

# Strategies for strengthening attitudes of religious tolerance in students at junior high school

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## Abstract

*This study is motivated by the importance of strengthening tolerance in junior secondary schools as part of efforts to cultivate a generation capable of living harmoniously in a plural society. The research aims to analyze the strategies employed to strengthen tolerance at SMP Negeri 2 Somagede and to identify the supporting and inhibiting factors. A qualitative approach with a case study design was applied. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, participatory observations, simple questionnaires, and document analysis, and were examined using Miles and Huberman's interactive analysis model. The findings reveal that tolerance is reinforced through four main strategies: institutional policies emphasizing anti-discrimination principles, integration of tolerance values into teaching subjects such as Civic Education, Islamic Education, and Bahasa Indonesia, inclusive extracurricular activities including Scouts, student councils, and cultural arts, as well as religious accommodations provided for minority students. Supporting factors include inclusive leadership from the principal, teachers' commitment, and acceptance from the majority group, while inhibiting factors are related to limited facilities. The study concludes that tolerance building in schools requires a synergy of policy, pedagogy, extracurricular programs, and community support, ensuring that tolerance becomes a lived practice in students' daily life.*

**Keywords:** Religious Accommodation; Value Integration; School Policy; Religious Tolerance

## Abstrak

Penelitian ini dilatarbelakangi oleh pentingnya penguatan sikap toleransi di sekolah menengah pertama sebagai upaya membentuk generasi yang mampu hidup harmonis dalam masyarakat yang plural. Tujuan penelitian adalah menganalisis strategi penguatan toleransi di SMP Negeri 2 Somagede serta mengidentifikasi faktor pendukung dan penghambatnya. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan desain studi kasus. Data dikumpulkan melalui wawancara mendalam, observasi partisipatif, angket sederhana, serta telaah dokumen, kemudian dianalisis menggunakan model interaktif Miles dan Huberman. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa strategi penguatan toleransi dilaksanakan melalui empat jalur utama, yaitu kebijakan kelembagaan yang menekankan prinsip anti diskriminasi, integrasi nilai toleransi

dalam pembelajaran PPKn, PAI, dan Bahasa Indonesia, kegiatan ekstrakurikuler yang inklusif seperti Pramuka, OSIS, dan seni budaya, serta akomodasi kebutuhan keagamaan siswa minoritas. Faktor pendukung mencakup kepemimpinan kepala sekolah yang inklusif, sikap guru, serta penerimaan sosial siswa mayoritas, sedangkan faktor penghambat meliputi keterbatasan fasilitas. Simpulan penelitian ini menegaskan bahwa penguatan toleransi di sekolah menuntut keterpaduan antara kebijakan, pembelajaran, aktivitas kesiswaan, dan dukungan komunitas sehingga toleransi menjadi praktik nyata dalam kehidupan sehari-hari siswa.

**Kata kunci:** Akomodasi Keagamaan; Integrasi Nilai; Kebijakan Sekolah; Toleransi Beragama

## Introduction

Indonesia is recognized as a country with a remarkably high level of diversity. This diversity encompasses ethnicity, language, customs, and the religions practiced by its population. According to population census data, there are six officially recognized religions in the country, namely Islam, Protestantism, Catholicism, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Confucianism, alongside hundreds of local belief systems. Such pluralism represents both a cultural asset and a significant challenge for Indonesia, particularly in maintaining national unity and cohesion (Riyadi et al., 2024). Social life and the dynamics of nationhood continue to evolve, one manifestation of which is the persistence of intolerance — a critical issue in Indonesian society. The annual report by the SETARA Institute highlights violations of religious freedom across various regions, indicating that intolerance remains present in the public sphere (Ali-Fauzi et al., 2017). To prevent the escalation of such phenomena, proactive measures are necessary. One effective approach is through formal education. Schools, as formal institutions that bring together students from diverse social, cultural, and religious backgrounds, play a strategic role in instilling the values of tolerance from an early age (Jannah et al., 2022).

Schools as formal educational institutions have a strategic role in strengthening social integration and shaping student character. According to (Fullan, 2016), schools are not only places of knowledge transfer, but also agents of social change that are able to instill moral values and form a culture of peace. This is reinforced by (Coleman, J. S., 1988) who emphasizes that schools play a role in building social capital, which is very important for the sustainability of society. In the Indonesian context, Suyanto and Abbas, (2001) state that schools have a great responsibility in shaping the character of the nation based on democratic values and respect for diversity.

Several studies underscore the importance of tolerance education in schools. (Dewi, 2023) emphasizes that child-friendly schools based on tolerance are

capable of creating an inclusive environment for all students. For instance, research by ( Octavia, n.d.) found that tolerance education at SMP Negeri 32 Semarang was implemented through the planning and execution of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) lessons. Similarly, Andri M, (2023) demonstrated that PAI instruction at SMP Negeri 1 Wiradesa effectively strengthened inter-student tolerance. These findings indicate positive outcomes in fostering tolerance within schools through efforts undertaken by school authorities. However, existing studies have primarily focused on religious curriculum aspects, while broader institutional strategies including school policies and the cultivation of school culture have received limited attention.

On the other hand, several studies reveal persistent challenges in implementing tolerance education. Wahab Syakhrani, ( 2025) highlights that, despite inclusive schools' efforts to promote tolerance, subtle stereotypes and discrimination still exist among students. These obstacles suggest that tolerance education requires comprehensive strategies encompassing school policies, curricula, extracurricular activities, and community support.

Building on these previous findings, there remains a research gap concerning how schools institutionally design and implement comprehensive strategies for religious tolerance. The novelty of this study lies in its focus on school-level strategies that foster religious tolerance, not only through religious instruction but also through school policies, culture, leadership, and the engagement of the entire school community. Consequently, this research addresses the partial focus of prior studies and contributes to the development of models for enhancing religious tolerance in junior high schools.

SMP Negeri 2 Somagede represents a school with considerable potential for promoting tolerance. Located in Tanggeran Village, Somagede District, Banyumas Regency, Central Java, the student population is predominantly Muslim, with minority Hindu and Buddhist students. This demographic context necessitates the school's active role in instilling tolerance to prevent social segregation among students. Preliminary observations indicate that the school has implemented several strategies, including anti-discrimination policies in school regulations, integration of tolerance in Civics (PPKn) and Islamic Religious Education (PAI), inclusive student council activities (OSIS), and recognition of religious holidays.

This study is significant theoretically, as it enriches understanding of the school's role in cultivating tolerant character among students, particularly at the junior high school level. Practically, its findings may serve as a model for other schools to develop similar strategies. By examining practices at SMP Negeri 2

Somagede, this research aims to demonstrate how schools function as agents in fostering tolerance in pluralistic societies.

## **Research Method**

This study employed a qualitative approach with a case study design. The qualitative approach was selected for its capacity to explore in depth the strategies employed to strengthen tolerance at SMP Negeri 2 Somagede, including the social, cultural, and interactional dynamics among school members (Creswell & Poth, 2018). A case study design was deemed appropriate as it allows for a holistic examination of the school's role as an educational institution in internalizing values of tolerance among students (Wang & Reio, 2018).

The research was conducted at SMP Negeri 2 Somagede, Banyumas Regency, Central Java, considering the heterogeneous characteristics of its student body. While the majority of students are Muslim, there are also Hindu and Buddhist students. This demographic composition positions the school as a microcosm of a plural society, making it a relevant site for investigation. Research participants included the principal, teachers, and students. Participants were selected purposively based on their direct involvement in planning and implementing tolerance strategies (Sugiyono, 2019).

Primary data were collected through participatory observation, in-depth interviews, and simple questionnaires to capture students' perceptions of tolerance (Moleong, 2019). Secondary data were obtained from school documents, including school regulations, work programs, student council (OSIS) activity reports, and institutional policy archives. Research instruments consisted of interview guides, field notes, and observation sheets. Data were analyzed using Miles and Huberman's interactive model, encompassing data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing (Miles et al., 2020). Data validity was ensured through source, method, and document triangulation (Denzin & Giardina, 2012).

To assess the effectiveness of the strategies, the study examined the extent to which tolerance was reflected in students' daily behavior, participation in school activities, and positive perceptions from teachers and minority students. Through this methodology, the study aims to provide a comprehensive depiction of tolerance-strengthening strategies in schools and to identify the supporting and inhibiting factors that influence their implementation.

## **Results and Discussion**

The data analysis indicates that the school implements various efforts to strengthen students' tolerance, which can be categorized into four main strategies:

### **A. Institutional policy**

The data analysis indicates that institutional policies at SMP Negeri 2 Somagede serve as a primary foundation for fostering students' tolerance. The principal emphasized that school regulations are designed to ensure all students are treated equally, regardless of religion. In an interview, the principal stated, "Our school rules are clear: no discrimination is allowed. All students have equal rights to learn and participate in school activities" (Principal interview, 2025). This statement was corroborated by teachers, who noted that these policies are not only documented but also routinely communicated during teacher meetings and student assemblies.

One manifestation of the school's policy to strengthen tolerance is providing space for minority students to practice their religious rituals. For example, Hindu and Buddhist students are granted permission to celebrate their religious holidays. A Hindu student remarked, "I was able to participate in the Galungan celebration because the school allowed it, so I feel respected and valued by the school" (Student Interview, 2025). Such accommodations indicate that the school not only enforces rules but also strives to provide protection and comfort for all students.

Theoretically, these findings align with UNESCO's emphasis on inclusive policy frameworks in education to ensure equal learning opportunities for all students (Thahir et al., 2025). Schools with anti-discrimination policies have been shown to create safe and conducive environments for the development of tolerance. Similarly, Aswidar and Saragih (2021) found that school policies grounded in tolerance-oriented character education positively influence students' interactions with peers.

Moreover, the principal's leadership is a crucial factor in the successful implementation of these policies. The principal at SMP Negeri 2 Somagede not only provides formal guidance but also models respect for diversity, such as attending non-Muslim religious celebrations and emphasizing the importance of fraternity in speeches. This is consistent with Fuaddah et al. (2025), who noted that inclusive leadership fosters a tolerant school culture by visibly demonstrating inclusive values. The school's anti-discrimination policy also strictly prohibits religion-based bullying. The school counselor stated, "If a

student mocks a peer’s religion, we immediately give a firm warning in accordance with school regulations” (Counselor interview, 2025). This practice aligns with El Ilmi et al. (n.d.), , who highlighted that anti-bullying policies in schools reduce verbal and physical intolerance incidents.

Despite these efforts, limitations remain, particularly regarding facilities. The principal acknowledged that the school does not yet provide a dedicated prayer room for non-Muslim students: “We have tried to be fair, but prayer facilities are still inadequate for non-Muslim students” (Principal interview, 2025). This finding is consistent with studies indicating that the implementation of tolerance policies is often constrained by limited infrastructure in public schools(Amaliani et al., 2024).

Table 1. Institutional Policies and the Promotion of Tolerance

Policy Type	School Practices
No discrimination	Regulations apply equally to all students
Minority protection	Permission granted for religious holiday celebrations
No bullying	Strict sanctions for religion-based bullying
Leadership modeling	Principal attends students’ religious activities

**B. Integration of tolerance in learning**

At SMP Negeri 2 Somagede, tolerance is integrated into the curriculum through diverse approaches across normative subjects such as Civics (PPKn), Islamic Religious Education (PAI), and Bahasa Indonesia. The findings indicate that teachers actively link lesson content with students’ social realities, enabling tolerance to be understood not merely as an abstract concept, but also as a daily practice in the classroom.

In PPKn, teachers consistently connect topics such as democracy, human rights, and diversity with students’ real-life experiences. One teacher explained, “I relate PPKn materials to everyday life, such as respecting friends of different religions, so students understand that tolerance is part of being a good citizen” (Teacher Interview, 2025). This aligns with (Cha et al., 2018)content integration theory, which asserts that diverse perspectives should be incorporated into learning materials to strengthen students’ understanding of democratic values and diversity.

A similar approach is observed in PAI. Religious teachers emphasize that Islam teaches compassion for all humanity (*rahmatan lil ‘alamin*) and that differences are God’s will, to be respected. A teacher stated, “I always stress that Islam teaches peace and respect for others. Differences are not obstacles, but



something we must accept” (Teacher interview, 2025). This demonstrates that religious education not only focuses on rituals but also internalizes universal values of tolerance. This is consistent with (Dwi Kurnia Zamroni et al., 2024) who found that inclusive Islamic education can strengthen students’ tolerance in public schools.

Bahasa Indonesia also serves as a medium for integrating tolerance. Teachers select texts containing folklore from various regions, allowing students to explore the cultural diversity of the archipelago. Through discussions, students are encouraged to reflect on the values of togetherness and mutual respect embedded in the texts. A teacher explained, “We use stories from different regions so that students are accustomed to seeing cultural diversity as a national strength” (Teacher interview, 2025). This strategy aligns with Salim and Aprison (2024), who found that local culture-based literacy in Bahasa Indonesia strengthens students’ appreciation of ethnic and religious diversity.

Beyond the curriculum, tolerance is also fostered through teacher-student interactions. Teachers provide equal opportunities for all students to express opinions and respect differing viewpoints. As Wahab Syakhrani (2025) notes, teachers who model tolerant behavior in daily interactions influence students to adopt and internalize similar values. Overall, tolerance integration in learning at SMP Negeri 2 Somagede is implemented through three main approaches: linking civics content to social practices, emphasizing inclusive religious values, and using cross-cultural reading materials. The details of tolerance integration in learning are presented in table:

Table 2. Integration of Tolerance in Learning

Subject	Tolerance Integration Practices
PPKn	Linking democracy, human rights, and diversity topics with student experiences
PAI BP	Emphasizing universal compassion ( <i>rahmatan lil ‘alamin</i> ) and respect for differences
Bahasa Indonesia	Selecting cross-cultural texts, folklore from various regions
Teacher-Student Interaction	Providing equal opportunities for expression and respecting differing views

### C. Extracurricular activities

Extracurricular activities at SMP Negeri 2 Somagede are designed as a key strategy for fostering students’ tolerance. According to interview data, school policy encourages all extracurricular programs to be inclusive and open to all students regardless of religious background. The principal emphasized, “Every

extracurricular activity must be accessible to all students. No restrictions are allowed based on religion or ethnicity” (Principal interview, 2025). This statement was reinforced by the student council (OSIS) advisor, who noted that program planning always involves representatives from diverse backgrounds, ensuring equitable participation.

Observations and student interviews indicate that activities such as Scouting, OSIS, and cultural arts provide effective platforms for interfaith interaction. A Hindu student remarked, “I participate in OSIS and my friends accept me well; there are no distinctions” (Student interview, 2025). Similarly, a Buddhist student expressed comfort in Scouting activities, as they were given equal opportunities to lead their group.

These findings align with multicultural education theory, which emphasizes out-of-class activities as crucial spaces for social learning. According to Gay (2018), co-curricular and extracurricular activities strengthen values of togetherness by engaging students in collaborative experiences that require cooperation across differences. Supporting this, Nasution, H., & Mufidah, N. (2025) found that OSIS significantly contributes to shaping tolerant attitudes, providing students from diverse backgrounds opportunities to collaboratively develop school programs. (Haryanto et al., n.d.) similarly notes that Scouting serves as an effective medium for internalizing values of cooperation and respect for differences, as camping and group exercises teach students mutual support regardless of identity.

Additionally, cultural arts activities at SMP Negeri 2 Somagede offer students avenues to express diversity. The arts teacher explained that the school regularly presents regional dances from various traditions, and students are free to choose roles regardless of religious background. This strategy aligns with Tiara Buana & Dwi Arisona, (2022), who asserts that cultural arts education enhances tolerance by training students to appreciate different cultural expressions.

Overall, these findings demonstrate that extracurricular policies at SMP Negeri 2 Somagede create social spaces that foster interfaith interaction. Through Scouting, OSIS, and cultural arts, students not only acquire technical skills but also engage in social learning processes that cultivate tolerance. Thus, extracurricular activities serve as a vital instrument in strengthening tolerance education in schools. The details of extracurricular activities, evidence of student participation, and their impact on fostering tolerance are presented in Table

Table 3. Extracurricular Activities and the Promotion of Tolerance



Extracurricular Activity	Evidence of Student Participation	Impact on Tolerance Attitudes
OSIS	Students from diverse religions actively participate; minorities have leadership opportunities	Interfaith interaction, sense of belonging, equitable participation
Pramuka	All students given chances to lead and train together	Solidarity, cross-identity collaboration, internalization of togetherness values
Cultural Arts	Students perform dances and cultural expressions from various traditions	Cultural appreciation, respect for differences, understanding diversity

#### **D. Accommodation of religious needs**

Accommodating students' religious needs represents a concrete form of SMP Negeri 2 Somagede's commitment to fostering a climate of tolerance. The findings indicate that the school actively provides space for students of various faiths to perform religious practices and celebrate their religious holidays. The principal emphasized that special permission is always granted to minority students, such as Hindus and Buddhists, when religious activities coincide with school schedules. He stated, "We never prevent students from fulfilling their religious obligations. On religious holidays, they are allowed to participate, provided they report in advance" (Principal interview, 2025).

This statement is supported by students' testimonies. A Buddhist student noted, "During Vesak, I was allowed to be excused from classes, and the school granted permission and accommodations. It made me feel respected" (Student interview, 2025). Similarly, a Hindu student remarked, "I was able to participate in Galungan and Kuningan without difficulty. Teachers gave me permission to miss class, and my classmates understood my absence." These accounts demonstrate that the school's accommodation policies protect minority students' rights while fostering social solidarity.

Theoretically, this policy aligns with the principles of inclusive education, which emphasize addressing students' spiritual needs as part of their right to learn. According to UNESCO, inclusive schools should provide learning environments that respect religious diversity, including allowing students the freedom to practice their faith (Rahmatika et al., 2020). In Indonesia, such policies are particularly important, given that religious diversity constitutes part of national identity.

Accommodation practices also include teachers' respect for minority students' religious practices. For example, during collective prayers, non-Muslim students are allowed to pray according to their own beliefs or observe a moment

of silence. The school counselor stated, "We always remind students to respect different prayers; non-Muslims are not required to join Islamic prayers but are given space to pray individually" (Counselor interview, 2025). This supports Azra, (2017) findings that respect for other religions' rituals in educational settings is a key indicator of institutional tolerance.

However, limitations exist in terms of facilities. The school does not yet have a dedicated prayer room for non-Muslim students, whereas a prayer room (*mushola*) is available for Muslim students. The principal acknowledged, "We are still constrained by facilities; there is no prayer room for non-Muslims yet. But we try to provide as much freedom as possible" (Principal interview, 2025). This reflects a common challenge in public schools when implementing inclusive policies, including religious accommodations (Gustaman et al., 2025).

Overall, the findings confirm that accommodating religious needs is a vital instrument for strengthening tolerance at SMP Negeri 2 Somagede. By granting permission for religious holidays, respecting individualized prayer practices, and supporting minority students, the school creates an inclusive learning environment. Despite facility limitations, these accommodation strategies align with the principles of inclusive and multicultural education, emphasizing respect for diversity as the foundation for fostering tolerant attitudes in schools (Cha et al., 2018; Mubaidi, Khamidatul, n.d.)).

Based on the overall findings, the study at SMP Negeri 2 Somagede indicates that strategies for strengthening students' tolerance have been systematically implemented through institutional, pedagogical, cultural, and social approaches. At the institutional level, the school enforces formal policies emphasizing equality and anti-discrimination, grants minority students' permission to celebrate religious holidays, and prohibits identity-based bullying. These findings are consistent with Cha et al., (2018) view of schools as agents of social change and align with Coleman, J. S., (1988) concept of social capital, whereby inclusive policies foster trust and social cohesion among school members.

In the pedagogical domain, teachers integrate tolerance values into Civics (PPKn), Islamic Religious Education (PAI), and Bahasa Indonesia. This practice reinforces findings by Octavia, n.d. and Andri, n.d. which highlight the effectiveness of PAI in promoting tolerance. However, this study extends previous research by demonstrating that tolerance is not solely cultivated through religious subjects but also through general subjects oriented toward national and humanistic values. This broadens the perspective that tolerance education is cross-curricular, rather than limited to religious education alone.

Regarding extracurricular activities, the study found that Scouting, OSIS, and cultural arts serve as effective mediums for internalizing tolerance through interfaith interactions. These findings are in line with Jannah et al. (n.d.), who emphasize the importance of direct social experiences in shaping students' tolerant attitudes. In contrast to Wahab Syakhrani, (2025) , who reported the persistence of subtle stereotypes and discrimination in inclusive schools, SMP Negeri 2 Somagede demonstrates relatively harmonious interfaith social interactions. This difference is likely influenced by the strength of school culture, teacher modeling, and consistently applied anti-discrimination policies.

Thus, the strategies for strengthening tolerance at SMP Negeri 2 Somagede can be understood as integrated multicultural education practices. The school successfully positions tolerance not merely as a normative discourse but as a value realized through institutional policies, pedagogical practices, students' social experiences, and accommodation of diversity. These findings both confirm and extend prior research by demonstrating that effective tolerance promotion requires the integration of formal regulations, cross-curricular learning, extracurricular activities, and sustained support from the school community.

## **Conclusion**

The findings of this study confirm that the strengthening of tolerance at SMP Negeri 2 Somagede is implemented through complementary strategies consciously designed by the school. Tolerance does not emerge naturally but is cultivated through integrated interventions involving institutional policies, pedagogy, and social practices. Formal policies that reject discrimination and protect minority students provide a foundation for creating a safe environment and fostering students' confidence to participate actively in school life. In the pedagogical domain, tolerance is embedded through lesson content and teaching methods that emphasize students' direct experiences, with teachers modeling equitable interactions and respect for differences. Additionally, extracurricular activities such as Scouting, OSIS, and cultural arts offer strategic spaces for collaborative interfaith interactions, while accommodations for minority students' religious needs reinforce the school's respect for diverse beliefs.

These strategies are strengthened by inclusive leadership, consistent efforts by teachers, social acceptance from the majority of students, and support from school programs. Nevertheless, challenges remain, including limited prayer facilities and external influences from some parents who are not fully supportive of interfaith engagement. The findings suggest that promoting tolerance requires sustained synergy among schools, families, and the wider community. Overall,

tolerance at SMP Negeri 2 Somagede is understood as an integrated multicultural education practice, where tolerance is not merely a normative ideal but a lived value realized through formal policies, cross-curricular teaching, student activities, and respect for religious diversity. Conceptually, this study highlights that developing tolerance is a simultaneous process involving regulation, internalization, and habituation of values in students' everyday social experiences.

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