

Multireligious Culture for Developing Tolerance Character at Elementary School

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Submitted: 08-01-2026

Revised : 24-03-2026

Accepted: 27-04-2026

ABSTRACT. The research titled "Multireligious Culture for the Development of Tolerance Character at SD Negeri Kasihan Yogyakarta" is based on the idealism of the school as a safe space that facilitates interfaith interactions. However, the reality shows instances of bullying against Catholic students, the marginalization of Hindu students, and the feeling of being marginalized among non-Muslim teachers due to the lack of multireligious interaction. This condition encourages the school to initiate a multireligious culture as a strategy to strengthen the character of tolerance. This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach to describe the implementation of a multireligious culture, the profile of the school's tolerance character, and its contribution to the development of student tolerance. Data were collected thru observation, documentation, and in-depth interviews with informants selected thru purposive sampling, including the principal, teachers, and students of Islamic, Catholic, and Hindu faiths. Data analysis was conducted thru reduction, presentation, and conclusion drawing, with validity testing using source and technique triangulation. The research results show that: 1) multireligious culture is understood as a system of values, beliefs, and social practices based on three layers of culture (basic assumptions, adopted values, and artifacts) that emphasize harmony and non-discrimination; 2) the character of tolerance is reflected thru six indicators: recognition of differences, mutual respect, freedom of belief, coexistence, self-control, and justice; 3) the contribution of multireligious culture to the development of the character of tolerance occurs systematically thru three layers of culture. First, artifacts in the form of symbols of love and joint activities among followers of different religions; second, the values upheld, namely mutual respect, harmony, and justice, are instilled thru vision & mission, regulations, and exemplary behavior; third, the underlying assumptions of the school community are the belief that diverse religions are a natural reality and the belief that human relationships are inclusive, egalitarian, and collaborative.

Keywords: *Multireligious Culture, Tolerance Character, Elementary School, Inclusive.*

INTRODUCTION

Educational institutions consisting of students and teachers from diverse religious backgrounds play a strategic role in building a character of tolerance thru the creation of an inclusive multireligious environment (Yanti et al., 2025). Ideally, schools become social spaces that facilitate positive interactions, cooperation, and the formation of interfaith friendships, so that each individual feels safe, valued, and becomes part of a harmonious school community (Allport, 1955). However, the reality on the ground shows that intolerance remains a tangible phenomenon in the world of education. Qualitatively, this phenomenon is evident from the bullying of Catholic students, the ostracism of Hindu students, and the marginalization felt by non-Muslim teachers before the implementation of the multireligious cultural program (Rita Cicilia, 2025). In Islam, such behavior is considered a form of bullying that is prohibited (Wantini, Arfah M, 2023). This phenomenon shows that religious diversity in schools does not automatically result in a tolerant attitude; instead, it requires planned and systematic efforts thru a supportive school culture.

Various previous studies have examined the formation of tolerance character through multicultural education, religious activities, social activities, and habituation within the school culture (Zamroni Anisa Dwi Kurnia, Zakiah Linda, Amelia Childina Rifka, Ahma Shaliha Hafidha, 2024) (Nur & Rizkia Pangestika, 2022) (Wardi et al., 2023). These studies show that joint activities, multicultural education, teacher role modeling, and collaboration between schools and parents can be effective means in developing student tolerance (Sari et al., 2025) (Ahsan, A.A., Fadila Muchtar, 2024). Additionally, pluralistic education that emphasizes dialog, communication, and active participation in diversity has also proven to play a role in fostering mutual respect (Ali et al., 2025). However, most of these studies were conducted in schools with a homogeneous religious background, thus not specifically examining how multireligious culture is applied and functions in the context of public schools that have real religious diversity in daily life. The limitations of previous research indicate a gap in the study, particularly regarding the implementation of multireligious culture in the context of elementary schools with a truly multireligious school composition. Previous research has primarily emphasized the conceptual or programmatic aspects of multicultural education, but has not deeply analyzed how a multireligious culture as a school culture can shape tolerance character through real social interactions between students and teachers of different religions. Thus, this research has novelty in examining multireligious culture as a real practice that thrives in a public school environment with concrete religious diversity, and its impact on the formation of students' tolerance character. The specific objective of this research is to analyze the multireligious culture that develops at SD Negeri Kasihan Yogyakarta and to analyze students' tolerance character in that context. This research focuses on how activities, habits, and interactions within a multireligious school culture contribute to the formation of attitudes of mutual respect, cooperation, and appreciation of religious differences. Thus, this research not only complements previous studies but also provides a more contextual and empirical understanding of the role of multireligious culture in shaping tolerance character in elementary school environments.

Furthermore, this research aims to prove that a structured implementation of multireligious culture through school activities, habituation, and social interactions can be an effective means of developing students' tolerance character. The main argument tested in this research is that a multireligious culture not only serves as a symbol of diversity but also as a social and cultural mechanism capable of shaping values, attitudes, and tolerant behaviors in the school environment. Thus, this research is expected to provide theoretical contributions to the development of multicultural education studies and practical contributions for schools in building an inclusive and harmonious educational environment.

METHOD

This research uses a qualitative approach with a case study type to deeply understand the multireligious culture and its role in developing students' tolerance character at SD Negeri Kasihan Yogyakarta (Creswell, 2018). A qualitative approach was chosen because this research aims to explore the meanings, experiences, and social interactions that occur in the natural context of the school environment. Case studies are used because this research focuses on the analysis of a program and the practice of multireligious culture within a limited system, namely a public elementary school with religious diversity (Arikunto, 2006). In this study, the researcher acts as the primary instrument who directly collects and analyzes data in the field in the role of a non-participant observer (Creswell, 2018). The research was conducted at SD Negeri Kasihan Yogyakarta, which was purposively selected because it has a diverse religious background among its school community, namely Islam, Catholicism, Christianity, and Hinduism (Creswell, 2018). The research was conducted over four months in the odd semester of the 2025/2026 academic year. The research informants numbered eight people, consisting of the school principal, religious teachers from various religions, class teachers, and students. The informants were purposively

selected based on their direct involvement in school activities and their experiences related to multireligious culture and interfaith interactions in the school environment (Sugiyono, 2013) (Creswell, 2018). Data collection techniques were carried out through non-participant observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation. Non-participant observation was conducted by directly observing the social interactions of students and teachers, school activities, and multi-religious cultural practices without the direct involvement of the researcher in those activities. In-depth interviews were conducted face-to-face using semi-structured interview guidelines to obtain data on students' views, experiences, and practices of multireligious culture as well as their character of tolerance (Weyant, 2022). Documentation was used to complement the data through the analysis of school documents, such as the school's vision and mission, regulations, activity programs, school archives, and documentation of activities relevant to the research focus (Arikunto, 2006).

The research instruments consist of the researcher as the main instrument supported by observation guidelines, interview guidelines, and documentation guidelines. The instruments were developed based on organizational culture theory and tolerance theory to ensure that the data collected aligns with the research focus. In addition, aids such as voice recorders and cameras were used to support data accuracy and documentation of research activities (Creswell, 2018). The validity of the data is tested using source triangulation and technique triangulation. Source triangulation is conducted by comparing data obtained from the principal, teachers, and students, while technique triangulation is conducted by comparing data obtained through observation, interviews, and documentation. This technique is used to ensure the credibility, consistency, and validity of the data so that the research results can be scientifically accountable (Arikunto, 2006) (Sugiyono, 2013). The data analysis technique uses the interactive analysis model of Miles and Huberman, which includes data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. Data reduction is carried out by selecting and simplifying data relevant to the research focus. Data presentation is carried out in the form of systematic narrative descriptions to facilitate understanding of patterns and relationships between the data. Drawing conclusions is carried out gradually and continuously throughout the research process to obtain valid and in-depth findings. Through this process, the research aims to produce a comprehensive understanding of multireligious culture and its role in developing students' tolerance character in the school environment (Miles, M. B., Huberman, A. M., & Saldaña, 2014).

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Result

Multireligious Culture

Research results at Elementary School show that at the level of basic underlying assumptions, the multireligious culture has been internalized as a deep belief among the school community. In the aspect of the nature of reality and truth, religious diversity is viewed as a natural social reality and accepted as it is. Meanwhile, in the aspect of the nature of human relationships, social relations are built on cooperation, togetherness, and an egalitarian attitude without separation based on religion. The natural and unbarriered interactions among students indicate that tolerance has become a collective habit that spontaneously shapes the mindset and behavior of the school community in their daily lives. At the layer of espoused values, the research found that tolerance is consciously formulated and instilled through the school's vision, mission, and regulations. The values of mutual respect, living in harmony, and not discriminating against friends are emphasized in school policies and reinforced through the exemplary behavior of teachers in the learning process and daily interactions. Teachers demonstrate fairness to all students, use language that respects differences, and consistently remind the importance of maintaining speech and behavior toward friends of different religions. Thus, the value of tolerance is not only written in formal documents but also embodied in educational practices that are carried out continuously.

Meanwhile, at the artifact layer, the multireligious culture is evident in symbols and tangible activities that can be directly observed in the school environment. The presence of the Gemilang Cinta symbol as a representation of unity in diversity, interfaith activities such as the lantern of goodness, joint community service, and sharing stories of holy days, serves as a concrete manifestation of the implementation of tolerance. In addition, the school also facilitates the implementation of worship according to each religion side by side. All these practices show that the multireligious culture does not stop at the level of discourse, but rather exists as a structured, experienced, and genuinely implemented living culture by all members of the school community. The result can be seen in the following image:

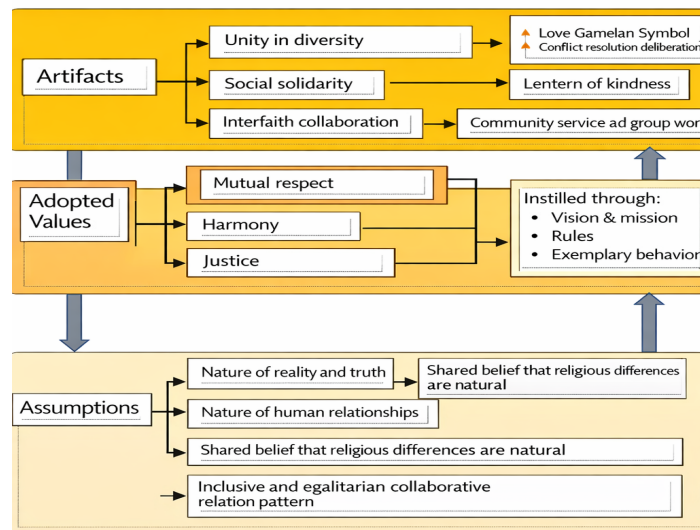


Figure 1.1 Illustration of the multilayered multireligious culture

The first layer of the Artifact contains several values, namely unity in diversity, social solidarity, and interfaith cooperation, which are manifested in the brilliance of love, conflict resolution deliberations, lanterns of goodness, and community service as well as groups. The second layer consists of the values upheld in carrying out multireligious activities, namely mutual respect, harmony, and justice, which are instilled thru vision and mission, regulations, and the example set by teachers. 3. The deepest layer, which is an assumption based on 2 aspects, namely first, the nature of reality and truth that is evident in the shared belief that religious differences are normal, and the importance of harmony. Second, the nature of human relationships is characterized by collaborative, inclusive, and egalitarian patterns.

The Character of Student Tolerance

The research results show that the character of student tolerance develops thru six main indicators. Pertama, pengakuan terhadap perbedaan terlihat dari keterlibatan siswa dalam kerja kelompok heterogen tanpa segregasi agama dan interaksi bermain yang alami. Second, the attitude of mutual respect is reflected when students maintain silence while their friends are worshipping and adhere to regulations that emphasize the prohibition of discrimination. Ketiga, kebebasan beragama terlihat dari penyediaan ruang dan jadwal ibadah untuk setiap agama tanpa paksaan untuk mengikuti praktik keagamaan lainnya. Semua temuan dari observasi, wawancara, dan dokumentasi menunjukkan bahwa siswa tidak hanya memahami perbedaan secara konseptual tetapi juga menerimanya dalam praktik sehari-hari mereka di sekolah. In addition, the character of tolerance is also evident thru the willingness to live side by side, which is reflected in community service

activities, class duties, and joint activities without choosing friends based on religion. Pengendalian diri terlihat ketika perbedaan atau bentrokan jadwal diselesaikan melalui musyawarah tanpa konflik berkepanjangan. Sementara itu, keadilan dan non-diskriminasi diwujudkan melalui pembagian tugas upacara, kepemimpinan kelas, dan kesempatan partisipasi yang setara yang diberikan kepada semua siswa. Así, la tolerancia no solo es un valor enseñado, sino que se ha convertido en una actitud real que vive en las interacciones sociales, las políticas escolares y las experiencias de aprendizaje diario de los estudiantes. Here is the diagram summarizing the results of the tolerance character research:

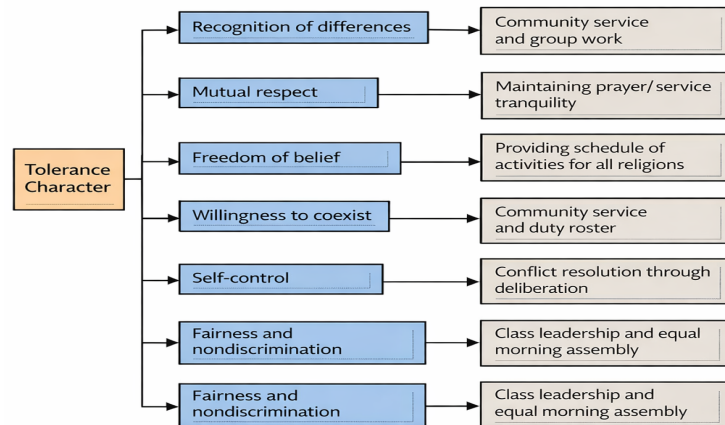


Figure 1.2 Tolerance Characters

Figure 1.2 shows 6 tolerance characters present. First, the recognition of differences is seen thru community service and group work. Second, mutual respect is reflected in the attitude of maintaining tranquility during worship. Third, freedom of belief is demonstrated by the existence of worship schedules for all religions. Fourth, the willingness to live side by side is marked by communal work and duty rosters among followers of different religions. Fifth, self-control is demonstrated by resolving conflicts thru deliberation. Sixth, justice and non-discrimination are reflected in equal class leadership and assemblies.

C. The Role of Multireligious Culture in Developing Tolerance Character

The research results show that the multireligious culture in developing students' tolerance character is systematically formed thru three layers of culture: artifacts, espoused values, and basic underlying assumptions. These three layers contribute integratively to forming six indicators of tolerance, namely recognition of differences, respect, freedom of belief, willingness to coexist, self-control, and justice and non-discrimination. At the artifact layer, the multireligious culture is evident in symbols and tangible practices that can be directly observed. The findings show the presence of symbols of radiant love, lantern activities of kindness, interfaith community service, the provision of worship schedules for all religions, and discussions to adjust activity schedules with worship times. Image documentation shows that the symbol of unity in religious diversity strengthens the recognition of differences. The worship schedule facilitated by the school reflects freedom of belief. Meanwhile, the practice of dialog in resolving schedule conflicts demonstrates self-control and institutional support for harmonious relations between groups. These artifacts serve as direct experiences for students to practice the value of tolerance in their daily school life. At the layer of espoused values, tolerance is consciously expressed thru the school's vision and mission, regulations, and the exemplary behavior of teachers. The main values found are mutual respect, harmony, and justice. The value of mutual respect fosters an attitude of appreciating students' religious differences. The value of harmony cultivates a willingness to live side by side and the ability to control oneself in conflict situations. The value of justice shapes a non-discriminatory character and equality of status among students. Documentation shows that teachers greet and treat all students without distinguishing between religions, which serves as modeling in the value internalization process. In

addition, the existence of written rules regarding the obligation to maintain harmony and the prohibition of discrimination reinforces institutional norms that support the creation of positive intergroup relations.

At the level of basic assumptions, tolerance has taken root as a collective belief among the school community. In the aspect of the nature of reality and truth, religious diversity is understood as a natural social reality that must be accepted. This belief shapes the recognition of differences as part of communal life. In terms of the nature of human relationships, the developing relational patterns are inclusive, egalitarian, and collaborative. Documentation shows that students from different religious backgrounds work in heterogeneous groups without the separation of religious identities, and play together naturally without awkwardness. This interaction reflects the fulfillment of the principles of status equality and shared goals in social relations, while also showing that tolerance has been internalized as a spontaneous habit, not merely compliance with formal rules. Thus, the research results affirm that the multireligious culture is not only present in the form of symbols and formal policies but has also been internalized as a shared system of values and beliefs. The integration of artifacts, adopted values, and basic assumptions consistently shapes the students' character of tolerance in their daily school life, so that tolerance develops as a real practice and a collective awareness among the school community. To make it easily understandable, here is an illustration of the multireligious culture for the development of tolerance character among students.

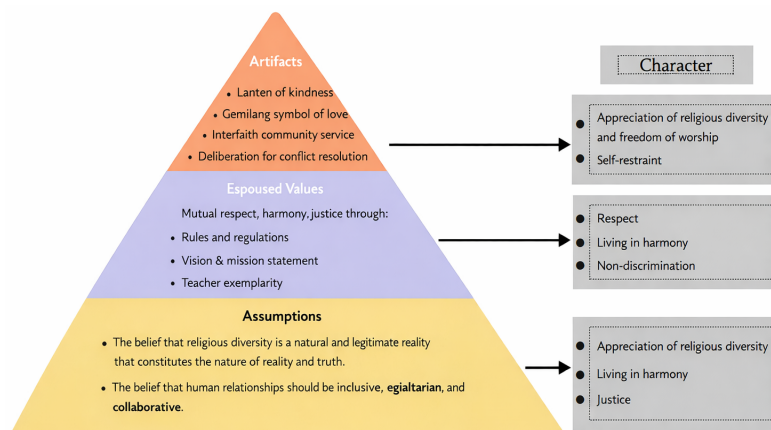


Figure 1.3 Multireligious Culture that Shapes the Character of Tolerance

Figure 1.3 explains that the multireligious culture is seen thru three layers. The visible layer consists of artifacts such as the lantern of kindness, the symbol of love, interfaith community service, and conflict resolution discussions, which shape the character of recognition of differences, freedom of belief, and equality of status. The layer of values upheld includes mutual respect, harmony, and justice, instilled thru vision and mission, regulations, and the exemplary behavior of teachers. The underlying, invisible layer is the assumption, which is the shared belief that religious diversity is natural and that human relationships are egalitarian, inclusive, and collaborative.

Discussion

This research addresses the problem formulation regarding how a multireligious culture is formed and how that culture plays a role in developing students' tolerance character at SD Negeri Kasihan Yogyakarta. The research results show that a multireligious culture is formed thru the integration of values, practices, and social interactions that support religious diversity (Widodo H., 2019). This culture is reflected in inclusive student interactions, school policies that promote tolerance, and ongoing social habituation (Mu'ti Abdul dan A.K, 2019). These findings are in line with Wantini et al., who assert that the internalization of religious values and social experiences in Islamic education play a crucial role in the development of students' moral maturity within the context of formal education, including attitudes of mutual respect and harmonious living.

These findings indicate that students' tolerance character develops through direct social experiences in a school environment that supports diversity (Wantini, Sulastri, S., & Mahmudah, 2024). This is in line with recent research that shows that an inclusive school culture plays an important role in shaping attitudes of tolerance and reducing social prejudice among students (Schein, 2010) (Perawironegoro, D, 2022). The concept of open and contextual value integration in religious education is also highlighted by Hopid in the context of the dynamics of Islamic educational institutions in Indonesia, which shows the importance of value and social practice integration in educational institutions to foster openness and understanding between groups (Hopid, A., Wantini, W., Andriani, F., Sutipyo, & Sama Alee, 2024). That culture is reflected in inclusive student interactions, school policies that support tolerance, and ongoing social habituation. These findings are in line with the research by Hopid & Kistoro, which shows that Generation Z exhibits an open and inclusive perception of religious moderation, emphasizing the importance of social experiences in shaping attitudes of mutual respect and harmonious living as part of religious education (Hopid, A., Sama Alee, A., Rachmaningtyas, N. A., & Kistoro, 2023).

The findings of this study can be explained through the social contact theory proposed by Allport, which states that direct interactions between individuals from different groups can reduce prejudice and enhance mutual respect (Allport, 1955). In the context of primary education, the Islamic educational psychology approach developed by Dahuri & Wantini supports the habituation of social values through learning that emphasizes students' real-life experiences in their social interactions (Wantini, W. Dahuri, D., 2023). In this study, students who are accustomed to interacting with friends of different religions demonstrate an open attitude, cooperate without discrimination, and appreciate differences. Recent empirical research also shows that social interaction in a multicultural educational environment significantly contributes to the development of students' attitudes of tolerance and empathy (Abdullah, 2005) (D'Amato Gianni dan Gonzales Fransisco Colom, 2017). Thus, the findings of this study confirm that social interaction is an important factor in the formation of students' tolerance character.

Furthermore, the multireligious culture found in this study can also be explained through a consistent character value education strategy, as discussed by Diponegoro et al. in the context of religious character formation through parenting methods that involve continuous religious and social practices, which parallels the role of school culture in fostering tolerance (Rambe, M. S., Wantini, W., & Diponegoro, 2023). The reinforcement of these values aligns with Perawironegoro's view, which emphasizes that religious education and school culture play a strategic role in fostering awareness of diversity and inclusive attitudes through habituation and exemplary behavior integrated into the education system (Perawironegoro, 2019). Similarly, Widodo emphasizes that strengthening character education in elementary schools must be carried out holistically through the integration of values in the curriculum, school culture, and social interactions among school members, thereby forming a tolerant and humane social character (Widodo, 2019). This is also supported by Schein's theory, which states that organizational culture is formed through basic assumptions, adopted values, and artifacts that influence the behavior of organizational members (Schein, 2010). In the context of this research, the value of tolerance embedded in school policies, teacher role models, and daily social practices shapes social norms that encourage students to be tolerant. These findings are supported by previous research that shows school culture has a significant influence on the character formation of students, particularly in aspects of tolerance and social attitudes (Mu'ti Abdul dan A.K, 2019). Furthermore, this research shows that a multireligious culture not only functions as a formal policy but also as a social practice internalized in the daily lives of students. This is evident from the absence of discrimination, the presence of interfaith cooperation, and the mutual respect among students. These findings are in line with international research that shows that an inclusive school environment contributes to the formation of a positive social identity and the development of students' tolerance character (UNESCO, 2014) (Handayani, 2019). National

research also shows that the habituation of school culture plays an important role in shaping the character of tolerance thru the process of value internalization(Satianingsih et al., 2020).

The new contribution of this research is to show that a multireligious culture can function as an effective social mechanism in developing a character of tolerance thru habituation, social interaction, and exemplary behavior. These findings expand the theory of organizational culture by demonstrating that a multireligious culture in the context of primary education can be a practical strategy in shaping students' character of tolerance(Allport, 1955).. Thus, this research reinforces and modifies the understanding that the formation of tolerance character is not only influenced by formal education but also by the school culture internalized in daily social interactions(Mu'ti Abdul dan A.K, 2019). Overall, this research makes an important contribution to the development of educational management science by demonstrating that a multireligious culture can be an effective strategy in creating an inclusive educational environment and supporting the development of students' tolerance character. These findings reinforce previous theories and provide an empirical basis for the development of education policies aimed at strengthening an inclusive and tolerant school culture.

CONCLUSION

The multireligious culture is understood as a system of values, beliefs, and social practices that develop in a school environment with diverse religions, emphasizing harmonious living, mutual respect, and cooperation without discrimination in daily life based on three layers of culture: assumptions, adopted values, and artifacts. The character of tolerance is the attitude of accepting and respecting religious differences, which is manifested in the daily school life. That tolerance is reflected thru six main attitudes, namely recognition of differences, mutual respect, freedom of belief, willingness to coexist, self-control, and justice and non-discrimination. The multireligious culture in the development of student character is formed thru three layers. The first visible layer consists of artifacts such as the lantern of goodness, the symbol of love, interfaith community service, and conflict resolution discussions, which shape the character of recognizing differences and freedom of belief. The layer of values upheld includes mutual respect, harmony, and justice, instilled thru vision and mission, regulations, and the exemplary behavior of teachers. The layer of assumptions is the shared belief that religious diversity is natural and that human relationships are egalitarian, inclusive, and collaborative.

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