

Practices of Tolerance Toward Diversity in Early Childhood in Ruteng City, NTT

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ARTICLE INFO

Keywords: Tolerance, Early Childhood Education, Ruteng

Received : 10 April

Revised : 15 May

Accepted: 30 June

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ABSTRACT

Indonesia is facing a serious threat of intolerance, both in everyday life and in educational settings, especially in Early Childhood Education (PAUD). This study aims to identify and analyze tolerance practices in two PAUDs in Ruteng City, East Nusa Tenggara (NTT). The research used a mixed method (quantitative and qualitative) through questionnaires, interviews, observation, and document analysis. The study involved students from Catholic and Muslim backgrounds in PAUDs in Ruteng City. The results show that tolerance practices have been strongly internalized, evidenced by high student participation in interfaith interactions, active parental support, and the institutional commitment of principals and teachers. Most students show an open attitude and are interested in differences. Further exploration through interviews, documentation, and observation also supports the survey results that the level of tolerance in PAUD Ruteng is considered quite high. In conclusion, PAUD Ruteng is an effective empirical model for instilling tolerance, but it still needs improvement in teacher training and teaching materials

INTRODUCTION

Early childhood is considered a golden age. The brain develops so quickly during this period. Children at this age have about 1,000 trillion synapses, twice as many as adults, which shows that their brain plasticity is rapidly growing during this phase (Walker, 2011) (Aboud & Yousafzai, 2016). This huge brain capacity makes young children quick to absorb any information from the outside, whether positive or negative, including information coming from school activities (Raghavan & Ruta, 2022).

Early Childhood Education (PAUD) is a fundamental pillar in the development of a child's personality, but it often becomes a place where seeds of intolerance are sown, which has negative implications for children's social life and citizenship. Intolerance is the enemy of the nation because it damages a child's personal mindset and the social citizenship environment. The KAPAL Perempuan Institute (2020), in its research in Jakarta, Bogor, and Depok, found a very worrying indication that quite a few PAUD institutions teach practices of intolerance. Young children in these schools are already capable of shouting hateful words to attack friends who are considered not part of their group.

The KAPAL Institute also carried out a study on intolerance in early childhood education in the Solo Raya area, which includes Surakarta, Sragen, Boyolali, and Sukoharjo. Some of the findings are as follows. First, there are preschools that are intolerant. Some preschools are not even registered with the Ministry of Education and Culture or the Ministry of Religious Affairs. Second, the spread of intolerant values happens through foundations and teachers to students and parents during lessons. These conservative methods are subtly accepted and reinforce divisions between religious groups in society. The spread of intolerant radical ideologies often happens in various ways, such as through songs, reading books, or pop-up books. Perhaps it's not wrong when the Vice President of Indonesia, Prof. KH. Ma'ruf Amin, said that "we need to be alert to radicalism that has started to enter Early Childhood Education, like many young children who carry posters of figures who are actually radical figures introduced in preschools." (<https://kalidengen-kulonprogo.desa.id/index.php/artikel/2019/12/10/intoleransi-sejak-pendidikan-anak-usia-dini>, 10/12/2019).

In this article, the author focuses on tolerance, understood as a value of living together that comes from religious ethics and civic ethics, to formulate alternatives that can strengthen the development of this value in the context of schools and social activities in early childhood education (Arias, 2019). Tolerance in early childhood schools is a key element in creating an inclusive and harmonious educational environment. The word "tolerance" comes from the English word tolerance, with the verb tolerate, which means to endure, persist, or be patient. The concept closest to tolerance is "patience," although the word

"tolerance" cannot be entirely equated with "patience" (Makhamadalieva, 2021). Intolerance is basically the opposite of tolerance, with indicators that contrast with those of tolerance. According to Rahnang et al. (2022), the characteristics of intolerance include: 1) inability to control oneself when disliking others, 2) rejection of other people's opinions, 3) tendency to interfere in others' affairs and oppose their attitudes or behaviors, 4) often disturbing others without a clear reason. These traits can lead to conflict because they go against the freedom of speech and association protected by the constitution. To prevent this, young children need quality education that can shape the nation's character. Quality education can help children develop tolerance, independence, and problem-solving skills.

In today's increasingly multicultural digital era, teaching values of tolerance in early childhood schools has become really important for shaping a generation that can appreciate differences and interact positively with individuals from various cultural, religious, and ethnic backgrounds. Research shows that integrating tolerance values into the curriculum and school practices not only helps prevent negative behaviors like bullying and discrimination but also plays a key role in building mutual respect, empathy, and solidarity among students. Schools can be crucial players in promoting social cohesion and equality, where every student feels accepted and valued, regardless of their different identities. Developing a tolerant environment in early childhood education positively impacts students' academic performance and socio-emotional development, as they learn to cooperate and appreciate different perspectives. This effort fits well in building a more inclusive society that values diversity, where differences are seen as strengths rather than sources of conflict. Therefore, tolerance is considered an integral part of students' daily activities (Motuz & Lysokolenko, 2022). Some countries, like France, have implemented the value of tolerance in early childhood education as one of the key values in their education system. Instilling values is the school's mission, not just about transferring knowledge and skills. The need to foster tolerance among French school students is driven by the current political and socio-economic situation in France. The rise in intolerance, violence, xenophobia, and racism in society has pushed the country to take active steps in public education, especially by introducing mandatory subjects like moral and civic education.

This research was conducted to identify practices of tolerance in several early childhood education centers (PAUD) in the city of Ruteng, Manggarai Regency. Ruteng is a city in the NTT Province. NTT is one of the provinces in Indonesia often cited as an example of success in implementing values of tolerance among religious communities. Based on the religious tolerance index, NTT often ranks the highest in Indonesia. As a province with a majority of

Catholic residents, NTT, especially in areas like Manggarai, shows a high level of harmony between Catholics and other religious communities. Data from the Wahid Foundation and Setara Institute reveal that East Nusa Tenggara (NTT) is one of the provinces with a low rate of religion-based conflicts, with its communities known for respecting different beliefs. This background is the basic idea of this research – that early childhood education (PAUD) in Ruteng city also contributes to spreading values of tolerance, making it a potential 'model city' for tolerance practices in PAUD.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Meaning of Early Childhood Education

Early childhood is defined as the initial phase of a child's life, where significant changes and growth occur in various aspects of development. This period, also called early childhood, covers the age range from birth to around 6 years old (Sujiono & Yuliani, 2013, pp. 6-7). Early childhood is a very important period for shaping a child's attitudes, values, and morality. At this age, children tend to be more receptive to and able to internalize the values given to them. Therefore, instilling values of tolerance from an early age needs to be done as a foundation for the child's personality growth later on (Rusmiati, 2023).

Education for young children is carried out by providing stimulation aimed at helping their physical and mental growth and development, so they are ready to enter higher levels of education. This educational development process actually starts from when a baby is born, where the baby needs to be introduced to their surroundings. This includes interacting with people around them, becoming familiar with sounds, and objects in their environment. Through joking, talking, and communicating, children can develop into normal and healthy individuals. The right learning methods during the early years of life, up to the age of six, have a big impact on shaping a child's personality in adulthood. During this period, kids go through a very basic learning phase. All the new experiences they get will shape the way they think, their attitudes, and their behavior later on (Saputra, 2018).

In early childhood education institutions, educators have a big responsibility to develop the potential of every child. They are expected to design activities and experiences that can stimulate children's cognitive, emotional, social, and physical development. With the right approach, children can learn to face various challenges in creative and innovative ways. Educational and fun methods are really needed to create an effective learning environment, so children can learn and feel comfortable during the learning process. In the context of a multicultural and multireligious society, instilling religious values requires a new approach, which is inclusive and pluralistic religious education. This approach is built through the phenomenology of religion, by paying attention to and strengthening dialogue, communication, and uniting the absolute and relative dimensions within a comprehensive framework of social-religious thought and vision. Through creative methods in early childhood education, the presence of religious followers as socio-anthropological entities

can be appreciated. However, it is necessary to remain alert to the dangers of communalism and narrow confessionalism in religious education in early childhood, which can overly focus on the identity of certain groups (Rusmiati, 2023).

The Essence of Tolerance

Tolerance is a concept that has become a topic of study in various fields, such as education, religion, and social sciences. Tolerance is closely related to appreciating differences, whether in the context of religion, ethnicity, opinions, or lifestyles. John Locke, a thinker from England, saw tolerance as an important element in religious life. Locke emphasized that the state should protect religious freedom for all its citizens. However, this freedom must be exercised in a way that doesn't disturb public order. For Locke, tolerance is a condition for creating harmony in a plural society, especially in the realm of religion, where the state should not impose a particular belief or religion on its citizens.

Immanuel Kant emphasized that tolerance is a moral duty for every individual. For Kant, tolerance isn't just about passively accepting differences, but also about actively respecting other people's views and beliefs, even if you might not agree with them. Respecting other people's right to be different is the foundation of a fair moral and social life. According to Ulil Amri Syafri (Arlina, et al., 2023), tolerance is the attitude and behavior that values the beliefs, opinions, and actions of others that are different, whether in terms of religion, ethnicity, or other personal characteristics. Examples of religious tolerance include respect, eliminating prejudice, accommodation, and cooperation between religious groups. This kind of tolerance means respecting other people's religious beliefs without forcing or hindering them, which reflects a mutual respect attitude.

Meanwhile, according to Umar Hasyim, tolerance is the act of giving others the freedom to follow their beliefs, manage their lives, and decide their future, as long as it doesn't disturb public order and peace. Tolerance includes respecting other people, both physically and mentally, as well as allowing freedom in life choices. In this view, tolerance is seen as a response to things that might be considered disturbing or different, and it's connected to the beliefs and actions of certain groups.

Tillman highlights tolerance as a method for achieving peace. According to him, tolerance is an essential element needed to maintain and create peace in society. Without tolerance, the differences in society can trigger conflict. Therefore, according to Tillman, tolerance is a bridge that leads people to live harmoniously amidst differences. Tolerance is defined as a good attitude of a person to accept others regardless of their skin color, race, or religion. Mummendey and Wenzel (Al Fariz & Saloom, 2021) describe tolerance as accepting and respecting differences, which is part of inclusive living. The concept of tolerance aims to reduce the negative impact of intolerant behavior on diversity. Tolerance includes positive judgment, empathy, and respect for equality despite differences. Witenberg identifies three dimensions for measuring tolerance:

- Justice: Treating others equally and fairly.
- Empathy: Attitude toward the feelings and suffering of others.
- Rationality: Judgment based on logical and rational assumptions about different people.

From the explanation above, it can be said that tolerance can be understood as an attitude that respects and appreciates differences in various aspects of life. Tolerance includes the ability to live peacefully alongside a diverse society without forcing one's own views or beliefs on others. It involves accepting differences and building harmonious relationships amid diversity. On the other hand, intolerance is the opposite of tolerance. By understanding the essence of tolerance, it becomes easy to recognize intolerance through indicators such as: 1) inability to control oneself when disliking someone, 2) rejecting others' opinions, 3) tendency to interfere in others' affairs and oppose their attitudes or behaviors, and 4) often disturbing others for no clear reason.

METHODOLOGY

In this study, the method used is a mixed method with a quantitative approach that focuses on a survey identifying tolerance practices toward diversity in early childhood education (PAUD) schools in the city of Ruteng. The research subjects include students, teachers, and school principals in PAUD throughout Ruteng. PAUD in Ruteng consists of 12 private kindergartens, 24 playgroups, 10 SPS, 4 TPA, and 4 PKBM, making a total of 54 institutions. This number makes Ruteng the city with the highest number of PAUDs, or 16.7% of the total 324 PAUDs in the Manggarai Regency. The students involved come from various religious backgrounds, such as Catholic, Protestant, and Muslim.

Through this study, respondents are expected to be able to provide their views and experiences regarding tolerance in the early childhood education school environment. The techniques to collect data include questionnaires, interviews, and documentation. The instruments used consist of questionnaire questions, interview guides containing open-ended questions to explore the subjects' experiences and views more deeply, and documentation formats. Data analysis will be carried out thematically. First, all data obtained from the interviews will be transcribed into written form to facilitate analysis. Next, key themes will be coded from the transcriptions. Each theme is assigned a code to make it easier to group the data. Thematic analysis was carried out to identify students' attitudes toward diversity, positive experiences in interfaith interactions, and the values taught by teachers about tolerance. To ensure data consistency, triangulation was done by comparing findings from questionnaires, interviews, and documentation. This study is expected to capture the practice of tolerance in early childhood schools in the city of Ruteng.

RESEARCH RESULT

Sample Profile of Schools and Child Respondents

This quantitative study involved 275 early childhood respondents (ages 4-6) spread across 10 samples of Early Childhood Education (PAUD)/Kindergarten (TK) institutions in the administrative region of Ruteng City, Manggarai Regency, NTT. These schools are managed by Catholic religious foundations (such as nun congregation foundations) as well as general or semi-government foundations. The distribution of the number of children at each sample school is detailed in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Distribution of Early Childhood Samples in 10 PAUD Institutions in Ruteng City

No	Name of the Early Childhood Education/Kindergarten Institution	Number of Children (Respondents)
1	Inviolata Kindergarten	40
2	Maria Christina Brando Kindergarten	30
3	St. Francis Kindergarten	25
4	Kemala Bhayangkari Kindergarten	40
5	Dharma Wanita Kindergarten	20
6	Nocera Early Childhood Education	20
7	Maria's Servant Early Childhood Education	30
8	Bunda Maria Gracia Early Childhood Education	20
9	St. Francis of Assisi Kindergarten	20
10	St Nino Kindergarten	30
Total	Respondent Sample	275



Figure 1: Infographic of the research sample distribution

The religious backgrounds of the children who were the subjects of this study were mostly Catholic, reflecting the sociological majority in Manggarai Regency, while Muslims and Protestant Christians were in the minority. This data shows differences in religious identity, but these sample schools actually implemented inclusive policies where students of different religions study in the same class and interact actively every day.

Quantitative Recap of Early Childhood Children's Practice of Tolerance

Survey data was collected through structured interview sheets with 20 items on diversity tolerance behavior. The summary of children's responses to these 20 items was classified into answer choices: "Yes, I like it/Yes" (representing a positive tolerant attitude), "Sometimes" (representing partial tolerance), and "No, I don't like it/No" (representing resistance or intolerant behavior). The data summary is presented quantitatively in Table 2.

Table 2. Summary of Early Childhood Respondents' Answers on Tolerance Practices

No	Survey Item	Yes, I like (f / %)	Sometimes (f / %)	No, no (f / %) I like it	Total
1	Do you play with friends whose way of praying is different from yours?	275 / 100%	0 / 0%	0 / 0%	275

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2	Are you happy if your friend talks about how they pray?	50 / 18,2%	200 / 72,7%	25 / 9,1%	275
3	Do you want to hear a story about your friend's religious holiday?	125 / 45,5%	150 / 54,5%	0 / 0%	275
4	Do you still play with your friend who wears different prayer clothes?	275 / 100%	0 / 0%	0 / 0%	275
5	If your friend has a different way of worshiping, would you still want to be friends with them?	275 / 100%	0 / 0%	0 / 0%	275
6	Did you know that all religions teach goodness?	25 / 14,3%	125 / 71,4%	25 / 14,3%	175
7	Do you also feel happy when your friend celebrates their religious holiday?	100 / 57,1%	75 / 42,9%	0 / 0%	175
8	Do you want to share your toys with a friend who has a different religion?	275 / 100%	0 / 0%	0 / 0%	275
9	Do you call your friend by a nice name, even though they have a different religion?	275 / 100%	0 / 0%	0 / 0%	275

10	Do you like learning about your friends' traditions from other religions?	5 / 2,9%	150 / 85,7%	20 / 11,4%	175
11	If your friend talks about their religion, would you want to listen?	50 / 18,2%	150 / 54,5%	75 / 27,3%	275
12	Have you ever said 'Congratulations' when your friend celebrates their religious holiday?	100 / 36,4%	125 / 45,5%	50 / 18,2%	275
13	If your friend doesn't eat something because of their religion, would you still respect them?	120 / 43,6%	150 / 54,5%	5 / 1,8%	275
14	Are you happy studying with friends who have different religions?	275 / 100%	0 / 0%	0 / 0%	275
15	Did you know that having friends from different religions is fun?	0 / 0%	0 / 0%	275 / 100%	275
16	Do you share food with friends of different religions?	275 / 100%	0 / 0%	0 / 0%	275
17	If your friend is praying, wouldn't you bother them?	200 / 72,7%	75 / 27,3%	0 / 0%	275

18	Do you ask for permission if you want to borrow something from a friend who has a different religion?	150 / 54,5%	100 / 36,4%	25 / 9,1%	275
19	Did you know that your friend is also learning good things in their religion?	100 / 36,4%	50 / 18,2%	125 / 45,5%	275
20	Do you listen to the teacher when talking about a religion different from yours?	275 / 100%	0 / 0%	0 / 0%	275

(Note: Items number 6, 7, and 10 were answered by a sub-sample of 175 children due to technical administrative constraints during school time, but the percentages were calculated proportionally based on the actual number of responses).

Based on the quantitative data above, we can classify children's behavior into four main domains:

1. Concrete Social Interaction and Pro-Social Behavior. This indicator includes playing together without noticing differences in prayer styles (Item 1: 100%), playing with children wearing different worship clothes (Item 4: 100%), inclusive friendships (Item 5: 100%), sharing toys (Item 8: 100%), studying together (Item 14: 100%), and sharing food (Item 16: 100%). All responses showed total acceptance (100% Yes).
2. Affective Respect and Respect for Worship. Children's responses to their friends' worship situations are generally high. About 72.7% of children consistently do not disturb friends who are praying (Item 17), and 43.6% of children respect the food rules/prohibitions of other religions (Item 13).
3. Openness in Interfaith Communication. The child shows a fairly good but dynamic listening attitude. Regarding stories about friends' religious holidays, 45.5% said they like listening and 54.5% said sometimes (Item 3). However, for dogmatic or verbal-theological discussions, like listening to stories about how to pray, the child's responses focused on 'Sometimes' (72.7% on Item 2 and 54.5% on Item 11).
4. Anomaly in Abstract Cognitive Aspects. There's a sharp dissonance between their very inclusive friendship behaviors and their conceptual

understanding. As much as 100% of the kids answered "Don't like/No" when asked if having friends from different religions is fun (Item 15), and 45.5% of the kids said "Don't know/No" that other religions also teach goodness (Item 19).

The findings from the qualitative data reinforce the results of the quantitative data above. Structured observations in the outdoor play area showed that children mingled naturally. There was no grouping of play based on religious identity. Catholic and Muslim children borrowed toys from each other and shared snacks without any psychological or social barriers. This aligns with points 8 and 16, which scored 100%. In-depth interviews with teachers revealed that values of tolerance are instilled through a daily 'habituation' program. Teachers do not teach the theological doctrines of other religions; instead, they instill universal human values. For example, when praying before meals, children are allowed to fold their hands or raise their hands according to their own religion, maintaining a calm and respectful attitude toward each other. Document analysis findings on the Daily Lesson Plan (RPPH) showed that themes of tolerance have been integrated into the sub-themes "Me and My Friends" and "My Country," with a focus on introducing religious symbols in a fun visual way. Teachers also confirmed that children's compliance with teacher instructions is very high, which is reflected in Item 20 where 100% of the children were eager to listen to the teacher's story about diversity.

DISCUSSION

Cognitive-Behavioral Dissonance: Practical Tolerance vs. Cognitive Categorization (Piaget's Perspective)

The most surprising yet interesting finding in this study is the extreme gap between 'practical tolerance behavior' (100% of children enjoy playing, learning, and sharing with friends of different religions) and 'cognitive understanding of differences' (100% answered 'No' to the statement that having friends of different religions is fun on Item 15, and 45.5% answered 'No' on Item 19). This phenomenon can be scientifically explained through Jean Piaget's cognitive development theory, particularly the characteristics of children's thinking during the preoperational stage (ages 2-7) (Piaget, 1926, 1952). At the preoperational stage, a child's thinking is dominated by centration (focusing on one dimension of an object and ignoring others) and an inability to think reversibly (irreversibility) (Inhelder & Piaget, 1964; Piaget, 1952). The term "religious diversity" is a high-level abstract concept that requires the capacity for multiple classification. Children aged 4-6 do not yet have the cognitive structure to group their friends based on such abstract religious categories (Aboud, 2008; Raabe & Beelmann, 2011). When they interact with friends who pray differently, they don't see those individuals as "representatives of another religion," but simply as "peers who share similar play interests". It's no surprise that when asked abstract, big-picture questions like 'is it fun to have friends from different religions?', kids get conceptually confused. They react negatively not because they dislike differences, but because those religious categories feel strange and irrelevant to their everyday social world, which is label-free (Nesdale, 2004; Rutland et al., 2010).

Not only that, the high percentage of "No" responses (45.5%) on Item 19 about whether other religions teach goodness reflects the 'egocentrism' inherent in the preoperational stage (Piaget, 1926). Children at this age see the world purely from their own perspective (egocentric perspective). They internalize their family's religious teachings as the absolute, single truth (moral realism), making it hard to imagine or understand other religious value systems that they haven't experienced themselves (Aboud, 2008; Nesdale, 2004). This finding is backed by recent research from Maryani et al. (2021) and Wibowo et al. (2020), which confirms that tolerance in early childhood develops from the concrete-kinesthetic level to the abstract-cognitive level. Forcing the concept of pluralism too early and in a theoretical way can actually trigger identity confusion in children.

Optimizing Social Contact in Early Childhood Education Settings

The perfect physical interaction score (100% on Items 1, 4, 5, 8, 14, 16) proves that early childhood education institutions in Ruteng City have successfully created an ideal social contact ecosystem. This situation strongly supports the validity of Intergroup Contact Theory, first formulated by Gordon Allport (1954) and reinforced through meta-analysis studies by Pettigrew and Tropp (2006, 2008). Allport stated that social prejudice can be reduced through direct interaction if four main conditions are met: (1) equal status in the interaction situation, (2) having shared goals, (3) intergroup cooperation, and (4) support from official authorities, law, or customs (Allport, 1954).

At the PAUD/TK institution in Ruteng City, these four optimal conditions are naturally and structurally met:

1. Equal status. All children wear the same school uniform, follow the same rules, and are treated equally by teachers regardless of their social or religious background (Maryani et al., 2021; Tropp & Prenovost, 2008).
2. Common goals. Learning activities are designed based on group activities, cooperative games, and class art projects where children want to complete tasks together (Cameron et al., 2006; Feddes et al., 2009).
3. Cooperation. The child consistently shares toys (100% on Item 8) and food (100% on Item 16), which fosters a sense of positive interdependence.
4. Authority support. The principal and teachers give full moral legitimacy to diversity. Item 20 results (100% of children listened to teachers telling stories about other religions) show that the teacher's role is very dominant as a 'trusted authority figure' who guides children's social norms toward inclusion (Feddes et al., 2009; Tropp & Prenovost, 2008).
5. Intensive social contact from an early age acts as a psychological shield that prevents the development of prejudice and stereotypes before they solidify in elementary school (Nesdale, 2004; Rutland et al., 2010). By placing children from different religions in cooperative interaction settings, schools naturally help form cross-group friendships without any theological pressure (Allport, 1954; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006).

Tolerance and Global Diversity Habitus: The Synergy of Early Childhood Education and Lonto Leok Culture of Manggarai

If we pull it into a broader sociological and ecological analysis, the success of internalizing practical tolerance values at PAUD Ruteng can't be separated from the socio-cultural macro context of East Nusa Tenggara (NTT). NTT consistently ranks at the top in the Religious Harmony Index (KUB) from the Indonesian Ministry of Religious Affairs, making it a model of national harmony (Ministry of Religious Affairs RI, 2023). The local culture of the Manggarai community plays a significant role as a habitus of tolerance (Bourdieu, 1977, 1990).

In Pierre Bourdieu's sociology, habitus is a mental or cognitive structure that individuals use to navigate social life, gained through everyday experiences in their social environment (Bourdieu, 1990). Manggarai culture has local wisdom called Lonto Leok (sitting in a circle to deliberate) (Jandu et al., 2022). The basic philosophy of Lonto Leok emphasizes the principles of equality, openness (dialogue), and community integrity, where everyone has an equal voice without barriers (Jandu et al., 2022; Nggoro, 2013). Children in Ruteng grow up in family and traditional environments that practice tolerance based on cultural closeness and social kinship (lonto leok), so this value of harmony is unconsciously absorbed into their behavioral disposition (Bourdieu, 1977; Jebadu, 2015).

This analysis aligns with Urie Bronfenbrenner's Human Development Ecological Theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 1989). According to Bronfenbrenner, individual development is influenced by the dynamic interaction between multiple layers of environmental systems:

- **Microsystem:** Children's direct interaction in the preschool classroom and within the nuclear family (Rahnang et al., 2022).
- **Mesosystem:** The relationship between home and school, where teachers and parents in Ruteng work together to support the tolerance values being taught (Rusmiati, 2023).
- **Macrosystem:** The cultural values of Lonto Leok and the peaceful and tolerant religious social climate in NTT (Jandu et al., 2022; Jebadu, 2015).

The positive ecological synergy between an inclusive early childhood education microsystem and the harmonious Manggarai cultural macrosystem creates a healthy child-rearing environment, fostering a strong global diversity character from an early age (Bourdieu, 1990; Bronfenbrenner, 1989; Rahnang et al., 2022).

Pedagogical Implications and Practical Recommendations

This research finding brings several important implications for early childhood education, especially in multicultural areas: first, a curriculum design based on concrete behaviors. Teaching tolerance in early childhood education shouldn't get stuck on cognitive memorization or introducing abstract religious dogmas (because it triggers Piaget's cognitive anomalies). The focus should be on cooperative play projects, habits of sharing food and toys, and real social empathy exercises (Maryani et al., 2021; Wibowo et al., 2020). Second, optimizing

the role of teachers. Since children have a 100% compliance level with what teachers say (Item 20), teachers should be regularly trained to have broad multicultural insight, free from personal bias, and skilled in designing inclusion-based activities (Feddes et al., 2009; Rusmiati, 2023). Third, providing contextual learning media. Schools need to minimize complicated conceptual teaching materials and include more illustrated stories, puppet characters, or traditional games that carry universal values of peace (Suyadi et al., 2022; Wibowo et al., 2020).

CONCLUSION

This study shows that the practice of tolerance towards diversity in early childhood in Ruteng City is in the very good category, especially in terms of concrete social behavior. A survey of 275 children in 10 early childhood education centers showed that most children are able to interact positively with friends of different religions, as evidenced by their willingness to play together, share toys and food, learn together, and maintain friendships regardless of differences in beliefs. These findings are reinforced by observations, interviews, and document analysis, which show that the school environment has successfully created an inclusive and diversity-friendly educational climate.

Research also found that the tolerance that develops in young children is more visible in practical behavior than in conceptual understanding. Kids show a high level of acceptance toward friends of different religions, but they still struggle to grasp abstract concepts about religious diversity and the universal values found in other religions. This phenomenon aligns with the cognitive development characteristics of young children, who are still in the preoperational stage, making it easier for them to understand concrete experiences rather than abstract concepts about plurality. The success of tolerance practices at PAUD in Ruteng City can't be separated from the synergy of various factors, namely the role of teachers as authoritative figures who instill universal human values, the support of parents in fostering openness to differences, and the cultural context of the Manggarai community that upholds togetherness and social harmony through local wisdom like Lonto Leok. This conducive social environment shapes a tolerance habitus that children naturally internalize from an early age.

The practice of tolerance in early childhood education in Ruteng City can be seen as an effective empirical model for developing tolerance education for young children. That said, this study also points out the need to strengthen teachers' capacity through multicultural education training, the development of more contextual learning media, and the preparation of learning materials that can bridge children's concrete experiences with a deeper understanding of diversity.

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