

## The Influence of Power Dynamics on Fostering Religious Tolerance in Early Childhood Education

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**Abstract.** This research seeks to dig deeper into the relationships built in the learning process at Darul Hanifah Kindergarten, especially related to religious tolerance because the religions adhered to by students attending Darul Hanifah Kindergarten are heterogeneous (Islam and religious beliefs). This research uses a qualitative case study approach. The case study method was chosen because there were cases of religious diversity/beliefs held by Darul Hanifah Kindergarten students. Observation, interviews, and documentation are data collection techniques. These three techniques were chosen to strengthen the data obtained. Meanwhile, the data analysis technique chosen in this research is data triangulation, so that the validity of the existing data can be recognized. The subjects of this research were the principal, teachers, and students of Darul Hanifah Kindergarten. Religious tolerance between students, teachers, school principals, and parents is well established. Children understand that around them there is diversity in terms of religion but this does not make them different and separate themselves in the learning process. However, it cannot be denied that teachers' involvement in instilling tolerance among children is quite dominant.

**Keywords:** *Religious Moderation, Early Childhood Education, Religious Tolerance.*

**Abstrak.** Penelitian ini berupaya untuk menggali lebih dalam relasi yang terbangun dalam proses pembelajaran di TK Darul Hanifah khususnya terkait dengan toleransi beragama, karena agama yang dianut siswa yang bersekolah di TK Darul Hanifah bersifat heterogen (Islam dan Aliran Kepercayaan). Penelitian ini menggunakan metode studi kasus dengan pendekatan kualitatif. Metode studi kasus dipilih karena adanya kasus keberagaman beragama/kepercayaan yang dianut siswa-siswa TK Darul Hanifah. Observasi, wawancara, dan dokumentasi menjadi teknik pengumpulan data. Ketiga teknik tersebut dipilih untuk menguatkan data yang didapat. Sedangkan, teknik analisis data yang dipilih dalam penelitian ini yaitu triangulasi data, sehingga data yang ada dapat diakui validitasnya. Subjek dari penelitian ini yaitu kepala sekolah, guru, dan siswa TK Darul Hanifah. Toleransi beragama antar siswa, guru, kepala sekolah, dan orang tua terjalin dengan baik. Anak memiliki pemahaman bahwa disekitarnya terdapat keberagaman dari sisi agama tetapi tidak menjadikan mereka berbeda dan memisahkan diri dalam proses pembelajaran. Namun, tidak dapat dipungkiri bahwa keterlibatan guru dalam menanamkan toleransi antara anak cukup dominan.

**Kata Kunci:** *Moderasi beragama, Pendidikan Anak Usia Dini, Toleransi beragama.*

## **Introduction**

Indonesia is a diverse country in terms of ethnicity, language, culture, customs, and religion/belief. On the one hand, this demonstrates the nation's extraordinary wealth and potential. However, diversity is one of the sources of conflict. Many conflicts arise due to diversity, one of which is triggered by the background in the name of religion, such as the 2018 attack on a Buddhist place of worship (Klenteng) in Kediri, a group of irresponsible people failed Christians who conducted social services on accusations of Christianization that occurred in Bantul, and a type of rejection of the domicile of someone of a different religion, such as the rejection of the Catholic sub-district head, Buddhist residents, In Indonesia, incidents of intolerance are becoming more common and persistent.

According to Wardah (2023), the Setara Institute for Democracy's research found East Java to be the most intolerant province. This is based on data indicating that 50 places of worship have experienced disturbances in 2022. The increase was significant because disturbances occurred in 16 places of worship in 2017 and have since increased to 50. In addition to the trend of disturbing places of worship, there is also a trend of rejection of lectures, which occurs in various regions, with East Java being the most affected, with eight cases out of 14 occurring in East Java. Meanwhile, *cnnindonesia.com* (2022) reported that intolerance was widespread in the West Java area, citing data from the Indonesian Human Rights Monitor (Imparsial). The most common types of intolerance in West Java are those related to places of worship; however, there are also cases of intolerance related to the prohibition of worship, particularly among minorities.

Intolerance does not only exist in the larger community. However, it is also prevalent in the educational setting. Ihsan (2021) describes data from Setara Institute and Wahid Institute research, forms of intolerance in the educational environment, such as the prohibition of wearing the hijab in one of Bali's secondary schools, the distribution of the principal's circular letter requiring children to wear Muslim uniforms, regulations requiring all students to attend Easter camp, and cases of bullying against students who do not wear the hijab. Intolerance in the educational environment must be taken

seriously in order to begin the process of breaking the chain of intolerance, which will be extremely dangerous if it continues as children enter an increasingly diverse and complex social life. This can be accomplished by instilling in children an understanding of Indonesia's multiculturalism, resulting in a strong sense of tolerance (Latifah et al., 2022).

Reinforcing existing social facts, the causes of intolerance in Indonesia vary by region. Especially in Cilegon, the background of intolerance is the "grudge" of the past related to the Cilegon disturbance, when there was a ban on chanting adzan (Irvan N.S; et al., 2023). In Bogor City, various triggers include intolerant groups carrying out strong and massive suppression, government policies that are less relevant, weak law enforcement, and economic disparities (Khalikin, 2019). Cases of intolerance that arise in both the community and the realm of education are undoubtedly influenced by two factors: internal factors, which refer to beliefs that are realized on the basis of interpretations of religious teachings, and external factors, which refer to psychological condition variables (negative feelings, ignored, and depressed) that trigger intolerance (Qowaid, 2013). Intolerance not only spreads in general society and education, but it also appears in the more specific realm of education, namely early childhood education (PAUD), manifested in the attitude of refusing to make friends with those of different religions, as well as indications of bullying committed against minority friends. Children's rejection of friends of different religions is undoubtedly influenced by strong external factors, as children can generally mingle with peers based on their developmental stages during grouping.

However, some children do not understand the differences between their friends, allowing them to blend in as usual. This is similar to the field data obtained from pre-observation and informal interviews with educators; there is no obvious form of intolerance in the institution used as a research site, despite the presence of two students with cultic beliefs. What is intriguing, however, is the willingness of children who are religious or belief minorities to participate in all religious activities of the majority group with parental consent. Activities that occur subtly and without any intention or tendency to exhibit intolerant attitudes, resulting in an unwitting form of intolerance. Because we can define tolerance as harmony in diversity (Pitaloka et al., 2021a).

Intolerant attitudes must be eroded and never attached to children, because intolerance is one of the things that can destroy religious harmony and, as a result, the country. Furthermore, intolerance is one of the factors that contribute to radicalization (Daniel et al., 2019). Thus, different understandings, particularly those related to differences in beliefs, must be understood by children in order for them to optimally implement a religious tolerance attitude based on cognition. Tolerance, like character and other aspects of development, must be internalized at a young age because it is one of the attitudes that can reduce the level of violence and conflict caused by intolerance.

Many topics related to tolerance, particularly in the context of PAUD, have been researched, including the role of teachers, strategies, and the implementation of religious tolerance. The cultivation and development of tolerance attitudes in children cannot be separated from the role of the teacher; the teacher's attitude in the classroom serves as a model for children to be tolerant, and the teacher also plays a role in integrating education and culture to realize tolerance attitudes in children (Pitaloka et al., 2021b). Furthermore, teachers play a role in developing tolerance attitudes in young children by serving as role models. Another role of teachers in developing tolerance attitudes in children is to foster self-competence through the four basic competencies that teachers must possess, all of which are directly related to religious tolerance (Jumiatmoko, 2018b).

In addition to teachers playing an important role in developing religious tolerance in children, habituation can be used, such as children becoming accustomed to praying before and after participating in religious activities (Jumiatmoko, 2018a). Other research on religious tolerance has been more focused on the strategy of planting it in early childhood, where there are five strategies, namely introducing good traits, being tolerant, teachers encouraging children to be kind, teachers encouraging children to have a religious tolerance attitude, and children experiencing the nature of religious tolerance (Zain, 2020).

The above studies' explanations focus on teachers' roles, implementation, and strategies for developing religious tolerance in early childhood. However, the study's findings did not describe or discuss how teachers establish power relations with children. Thus, the purpose of this study is to reveal the teacher's power relations in learning in PAUD that are related to the cultivation of religious tolerance.

## Method

This study takes a qualitative approach, employing a case study method. The case study method was chosen for this research because it seeks to highlight the unique characteristics of the case under study (Assyakurrohim et al., 2022), which was inspired by the case of religious diversity embraced by students at Darul Hanifah Kindergarten Garut. The diversity is enhanced by the fact that each student's religious background is Sunda Wiwitan. Students and educators were the subjects of this study. The researcher did not intervene in the learning process and was only present as an observer.

The data was collected through observation, interviews, and documentation (Creswell, 2008). Thorough observations were made on learning activities that not only relate to religious values, but also on the interaction process that is designed to foster tolerance among children. Structured interviews were conducted with teachers and principals. The interviews with children were conducted informally, with the children approaching the researcher and initiating the conversation. Meanwhile, documentation focused on the teaching module, or lesson plan, which is used by the teacher to carry out the teaching and learning process. The data analysis process involved coding and categorizing the data (Assyakurrohim et al., 2022). Following that, data triangulation techniques were used to assess the validity of the data, specifically comparing data obtained from observations, interviews, and documentation (Syahza A, 2013).

## Result and Discussion

Religious tolerance must be instilled from an early age, because children as social beings can already understand social issues that are sometimes considered incomprehensible to children. based on this understanding, this research can be carried out at the PAUD level with the age of children ranging from 4-6 years old held at Darul Hanifah Garut Kindergarten. This kindergarten is a general kindergarten, but because the surrounding community is the majority of Muslims, the learning process is conditional on Islamic values. However, in reality, the students who attend the kindergarten are not only those who are Muslim but other religions and there are even students with a faith background. In previous years, many students with non-Islamic religious backgrounds attended the school, such as Christianity and a sect of belief (Sunda Wiwitan). In the 2023-2024 school year, there were three children who attended

school with a faith background (Sunda Wiwitan), two boys and one girl. Two are at group B level and one is at group A level.

Educators are figures who have the readiness scientifically and mentally to carry out the process of guidance, education, and care which is realized in the learning process. the readiness of educators in carrying out the learning process is a picture of professional educators by having competencies in accordance with those standardized in Law No. 14 of 2005 concerning teachers and lecturers, namely pedagogical, professional, personality, and social competencies.

The form of educators having social and personality competencies appears to be good communication between educators and parents. Educators can convey to parents well and straightforwardly without being related to differences in beliefs between prospective students and the beliefs of the majority of other children as well as educators. It can be seen when educators convey the state of the school and the learning process carried out at school, there will be many differences, especially in the stimulation and facilitation of religious and moral values based on Islamic teachings, which is the majority religion adhered to by children and educators.

*“Sebelum diterima di sekolah, disampaikan kepada orang tua ada praktik-praktik agama Islam. Apakah anaknya boleh ikut atau tidak?. Orang tua menjawab, katanya boleh ikut karena tidak tau kedepannya apakah anaknya akan menjadi muslim atau tidak”*

Interview session with bu Ade, November 2023

*“Orang tua sudah tau kalau di sini belajarnya berdasarkan agama Islam, orang tua bertanya pada alumni. Jadi ya langsung ikut saja belajar di sini bagaimana.”*

Interview session with bu Nur, November 2023

*“Orang tua mengizinkan untuk ikut kegiatan ke-Islama-an. Makana di sekolah ku orang tua, ibu wios da elmu mah moal beurat dicandak kamana-mana bilih engke nikah ka muslim. Kalau gitu mah ya Alhamdulillah atuh ya”*.

Interview session with bu Yani, November 2023

An agreement between parents and the school is realized during the delivery, even if it is informal (written).

*"Kesepakatan secara lisan saja, bahkan sebelum-sebelumnya juga dengan alumni seperti itu"*

Interview session with bu Nur, November 2023

*"Tidak tertulis, sepakat saja pas diawal pendaftaran bahwa di sini mah pembelajarannya berdasarkan Islam"*

Interview session with Bu Yani, November 2023

The agreement does not include children as subjects in the learning process. The absence of children's participation in the agreement process demonstrates adults' dominance over children. Parents' dominance over children stems from their belief that children are figures who must be guided, because children are still sacred and unique. This is based on the educator's statement as derived from the interview results.

*"Sesuai pengalaman, anak itu unik, murni, suci. Anak itu perlu diarahkan, sangat perlu di bimbing. Terus khawatir juga, khawatirmya anak benar-benar dipegang sama orang yang tepat mengarahkannya. Kalau di rumahnya apakah didampingi dengan baik tidak ya?. Kalau di sekolah kan benar-benar terawasi. Karena kesuciannya itu".*

Interview session with Bu Yani Bu Nur, November 2023

*"Anak itu ciptaan Allah anu awalna suci, anak mah pngintena tiasa dicandak wae, ku lingkungan nana diajarkan ke Kristen bakal Kristen kalau muslim akan muslim, tapi tidak seperti itu karena ada hidayah dari Allah walaupun se-Kristen-Kristennya pasti ada hidayah dari Allah, mudah-mudahan sing secara muslim, muslim sejati kembali kepada Allah."*

Interview session with Bu Yani Bu Yani, November 2023

Regarding children, various perspectives offer an overview of their identity. The teacher's assertion that children are entities requiring guidance is accurate. According to religious viewpoints, including Islam, children are born with fitrah (innate potential), regarded as the family's treasure, and it is the responsibility of parents to guide, educate, and nurture them, ensuring their optimal development and safety in both this life and the afterlife (Nurhayati, 2020). The process of guidance and direction must undoubtedly involve children as a reference in every decision, as they possess the right to participate in accordance with their dignity as human beings

(Carmela, 2021). This perspective frequently leads to decision-making that excludes children's opinions or involvement, as parents perceive their role in education and guidance to imply that children lack knowledge and experience. It flows and is accepted as truth, thereby forming a discourse, which in this instance can be identified as the prevailing discourse.

Moreover, the attributes that construct other prevailing discourses include the designation of *soleh* and *solehah* for children, grounded in knowledge derived from Islamic teachings; for instance, children who drink while seated are regarded as *soleh* due to their adherence to Islamic etiquette. Within the context of children, some may adhere to differing beliefs that influence their daily practices and customs regarding eating and drinking. The dominant discourse permeates not only eating and drinking behaviors but also extends to attitudes and flag ceremony activities, manifesting subtly. Educators impart guidance to ensure that children conduct themselves in alignment with Islamic principles. Additional activities that are seamless.

The prevailing discourse in education comprises the frameworks established by instructors, including reciting *Iqra* prior to class, forming lines before entry, greetings, prayer before learning, memorizing brief letters and daily prayers, followed by core activities and concluding procedures. The prevailing discourse in the educational process, particularly in fostering tolerance in children, influences the power dynamics between educators and students. The power discussed is not focused on an individual or institution; rather, it permeates community relations, establishing a disciplinary order, creating a structure, and fostering productivity linked to curiosity (Adlin, 2016). Consequently, power dynamics are not established by educators solely due to their superior status over children; rather, it is the framework constructed by educators, grounded in their understanding of Islamic values, that has engendered a dominant discourse fostering power relations. The relationship that occurs is a result of the discourse generated by the power and knowledge held (Siregar, 2021).

The power dynamics stemming from a prevailing discourse, particularly one aligned with Islamic teachings, suggest that these power relations hinder the effective promotion of religious moderation in a school setting characterized by diverse beliefs. This assertion is based on the concept of *wasathiyah* in religious moderation, which signifies a central position, devoid of extreme inclinations on either the far right or far

left (Junaedi, 2019). Furthermore, religious moderation encompasses tolerance, which acknowledges differences without conflating beliefs. Tolerance represents harmony amidst diversity (Pitaloka et al., 2021a).

The teacher informs her friends that not all children are Muslim; some adhere to the faith. The teacher communicated this when the children were preparing to practice prayer. The teacher implements this to prevent children from inquiring about the absence of friends who do not engage in prayer. Nevertheless, children who hold certain beliefs occasionally engage in prayer practices. The teacher and other friends do not feel discomfort as they have been informed beforehand of the differences. Children consistently engage in various activities together, and their differences are seldom discussed among them. They engage and interact organically, undisturbed by their inherent differences. This is integral to the educator's endeavor to instill tolerance in children, enabling them to coexist harmoniously amidst diversity.

## Conclusion

Teachers promote tolerance in children by collaborating with parents, introducing diversity from an early age, and highlighting that despite differences, children can engage in play and activities together. Religious tolerance can be achieved through mutual openness among all parties involved. Although it constitutes the majority, it remains accommodating, allowing the minority to develop fully and engage in religious practices without compulsion.

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