslim neighbors.

Discussion

The findings of this study confirm that tolerance character can be effectively strengthened through *Akidah Akhlak* learning when it is systematically integrated into the teaching process, role modeling, and extracurricular activities. This aligns with Lickona, T (2004) concept of character education, which emphasizes that values must be not only taught but also practiced and lived within a learning environment. By embedding tolerance into religious education, this study highlights that Islamic subjects are not limited to doctrinal knowledge but also serve as vehicles for fostering universal moral values such as respect, empathy, and peaceful coexistence.

One of the significant findings is the role of teachers as role models, which strongly influenced the way students internalized tolerance values. This supports prior research by Suciati, I., Idrus, I., Hajerina, H., Taha, N., & Wahyuni, D. S., (2023), who noted that teachers' attitudes and behaviors significantly affect students' moral development. In the

context of MTsS Kayu Aro Lindung Jaya, the teacher's consistent demonstration of fairness, inclusivity, and respect provided students with a living example of tolerant behavior.

Another critical aspect is the use of dialogic and collaborative learning methods, which created opportunities for students to interact with peers from diverse ethnic and cultural backgrounds. These findings reinforce Zhou, T., & Colomer, J., (2024) theory that cooperative learning fosters tolerance by encouraging students to engage constructively with differences. The heterogeneous grouping of students reduced tendencies to form exclusive cliques and facilitated mutual understanding across ethnic divides.

Moreover, the impact of tolerance strengthening was evident both internally and externally. Internally, students showed growth in empathy, cooperation, and conflict resolution skills. Externally, the school developed a more peaceful and inclusive climate, consistent with the goals of multicultural education described by Banks (2010). These results demonstrate that tolerance education has a dual benefit: shaping individual character while simultaneously creating a harmonious institutional culture.

Nevertheless, the study also reveals challenges in the form of inhibiting factors such as students' inclination to form exclusive peer groups, limited multicultural learning resources, and external community influences. These findings resonate with Khodijah, A., & Supriadi, U. (2024), who observed that tolerance education in Indonesia often struggles with sociocultural barriers outside the classroom. Addressing these challenges requires not only teacher commitment but also collaboration with families, policymakers, and local communities to ensure consistency between school values and broader social realities.

In summary, this research contributes to the understanding of how tolerance can be cultivated in rural Islamic junior high schools. It strengthens the argument that *Akidah Akhlak* is an effective medium for integrating character education into formal learning. At the same time, it highlights the importance of contextual factors, suggesting that tolerance education must be adapted to the unique cultural and social environment of each school.

Conclusion

This study concludes that the strengthening of tolerance character at MTsS Kayu Aro Lindung Jaya is effectively implemented through *Akidah Akhlak* learning by integrating theoretical instruction, practical activities, and moral role modeling. Tolerance values such as respect for differences, appreciation of diverse opinions, religious inclusivity, and cooperation in diversity were consistently emphasized in both classroom lessons and extracurricular activities. The process was supported by teachers' exemplary behavior, family reinforcement, and peer interactions, while challenges included exclusive student groupings, limited multicultural resources, and external community influences.

The impacts of tolerance strengthening were evident at both individual and institutional levels. At the student level, tolerance education fostered self-awareness, empathy, collaboration, and conflict resolution skills. At the school level, it contributed to a peaceful, inclusive climate that enhanced social cohesion and reduced conflict. These findings underline the strategic role of *Akidah Akhlak* as a medium for nurturing tolerance,

demonstrating that religious education can contribute significantly to building harmony in multicultural societies.

Overall, this research highlights the importance of embedding tolerance into Islamic education as part of character building and social cohesion. It contributes to the broader educational agenda of preparing students not only as knowledgeable individuals but also as morally responsible citizens who can live harmoniously in diverse contexts.

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