Critical Reflections on the Role of Islamic Early Childhood Educators in Building Tolerance Awareness in Educational Setting

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Abstract

Purpose – This study explores the role of Islamic early childhood educators in fostering tolerance awareness in educational settings while maintaining a strong Islamic identity. It addresses the tension between promoting religious exclusivity and fostering an appreciation for diversity in a pluralistic society, with the aim to contribute to both educational practice and theory on religious tolerance in early education.

Design/methods/approach – The study employs a qualitative descriptive exploratory design using content analysis. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with five teachers and observations of classroom interactions. The diversity management framework was used to analyze the approaches taken by teachers in integrating tolerance education within Islamic curricula.

Findings – The research highlights various strategies Islamic educators use to promote tolerance, including storytelling, empathy training, and participatory rule-making. The findings reveal a balance between religious identity and tolerance education, with a sequential approach that prioritizes Islamic principles first, followed by the introduction of tolerance concepts. Despite challenges, such as external influences and technological distractions, the research demonstrates that these strategies positively impact children's empathy and social behaviors.

Research implications/limitations – The study is limited by the sample size and geographic scope, focusing on specific Islamic early childhood institutions. Future research could expand the sample and explore cross-cultural comparisons in different Islamic educational contexts to generalize findings.

Practical implications – The findings provide valuable insights for educators, policymakers, and curriculum developers in balancing religious teachings and tolerance education. The study suggests that gradual and integrated approaches to teaching tolerance can foster social harmony and empathy in young children without compromising religious values.

Originality/value – This research contributes to the body of knowledge on Islamic education by offering a nuanced understanding of how tolerance can be embedded in early childhood education while maintaining religious integrity. It introduces the concept of sequential tolerance education, which integrates religious principles with empathy and respect for diversity in Islamic settings.

Keywords Islamic early childhood education, Tolerance, Religious identity, Empathy training, pluralism

Paper type Research paper

1. Introduction

Islamic early childhood education emphasizes holistic development by integrating Islamic values into children's cognitive, social, emotional, and spiritual growth. The primary goal is to nurture religious understanding and character formation from an early age, providing a strong foundation in Islamic principles. Research highlights the effectiveness of integrated learning models that enhance children's comprehension of religious concepts through collaboration among educational institutions, parents, and communities (Manora et al., 2024). For example, the Islamic Religious Education (PAI) curriculum for young children promotes spiritual, emotional, and intellectual growth through play-based learning, engaging children with religious content while supporting overall development (Mutholingah, 2024). Psychological principles are also crucial; understanding a child's nature and employing developmentally appropriate methods are essential for nurturing faith and moral character (Rokhimah et al., 2024). Similar approaches elsewhere show that constructive religious upbringing enhances moral development by instilling prosocial values like tolerance and social care (Yust, 2019). Collectively, these studies underscore the importance of early Islamic education in shaping a balanced Muslim identity through holistic approaches addressing spiritual and cognitive needs.

Building on this foundation, Islamic early childhood education is anchored in a holistic approach integrating spiritual, intellectual, social, and moral development. It emphasizes the foundation of aqidah (faith), introducing children to belief in Allah and practices like prayer and Quran recitation. Daily habits at home and in educational settings reinforce this foundation, with the family playing a crucial role (Hidayat et al., 2024). Developing moral character through Quranic and Hadith-derived values is central, aiming to foster akhlaq (good character) and teach children to live according to Islamic principles (Wahyunisa, 2019). Integrating spiritual intelligence guides children to develop self-awareness, empathy, and responsible behavior while building a relationship with Allah (Salimah et al., 2023). In other contexts, emphasizing moral and spiritual upbringing enhances openness toward religious diversity and fosters inclusiveness (Nicolaisen, 2012). Collaboration among educators, parents, and the community ensures consistent religious education and moral guidance both inside and outside formal schooling.

Teaching tolerance in early childhood is vital for promoting respectful, empathetic, and cooperative behaviors that contribute to peaceful social interactions. Tolerance education helps children appreciate diversity and reduces tendencies toward intolerance, radicalism, and discrimination later in life. In multicultural societies, early exposure to diverse viewpoints builds harmonious relationships. For instance, in Jerusalem, narratives among religious and secular children highlight the potential for fostering mutual understanding through educational settings that emphasize tolerance (Roer-Strier et al., 2003). Schools and families play pivotal roles in teaching tolerance through habituation, modeling respectful behavior, and engaging children in activities that encourage mutual respect and cooperation (Jumiatmoko et al., 2024). In regions with minority tensions, early tolerance education counters radical ideologies and fosters a socially inclusive mindset (Nadlifah et al., 2024). Educators and parents must collaborate to nurture children's ability to respect differences, shaping their character to value diversity from a young age (Syahputri, 2024). Transferring tolerance values from parents to children through family relationships and respect for differences effectively cultivates mutual consideration in community life (Sumadi et al., 2021).

Teachers are crucial in encouraging tolerance by creating inclusive environments and using methods that promote empathy, cooperation, and respect for diversity. Strategies include modeling tolerant behavior, organizing group activities, and teaching appreciation of differences through storytelling, play, and discussions. In rural Armenia, teachers use child-centered pedagogies to advance children's voices, emphasizing respect and inclusivity despite systemic limitations (Khachatryan, 2022). At PAUD Al-Barokah, teachers encourage sharing, cooperative tasks, and participation in religious activities, helping children internalize tolerance values through hands-on experiences. In child-friendly schools, habituation activities and examples of tolerant behavior effectively shape attitudes toward tolerance (Jumiatmoko et al., 2024). Educators integrate tolerance into the curriculum through stories and role-playing that highlight

diverse cultural perspectives, fostering positive responses to diversity (Mutik, 2023). Using religious-based children's literature enhances students' tolerance toward religious diversity through critical learning and literacy engagement (Hayik, 2015).

Teaching tolerance in Islamic educational settings faces challenges like the dominance of mono-religious education models, cultural resistance to change, and misconceptions about religious teachings. In Indonesia, Islamic Religious Education often follows a mono-religious framework, complicating efforts to foster interreligious and intercultural tolerance (Fitriani, 2023). Similar issues occur in Western countries, where Christianity's dominance in education indicates the need for more inclusive approaches in plural societies (Byrne, 2014). Resistance to moderate and inclusive interpretations of Islamic teachings can hinder tolerance education. Teachers may struggle to align religious values with modern concepts of tolerance, further complicated by inadequate curricula and insufficient training (Yanto et al., 2023). Stereotypes and discrimination in educational settings create additional barriers, necessitating efforts to build inclusive Islamic education systems (Barella et al., 2023). The limits of cultural relativism highlight complexities in promoting tolerance, as even tolerant societies may exhibit intolerance toward certain practices, challenging assumptions of cultural representation (Sutton, 1998).

Educators shape students' moral values by acting as ethical models and creating environments that encourage moral reasoning and behavior. They influence students by exemplifying ethical behavior, facilitating discussions on moral issues, and guiding reflection on values and decision-making. This guidance is crucial in today's globalized world, where students face complex social and ethical challenges. Teachers play an important role in increasing social awareness of cultural diversity through understanding customs and beliefs of immigrant groups (Morrish, 2021). They promote ethical responsibility, critical thinking, and self-reflection, ensuring students develop strong moral characters alongside academic success (Icka & Kochoska, 2024). Moral education is most effective when schools collaborate with parents, as consistent messaging contributes significantly to moral growth.

Pedagogical approaches that promote tolerance focus on creating inclusive environments and teaching practices that encourage understanding and respect for diversity. Effective methods include teacher training and fostering a welcoming atmosphere (Kuzdeubaeva et al., 2024). The bidimensional psycho-pedagogical approach integrates theoretical and practical components, improving teachers' tolerance toward marginalized groups and equipping them to reduce discrimination (Gutu & Boghian, 2019). Competency-based curriculum reforms promoting multicultural competencies have been effective in fostering respect in early education (Iliško, 2022). Out-of-class activities like discussions and projects enhance cooperation and openness to different perspectives (Tarhonii, 2020). These methods emphasize cognitive understanding and behavioral changes toward tolerance. Integrating peace education and multicultural values into the curriculum, such as through cultural heritage like Wayang Golek, effectively fosters tolerance by emphasizing non-violence and respect for diversity (Harjianto et al., 2021).

Islamic teachings emphasize peaceful coexistence, respect for diversity, and non-compulsion in faith matters. The Quran encourages tolerance: "There is no compulsion in religion" (Qur'an 2:256), promoting respect for diverse beliefs. Islamic values like akhlaq (good moral conduct) and rahmah (mercy) highlight the importance of kindness and understanding in interactions (Maulana et al., 2023). The Abrahamic religious traditions offer paths toward tolerance and interfaith respect through values encouraging peace and freedom of principle (Clark, 2012). Mosques play a central role in promoting tolerance through community-building efforts, and Islamic Religious Education incorporates these values into its curriculum. Scholars like Bahauddin Naqshband stress tolerance as a key component of Sufi teachings, emphasizing love and openness (Kilicheva, 2021).

Islamic education fosters tolerance by integrating religious moderation, multicultural values, and inclusive practices into its curriculum. Religious moderation-based education in Islamic boarding schools teaches appreciation of religious diversity and peaceful coexistence (Wibowo et al., 2024). Incorporating local wisdom and multicultural values helps students understand cultural diversity and develop empathy. Islamic education promotes tolerance by

introducing multicultural elements, reducing radicalism, and promoting social harmony (Ardhy, 2024). The Children's Spirituality Education (CSE) model emphasizes respect for others' beliefs and promotes inclusive thinking (Hidayat et al., 2024). These models cultivate an inclusive mindset that values diversity and peaceful coexistence.

Despite the emphasis on moral, spiritual, and cognitive development in Islamic early childhood education, a gap exists in how educators specifically promote tolerance in diverse settings. Previous studies focus on moral education and character development within Islamic frameworks (Rokhimah et al., 2024; Syahputri, 2024), but there's limited research on integrating tolerance into teaching practices. Broader educational models like peace, multicultural, and human rights education are more commonly explored (Harjianto et al., 2021; Salmon-Letelier & Russell, 2020). While early childhood education in countries like England promotes tolerance by highlighting diverse traditions, policy challenges related to extremism persist (Meehan & Meehan, 2019). A comprehensive study on Islamic early childhood educators' role in fostering tolerance in pluralistic contexts is missing.

This study aims to fill this gap by examining the strategies and challenges Islamic early childhood educators face in building tolerance awareness. It will explore how educators can incorporate tolerance into early education while maintaining religious principles. The findings will provide insights for developing pedagogical approaches that promote tolerance and coexistence from an early age. This study has practical implications for educators, policymakers, and curriculum developers, contributing to more inclusive educational environments. By exploring the intersection of Islamic education and tolerance, this research will contribute to promoting social cohesion in increasingly diverse societies.

2. Methods

2. 1. Research Design
This study employs a qualitative descriptive exploratory design, utilizing the content analysis method (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). This design was selected to thoroughly explore the role of Islamic early childhood educators in fostering tolerance awareness in educational settings. The qualitative exploratory approach facilitates the identification of various challenges, opportunities, and best practices in implementing tolerance education in schools (Bengtsson, 2016). The descriptive method allows for a comprehensive, accurate, and systematic description of the research object (Miles et al., 2014).

2. 2. Participants and Data Collection
The study involved six teachers, parents, and fifty students from several Islamic early childhood education institutions. Data were gathered using semi-structured interviews to explore educators' perspectives and practices in building tolerance awareness among students (O'Keeffe et al., 2016). Non-participant observations were also conducted to document classroom interactions and activities related to tolerance education. A triangulation of techniques and sources was applied to enhance the validity and reliability of the data (Carter et al., 2014).
The study utilized the diversity management framework, identifying four main approaches employed by teachers (Stier et al., 2012): *first*, Instrumental Approach**:** Teachers demonstrated a limited understanding of diversity, often focusing on superficial aspects such as cultural symbols, without leveraging these situations for deeper intercultural learning. *Second*, Co-productive Approach**:** Teachers began to acknowledge their own cultural backgrounds and biases, fostering a shared learning process with students about cultural diversity and mutual understanding. *Third*, Facilitative Proactive Approach**:** Teachers actively explored alternative cultural perspectives, encouraging students to recognize and appreciate individual uniqueness, including differences in physical traits and cultural practices. *Fourth*, Agitative Proactive Approach**:** Teachers promoted cross-cultural interactions among students, helping them expand their identities by learning about and embracing different languages, cultures, and traditions.

2. 3. Research Design

The data analysis was conducted qualitatively using content analysis based on the model. The process began with transcription of the interview and observation data. Initial coding was performed by identifying key statements from participants, retaining language close to the original expressions. These codes were grouped according to similarities and differences, categorized by meaning, relationships, and consistency. Categories were then structured into broader conceptual patterns, leading to themes that represented connections within the data. Both explicit and implicit meanings were analyzed to provide comprehensive insights (Bengtsson, 2016).

3. Result

This study uncovers diverse strategies employed by Islamic early childhood educators to foster tolerance awareness in educational settings. These educators adopt innovative approaches to instill values of tolerance, empathy, and respect for diversity in young children. However, their efforts face challenges in balancing these values with the preservation of Islamic principles.

One notable strategy is storytelling, as implemented by Teacher 1, who uses stories to introduce the concept of religious diversity. Through her storytelling, children learn about Indonesia's major religions, including Islam, Christianity, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Confucianism. This approach allows children to encounter the idea of religious diversity early in life. However, Teacher 1 underscores the importance of prioritizing Islamic teachings, stating, *"Guru juga akan mengajarkan kepada anak bahwa jangan mau untuk diajak ke tempat ibadah teman-teman yang selain Islam"* (*The teacher will also teach the children not to agree to be invited to places of worship of friends who follow religions other than Islam*) (Teacher 1, 2024). This illustrates a tension between promoting tolerance and maintaining religious boundaries, a recurring challenge in Islamic education.

Teacher 2 employs a different approach by embedding religious practices into daily routines. She encourages children to pray before activities, believing that a strong religious foundation builds good character. She explains, *"Anak akan dibiasakan dahulu untuk dekat dengan agama, karena jika anak sudah paham dengan agama, maka anak sudah baik dengan akhlaknya"* *(Children will first be accustomed to being close to religion, because once they understand religion, they will develop good morals)* (Teacher 2, 2024).

This method highlights the integration of religious identity and moral development. Nevertheless, she acknowledges external influences, such as the broader societal environment, as potential obstacles to sustaining these values.

Another innovation is conflict resolution through empathy training, as demonstrated by Teacher 3. In collaboration with psychologists and healthcare professionals, her school addresses conflicts among children by fostering empathy and respectful communication. In the classroom, children are encouraged to use polite expressions like *"tolong," "permisi,"* and *"terima kasih."* *("Please," "excuse me," and "thank you").* Teacher 3 identifies technology, particularly the influence of gadgets, as a significant challenge, explaining, *"Pengaruh gadget terhadap perilaku anak menjadi tantangan terbesar" (The influence of gadgets on children's behavior has become the biggest challenge)* (Teacher 3, 2024).

Despite these challenges, her approach promotes social interaction grounded in empathy and mutual respect. Teacher 4 highlights the value of engaging children in discussions to help them reflect on their actions and their consequences. When conflicts arise, teachers facilitate dialogues to explore the underlying reasons and collaboratively find solutions. She describes this process: *"Kita galikan kenapa kok mukul itu kenapa… dan diskusi terus kita carikan solusinya" (We explore why they hit and discuss it further to find a solution)* (Teacher 4, 2024). However, Teacher 4 notes that her limited direct interaction with children presents a challenge in ensuring consistent implementation of these values. Together, these findings reveal a nuanced landscape in which Islamic early childhood educators strive to promote tolerance and empathy while navigating the complexities of religious identity and external influences.

3. 1. Prioritizing Islamic Identity Before Teaching Tolerance

Teacher 5 underscores the importance of cultivating a strong Islamic identity in children as a foundation before introducing concepts of religious tolerance. Her pedagogical approach is sequential, with the first semester dedicated to *tauhid* (the Islamic concept of monotheism), followed by a focus on tolerance education in the second semester. She explains, *"Saya berusaha pokoknya di semester awal itu harus tercapai bahwa ruh anak-anak itu Islam sebagai orang muslim, kemudian nanti di semester 2 saya baru fokus menanamkan sikap toleransi" (I strive to ensure that in the first semester, the essence of the children as Muslims is firmly established. Then, in the second semester, I focus on instilling an attitude of tolerance)* (Teacher 5, 2024). This method reflects a deliberate strategy to balance the reinforcement of religious identity with the broader values of tolerance.

Teacher 6 employs a participatory approach by involving children in the creation of classroom rules. This strategy fosters a sense of ownership and responsibility among the children while promoting values such as sharing, helping others, and conflict avoidance. She states, *"Anak-anak juga kami libatkan dalam membuat peraturan sebelum bermain agar tingkat kedisiplinannya dalam mematuhi tata tertib tersebut lebih tinggi" (We also involve the children in creating rules before playing so that their level of discipline in following the regulations is higher)* (Teacher 6, 2024). By empowering children to co-create a harmonious classroom environment, her approach nurtures empathy and tolerance.

Classroom observations reveal that children are increasingly demonstrating tolerance and empathy during their daily interactions. For instance, during free play and learning activities, children were seen sharing materials, taking turns, and avoiding favoritism. Specific examples include children sharing food during snack time and assisting each other with tasks like reading and writing on the board. These behaviors mirror the values instilled by their educators, showcasing the effectiveness of their teaching strategies.

The analysis of school documents corroborates these findings, indicating that tolerance education extends beyond daily interactions and is reinforced through multimedia tools such as videos and storytelling. For example, teachers use videos to introduce children to various places of worship, fostering an understanding of religious diversity and respect for differences. These efforts demonstrate how tolerance education is systematically integrated into both informal classroom practices and formal teaching materials.

3. 2. Challenges in Implementing Tolerance Education

A significant challenge faced by educators is the influence of external environments and technology. Teachers observed that children often mimic behaviors seen on digital devices, which sometimes conflict with the values taught at school. Furthermore, children's critical thinking skills can create additional hurdles when they question the necessity of tolerance within the framework of religious absolutism. As Teacher 5 recounted, some children asked, "Why is tolerance necessary if Islam is considered the true religion?"

Another major challenge is the time required for children to internalize the values of tolerance. Teacher 6 highlighted this issue, stating, *"Penanaman sikap toleransi dan saling melindungi pasti membutuhkan waktu yang lama hingga dapat melekat pada anak" (Instilling an attitude of tolerance and mutual protection certainly takes a long time to become ingrained in children)* (Teacher 6, 2024). This underscores the need for sustained effort and reinforcement over time, as the outcomes of these educational initiatives are not immediately apparent.

Despite these challenges, the research highlights positive developments in children's social behaviors. Both teachers and parents reported that children involved in these programs exhibit greater empathy and a stronger aversion to violence. One parent remarked, *"Anak saya tidak bisa melihat ada kekerasan di sekitar dia dan dia tidak suka jika ada kekerasan di sekitar dia" (My child cannot tolerate seeing violence around them and does not like it when there is violence nearby)* (Parent 1, 2024). Additionally, children's actions, such as offering comfort to peers in distress or assisting others during activities, demonstrate the effectiveness of the tolerance education strategies.

The role of Islamic early childhood educators in fostering tolerance awareness is multifaceted. It involves a blend of religious instruction, empathy training, and participatory learning approaches. While challenges persist—particularly external influences and the extended timeline for behavioral change—the observed improvements in children's empathy and social interactions indicate that these strategies are making meaningful progress in promoting tolerance within educational settings.

4. Discussion

4. 1. Islamic Early Childhood Educators' Approaches to Promote Tolerance Awareness

Based on the findings, teachers adopt various approaches to promote tolerance within the diversity management framework (Stier et al., 2012). The Instrumental Approach, as seen in storytelling (Teacher 1) and daily religious routines (Teacher 2), introduces religious diversity superficially while prioritizing Islamic teachings. For instance, Teacher 1 emphasizes "not to participate in non-Islamic worship," reflecting a tension between fostering tolerance and maintaining religious boundaries. This approach often exoticizes other religions, limiting deeper intercultural understanding (Stier et al., 2012). In contrast, the Co-productive Approach emerges through practices like empathy training and conflict resolution (Teacher 3) and reflective dialogues about social behavior (Teacher 4), demonstrating a more interactive and collaborative effort to build mutual respect and understanding.

The Facilitative Proactive Approach is evident in Teacher 6's participatory rule-making strategies, where children are actively involved in establishing classroom harmony. This method encourages responsibility and empathy, empowering students to engage across cultural boundaries. However, a recurring theme is the prioritization of religious identity over tolerance. Teachers like Teacher 5 emphasize the formation of a strong Islamic identity before introducing tolerance, illustrating the delicate balance between religious indoctrination and intercultural learning. Furthermore, external challenges such as media and technology are noted by Teachers 2 and 3 as undermining the values being instilled, complicating efforts to foster tolerance. The gradual process of value internalization, as highlighted by Teacher 6, underscores the need for consistent reinforcement to achieve noticeable behavioral changes in children.

Islamic early childhood educators employ diverse strategies ranging from Instrumental to Proactive Approaches, reflecting the complexity of balancing strong religious identity with tolerance promotion. While Instrumental methods primarily focus on reinforcing religious principles, proactive strategies like empathy training and participatory learning show greater potential in cultivating tolerance. Nonetheless, external influences and the time-intensive nature of internalizing tolerance values suggest the need for a sustained, multifaceted effort to nurture intercultural understanding in young children.

4. 2. The Dialectic Between Religious Absolutism and Tolerance

The tension between religious absolutism and tolerance emerges prominently in the methods used by Teachers 1 and 5, who prioritize building a strong Islamic identity before introducing concepts of tolerance. This sequential approach to tolerance education aligns with the argument that early Islamic education aims to establish a firm foundation of faith as the moral basis for developing tolerant behaviors (Rokhimah et al., 2024). The emphasis on tauhid before tolerance underscores the prioritization of religious identity as a precursor to moral and civic virtues, reflecting a pedagogical strategy deeply rooted in Islamic principles.

This approach, however, raises a philosophical question: can genuine tolerance be fostered while maintaining the primacy of religious exclusivity? The concept of tolerance as neutrality is relevant here, suggesting that tolerance in religious education involves engaging with diversity without abandoning one's principles. The findings indicate that Islamic education can promote informed tolerance, where religious identity is affirmed while children are gradually introduced to respecting other faiths. This model avoids relativism and instead embeds tolerance within a

robust moral and religious framework, crucial for children's holistic development (Manora et al., 2024).

4. 3. Revisiting Islamic Pedagogy: Integrating Faith and Pluralism

Islamic educational philosophy has historically prioritized the integration of spiritual, social, and intellectual development (Salimah et al., 2023). The educators' strategies—such as storytelling (Teacher 1), empathy training (Teacher 3), and participatory rule-making (Teacher 6)—align with Islamic pedagogical pluralism, which emphasizes moral education alongside intellectual growth. These approaches reflect core Islamic values of *rahmah* (mercy) and *akhlaq* (morality), which serve as foundational principles for fostering peaceful coexistence (Wahyunisa, 2019). By embedding these values in teaching practices, educators aim to cultivate an environment that balances religious identity with social harmony.

Teacher 1's use of storytelling to introduce religious diversity exemplifies Islamic pluralism in practice. While emphasizing Islamic principles, this approach fosters empathy and understanding of diversity without compromising religious instruction. This methodology aligns with the advocacy for integrating moral values from the Quran and Hadith with broader social values like empathy and respect in early childhood education (Hidayat et al., 2024). By doing so, the teaching of tolerance becomes both a reflection of Islamic ethics and an embodiment of global citizenship, rooted in Islamic humanism that emphasizes the interconnectedness of all humanity (Kilicheva, 2021).

4. 4. Time and Internalization: A Developmental Perspective on Tolerance Education

Teacher 6's observation that tolerance education is a gradual process resonates with Aristotelian ethics, which emphasize that moral virtues are cultivated through habituation. Similarly, in Islamic pedagogy, the development of *akhlaq* (good character) is understood as a long-term process requiring consistent reinforcement through daily practices at home and in school (Rokhimah et al., 2024). This is reflected in routines such as daily prayers (Teacher 2), which serve as a means of gradually internalizing moral virtues and tolerance over time, underscoring the role of repetitive, value-based practices in character development.

Play-based learning in early childhood education within Islamic contexts integrates religious teachings with character-building activities (Mutholingah, 2024). This aligns with the study's findings, where interactive and participatory approaches are employed to nurture empathy and cooperation among children. Early Islamic education must balance cognitive development with moral instruction, positioning the gradual internalization of tolerance as a cornerstone of both religious and social development (Manora et al., 2024). Such strategies ensure that tolerance is not merely taught but embedded in the lived experiences of children.

4. 5. External Challenges and the Influence of Technology

The influence of external factors, particularly technology, as noted by Teacher 3, poses a significant challenge to tolerance education. The prevalence of gadgets and digital media often contradicts the values being taught in the classroom. This finding aligns with the argument that external influences such as media and societal norms can undermine the values of tolerance and respect instilled by educators (Jumiatmoko et al., 2024). In this context, educators must practice *phronesis* (practical wisdom), a concept rooted in Aristotelian ethics, to navigate these challenges while maintaining a focus on moral education.

Educators must collaborate with parents and communities to reinforce the values being taught in schools (Salimah et al., 2023). The concept of collaborative moral education is vital, as consistent messaging from both school and home environments is critical in countering external negative influences, such as those posed by digital media. This collaboration aligns with the findings of the current research, which suggests that external environments can often conflict with the religious and moral values being promoted within the educational setting.

4. 6. Toward a New Educational Paradigm: Religious Identity and Global Citizenship

The study's findings suggest the emergence of a new theoretical paradigm in Islamic early childhood education, where educators aim to shape children as both good Muslims and empathetic global citizens. This reflects the emphasis that Islamic education must incorporate elements of religious moderation and multicultural values to foster peaceful coexistence (Wibowo et al., 2024). The balance between strong religious identity and global citizenship is a core component of what can be termed cosmopolitan Islamic education.

This new paradigm integrates multicultural education with traditional Islamic teachings, preparing children to engage with a diverse world while remaining rooted in their faith. The findings show that participatory methods (Teacher 6) and empathy training (Teacher 3) contribute to this global outlook, where children are taught to respect differences without compromising their Islamic identity. Integrating religious literacy and tolerance education into the curriculum helps children navigate the complexities of a multicultural world.

4.7. Research Contribution

This study makes a significant contribution to the development of early childhood education paradigms within Islamic educational contexts, particularly regarding the promotion of tolerance. It highlights concrete approaches adopted by Islamic educators, such as instrumental, co-productive, and proactive strategies, which integrate religious values with principles of mutual respect and intercultural understanding. A key contribution of this research lies in its exploration of how early childhood Islamic education can embrace pluralism without compromising a strong religious identity, a challenge often faced in faith-based education. These findings pave the way for the development of more inclusive curricula that address contemporary social dynamics while providing a foundation for a more pluralistic Islamic educational theory. This theory could help cultivate a generation that not only understands their own faith but also respects religious and cultural differences.

4.8. Limitations

Despite the valuable insights provided, several limitations should be acknowledged. First, the study's focus on Islamic education in Indonesia limits the generalizability of the findings to broader or cross-religious contexts, particularly in countries with different cultural dynamics. Second, the research relies on qualitative data from a small sample of teachers, which, while rich in detail, may not fully capture the diversity of approaches employed in various Islamic educational institutions. Third, there is a potential bias in the self-reported data from the educators, as they may present their teaching methods in a more idealized or socially acceptable manner. Lastly, the study does not address the long-term impact of tolerance education in early childhood, leaving room for further research to assess how these approaches influence children's attitudes and behaviors as they grow older.

4.9. Suggestions

Future research could benefit from longitudinal studies to examine the long-term effects of tolerance education on children's behaviors and attitudes toward religious diversity as they mature. Additionally, exploring the perspectives of parents and community members would offer a more comprehensive understanding of the external factors influencing tolerance education in Islamic early childhood settings. Further studies should also investigate the role of technology and digital media in shaping children's views on diversity, as this study identified external challenges that educators face in maintaining the values taught in the classroom. Finally, it would be beneficial to expand the research to include the integration of religious moderation and global citizenship education at higher educational levels. This would contribute to a more holistic understanding of how Islamic education can foster both religious identity and global empathy, preparing children to engage in a multicultural world while remaining grounded in their faith.

5. Conclusion

The findings of this study contribute to a nuanced understanding of how Islamic early childhood educators navigate the balance between religious identity and tolerance education. The use of literature to reinforce these findings highlights key insights, including the concept of sequential

tolerance education, where religious identity is solidified first and tolerance is introduced gradually; the emergence of a holistic ethical framework integrating Islamic values with empathy and respect for diversity; the recognition of the temporal and developmental nature of moral internalization, where tolerance is cultivated through consistent reinforcement; and the development of a cosmopolitan Islamic identity, where children are educated to be devout Muslims and global citizens. This study underscores the importance of continued philosophical and pedagogical inquiry into how religious education in Islamic settings can evolve to meet the challenges of a globalized world. Despite its contributions, the study has limitations, including a narrow geographical scope and the potential for context-specific findings that may not generalize across diverse Islamic settings. Future research is recommended to explore longitudinal impacts, incorporate diverse cultural contexts, and examine the role of educators' personal beliefs and practices in fostering tolerance within religious education.

Declarations

Author contribution statement

Hafidh 'Aziz conceived the idea and developed the theory of islamic early childhood, and tolerance. Muhamad Aditya Hidayah conducted data collection. All authors engaged in discussions regarding the findings, performed the analysis, and made contributions to the final manuscript.

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Data availability statement

The dataset generated and analyzed during the research is available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

Declaration of interests statement

All authors declare that they have no financial or personal interests that could influence the work presented in this manuscript.

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