

## Teachers' Roles in Fostering Tolerance Values among Elementary School Students

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**Abstract:** This study investigates teachers' roles in fostering tolerance values among sixth-grade elementary school students at SDN Siwalankerto II/419 Surabaya. Using a qualitative case study approach, data were collected through classroom observations, semi-structured interviews, and document analysis involving classroom teachers, the deputy head of student affairs, the deputy head of curriculum, and students. The findings indicate that teachers foster tolerance through three interconnected roles: as role models, educators, and facilitators of habituation practices. Teachers demonstrated inclusive behavior through daily school routines, integrated tolerance into lesson planning and classroom interactions, and reinforced tolerant attitudes through sustained school culture practices. These findings align with Bandura's Social Learning Theory, emphasizing that students develop social behavior through observation and imitation of meaningful models. The study highlights the importance of consistent teacher practices and inclusive school environments in developing tolerance values in elementary education.

**Keywords:** Diversity, The Role of Teachers, The Value of Tolerance, Social Learning Theory, Elementary School Student

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## INTRODUCTION

Indonesia is a country rich in religious, ethnic, cultural and linguistic diversity, which presents both potential and challenges for the nation. The main challenge arising from this diversity is the continued occurrence of cases of intolerance and discrimination within the educational environment, particularly in primary schools. This is supported by data from a SETARA Institute survey (2023) which recorded that 23% of pupils in East Java had experienced religious discrimination at school, as well as actual incidents of intolerance amongst primary school pupils that have had fatal consequences. Education in primary schools plays a vital role in building a structured awareness of tolerance.

As a nation rich in diversity, tolerance should naturally be possessed by every Indonesian citizen. Tolerance, by definition, means respecting, permitting, or allowing opinions, views, beliefs, customs, and other actions that conflict with one's own, such as religion, ideology, or race (Sulistiyowati & Afkari, n.d.). Tolerance is an individual attitude demonstrated through openness in accepting and respecting differences—whether in terms of views, beliefs, customs, or attitudes that do not always align with one's own—without harbouring resentment (Gentala & Dasar, 2023). Understanding tolerance as an individual attitude demonstrated through openness in accepting and respecting differences.

Primary school age is a critical period for the formation of concrete character. Primary schools have a broader purpose than merely enhancing pupils' knowledge. Education in primary schools can foster a structured awareness of the importance of a tolerant attitude towards the diversity of ethnicity, culture, and religion in Indonesia (Anggraeni et al., 2022). The culture, behaviour, and customs within a school significantly influence pupils' behaviour at school (Wicaksono, 2023). Moreover, state primary schools with pupils of diverse religious, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds require the intensive instilling of values of tolerance to create a harmonious and inclusive school environment.

Observations at SDN Siwalankerto II/419 in Surabaya indicate that the school exhibits interesting and dynamic characteristics of diversity, making it a highly relevant setting for studies in the context of tolerance-based character education. The findings reveal that diversity is not limited to differences in religion, ethnicity and culture, but also extends to variations in pupils' academic abilities. As a formal educational institution, this school

serves as a meeting point for pupils from diverse backgrounds, ranging from differing religious beliefs and variations in family socio-economic circumstances to the diversity of academic ability levels within the classroom. These complex social interactions create various daily dynamics, such as the potential for disintegration or a tendency towards exclusivity amongst pupils.

One of the key figures in a school is the teacher. As a teacher, one of the most important things that can be taught to pupils regarding diversity is understanding differences (Dellarosa et al., 2024). In this context, teachers do not merely function as knowledge transmitters but must act as role models. This approach is relevant to Albert Bandura's Social Learning Theory (1971), in which character development is achieved through the process of *modelling* so that pupils can accept and emulate attitudes of mutual respect. Several previous studies have examined the role of classroom teachers in fostering attitudes of tolerance through setting a good example. Research by Candra et al. (2023) indicates that teachers play a crucial role in instilling the value of tolerance in students through setting a good example.

The attitude of tolerance exemplified by teachers is also part of their role as role models, in line with the research by Hasiba & Febrianti (2021). Teachers are figures whose attitudes are trusted and emulated by students. Furthermore, research by Sulaeka & Susanto (2023) indicates that teachers, as individuals who interact directly with students in the classroom must serve as exemplary role models. Teachers are required to display appropriate behaviour and speech towards their students. Research by Candra et al. (2023) indicates that it is crucial for teachers to possess exemplary conduct worthy of emulation by their students. However, as noted in , previous research has primarily focused on the final outcomes of teachers' roles in instilling the value of tolerance in general.

There is a research gap regarding specific and in-depth studies examining the processes involved in fostering attitudes of tolerance when analysed directly through the lens of Social Learning Theory among primary school pupils. This is particularly true for Year 6 pupils at primary school level, who are in a critical phase of social-emotional development as they approach adolescence. Research on how *the modelling* stage—encompassing attention, retention, motor reproduction, and motivational reinforcement—

is implemented within the context of managing diversity in multicultural primary schools remains very limited.

To address this gap, this study aims to explore how the instilling of tolerance values takes place within a diverse school environment. The primary focus of this study is to provide an in-depth description of the role of teachers in instilling the value of tolerance in Year 6 pupils at SDN Siwalankerto II/419, Surabaya, as viewed through Albert Bandura's Social Learning Theory. The analysis is framed using Bandura's Social Learning Theory, which emphasises the process of observation (Attention, Retention, Reproduction, and Motivation). Through this objective, this study is expected not only to contribute to academic literature. It is hoped that this research will reveal, in its entirety, how the role of the teacher as a role model, educator, and motivator functions as an instrument of social modelling capable of shaping behaviour characterised by mutual respect amidst the diversity of students' backgrounds.

## METHODS

This study employed a qualitative approach using a case study design to obtain an in-depth understanding of teachers' roles in fostering tolerance values among elementary school students. A qualitative approach is used to understand social phenomena in depth and holistically in order to capture the meaning behind the role of teachers in the process of instilling tolerance in their natural environment (Creswell, 2013). The research design applied is a *case study*. This design explores and describes in detail the role of teachers in a specific case, bound by space and time, namely in Class VI of SDN Siwalankerto II/419 Surabaya.

The primary instrument in this study was the researcher themselves. Primary data collection was conducted through passive participatory observation to observe natural interactions in the classroom. The researcher then conducted semi-structured in-depth interviews guided by a framework of the teacher's role (Anwar & Rusmin, 2023) and indicators of tolerance (Daryanto & Darmiatun, 2013). Secondary data was obtained through documentary analysis, namely teaching modules, school profiles, and photographic documentation of activities.

The collected data were analysed interactively using the model by Miles and Huberman (2014). The stages of analysis comprised: (1) Data Reduction, which involved

sorting and summarising the results of interviews and observations; (2) Data Presentation, to organise the data in a structured manner; and (3) Drawing Conclusions/Verification. Data validity was tested using source triangulation—by comparing data across informants—technique triangulation—by comparing interviews with observations and documentation—and member checking.

## RESULTS

Based on the results of the data analysis conducted, the role of teachers in instilling the value of tolerance is realised through:

### 1. Teachers As Role Models And Good Examples.

Based on the results of in-depth interviews with informants, namely Mr R, a Year 6 Class B teacher, class teachers strive to always be good examples or role models in integrating the value of tolerance within the classroom and school environment. This was conveyed by the informant, who stated that,

“... And we as teachers must set a good example” (Interview on 11 February 2026).

The role of teachers as role models is not limited to the classroom or lesson time alone. Every positive behaviour and attitude demonstrated by teachers is always the centre of attention and observed by pupils within the school environment. The reality of the broad scope of this role modelling was emphasised by Mr R, who stated “Every move a teacher makes is definitely observed. Not just by our own pupils. Other pupils will certainly notice too. ‘Oh, what is this teacher like? What is this teacher like?’” (Interview on 11 February 2026)

This example is most clearly seen in the implementation of the 5S culture (Smile, Greet, Say hello, Polite, Courteous) every morning at the school entrance. Through concrete actions in greeting pupils regardless of their background, teachers set an example of inclusive behaviour that can be directly observed by the pupils.



**Figure 1.** Teacher Implementing The 5S Culture

## 2. Teachers As Educators

In the context of learning, observations and documentation from the Teaching Module indicate that teachers actively instil values of tolerance within the learning process. This integration is achieved through an introductory activity that encourages pupils to reflect on the importance of togetherness before the main lesson begins. Furthermore, teachers demonstrate their role in classroom management by rotating pupils' seating arrangements in a mixed-group format once a week. This strategy effectively requires pupils to step outside their exclusive social circles and learn to collaborate with anyone, regardless of gender or other backgrounds.

## 3. The Teacher Acts As A Mediator And Facilitator

This role is reflected in the teacher's proactive steps to create an inclusive social environment and to facilitate pupils' emotional needs amidst the dynamics of diversity. Teachers not only create a safe space for collaboration but also act as neutral mediators when differences of opinion arise during discussions, ensuring every child feels they have an equal right to speak without fear of judgement. As mediators, when differences of opinion arise amongst pupils during discussions, teachers do not immediately determine which opinion is correct and which is incorrect. Teachers listen to and value all opinions expressed by pupils. This fosters a fair and harmonious environment within the classroom.

## DISCUSSION

The findings of this study indicate that fostering tolerance is not merely a matter of conveying theory, but rather the structured engineering of the classroom's social environment. According to , Albert Bandura's Social Learning Theory (1971), the process of internalising behaviour from a model must pass through the stages of attention, retention, *reproduction*, and motivation.

**The teacher's role as a role model** can stimulate the *attention* and *retention* stages in learners. The attitudes and words demonstrated by the teacher when observing differences, both within and outside the classroom, are recorded by the learners. Learners will pay attention to the attitudes demonstrated by the teacher. In line with Albert Bandura's Social Learning Theory, the teacher becomes a model who naturally becomes the centre of attention for learners within the school environment.

This finding aligns with the research by Hasiba & Febrianti (2021) and Candra et al. (2023), which confirms that consistent role modelling by teachers can foster an attitude of respecting differences among primary school pupils. When pupils consistently observe the teacher's behaviour, they will store this behaviour in their memory. Through this continuous process of observation and recall, pupils will tend to imitate and apply the positive behaviour modelled by teachers in their daily lives, both within the school environment and in social interactions with peers from different backgrounds.

In line with this, Candra et al. (2023) also explain that it is important for teachers to act as good role models. This is because the actions taken by teachers will be observed and imitated by pupils. Teachers are required to act as positive examples for students, both through their words and actions. This is particularly important in fostering a sense of tolerance among students. It is vital for teachers to demonstrate an open and accepting attitude towards students, so that students can emulate and implement this behaviour with their peers at school.

**The role of the teacher as an educator**, where according to (Daryanto & Tasrial, 2015) a teacher as an educator means that the teacher becomes a figure and role model for students. The role of the teacher as an educator has a crucial dimension in shaping students' attitudes. In the reality of the school environment, this position as a role model requires teachers to possess high standards of quality, encompassing responsibility, authority, independence, and discipline. The connection between this role and the



instilling of tolerance is clearly evident in the teacher's duty to foster children's development through the acquisition of real-life experiences from the surrounding environment.

The seating rotation strategy implemented by the teacher each week demonstrates that the teacher does not merely transfer knowledge to the pupils, but also facilitates a social space in which pupils gain first-hand experience of appreciating the diversity of their peers' backgrounds. In their role as educators, teachers are expected not only to master the subject matter but also to possess a deep understanding of teaching methods. This aligns with Sa'ud (2017), who highlights that the ability to manage classroom dynamics—such as implementing diverse seating rotation strategies each week—is a crucial classroom management skill for teachers as educators.

The strategy of rotating pupils' seating arrangements is a form of motor reproduction within Albert Bandura's Social Learning Theory. This policy requires pupils to practise emotional regulation and tolerance directly within new groups. Pupils are also actively involved in the learning process through the strategies employed by the teacher. This aligns with Anwar & Rusmin (2023), who state that the success of moral value internalisation is significantly influenced by the teacher's *classroom* management skills and the pupils' engagement in the learning process.

**The teacher's role as mediator and facilitator.** In addressing the dynamics of diversity in the classroom, a pedagogical approach cannot rely solely on setting an example. Teachers are required to proactively design an inclusive social environment. Practice at SDN Siwalankerto II/419 in Surabaya demonstrates that teachers assume the dual role of facilitator and social mediator. Referring to the views of (Anwar & Rusmin, 2023), the roles of mediator and facilitator require teachers not merely to be conveyors of information, but to act as neutral mediators and creators of safe spaces for collaboration. Field findings confirm this through teachers' actions when managing differences of opinion in class discussions. When pupils showed a tendency to jeer at or blame a classmate with a differing view, the teacher intervened to mediate the situation without passing judgement, instead postponing any assessment and inviting the class to examine the answer together. This mediating step directly provides a guarantee of psychological safety, where pupils are made aware that differing opinions are normal and not a threat.

Overall, the combination of field research findings and an understanding of Albert Bandura's Social Learning Theory demonstrates that success in instilling the value of tolerance at primary school level cannot rely on just one aspect of the teacher's role. A strong synergy between the teacher's role as a role model through the cultivation of the 5S culture, as an educator through the implementation of a heterogeneous seating rotation method, and as a facilitator and mediator cumulatively forms a complete social modelling ecosystem. When teachers are able to function as agents and, at the same time, designers of an open social environment, pupils not only receive tolerance as cognitive information but also make it a life value that is directly applied in interactions with their peers. This emphasis ultimately confirms that, in the context of a diverse primary school, the presence of responsive and transformational teachers is a key factor in maintaining diversity and preventing intolerance from an early age.

## CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the instilling of tolerance values in Year 6 pupils at SDN Siwalankerto II/419 Surabaya was successfully implemented systematically through the integration of three mutually supportive dimensions of the teacher's role. Firstly, the teacher's role as a role model was realised through the consistent application of the 5S culture (Smile, Greet, Greeting, Polite, Courteous) as well as fair and democratic treatment, which served as a direct model for the pupils. Secondly, the teacher's role as an educator is manifested through the integration of moral values into the learning process and managerial strategies, such as the rotation of seating arrangements in a heterogeneous manner to break down the exclusivity of group friendships. Thirdly, the teacher's role as a facilitator and mediator is realised through the creation of a safe space for discussion. All these actions have been empirically proven to align with the stages of modelling in Albert Bandura's Social Learning Theory, ranging from the attention phase to motivation.

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