



# Tolerance in Children's Play in Primary School

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**Abstract.** One of the issues that appear in pluralized societies, as in Indonesia, is tolerance. This is one of the reasons the value of tolerance is made as one of the core competencies in the school curriculum. This study aims to find out children's tolerant behavior during their play at school. This study first explains the religious tolerance phenomena at school, describes some types of games played by fifth-graders, and shows some of the children's tolerant behavior during the play. This research is qualitative phenomenological research. The participants of the research were teachers and fifth-grade students in Timor Primary School. The data was obtained using interviews and observation. Data analysis used three stages of Miles and Huberman techniques: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. The results showed that some school policies and teachers' conduct in Timor Primary School fulfill three aspects of tolerance behavior: peace, respect for individual differences, and awareness. The play patterns of fifth-graders in this school include physical, symbolic, socio-drama, and rules games with physics rules, symbolic rules, and symbolic-socio-drama rules. The students also showed some tolerant behavior while playing. We can conclude that Timor Primary School appeared to be a tolerant school. Some school policies and teacher decisions are based on aspects of religious tolerance. Also, some tolerant behavior was reflected in children's play activities.

**Keywords:** Religious Tolerance, children's play patterns, primary education

## 1 Introduction

Primary education aims to introduce children to the social environment and develop their competencies to prepare for the future. Freire (2011), as cited in Firdaus & Mariyat (2017), described one of the purposes of education is to make people aware of realities in everyday life to learn to be social creatures. This reality includes the diversity that people exhibit in social interactions, which are prone to conflict. A study by Arbatli et al. (2020: 727) shows "the contribution of population diversity to the non-cohesiveness of society, as reflected partly in the prevalence of mistrust, the divergence in preferences for public goods and redistributive policies, and the degree of fractionalization and polarization across ethnic, linguistic, and religious groups." The primary education curriculum in Indonesia has responded to this challenge by formulating competencies for spiritual and social attitudes as parts of the core

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competencies. The Ministry of Education and Culture in Indonesia (Wahyudin, 2018) stipulates that one of the core competencies at primary and secondary education is spiritual competence which is accepting, carrying out, and respecting the teachings of the religion he adheres. While the formulation of attitude competence shows honest, disciplined, responsible, polite, caring, and independent behavior in interacting with family, friends, teachers, and neighbors and loving the homeland.

The core competencies imply that tolerance is expected to be obtained through learning activities. Kirchner et al. (2011), as cited in Hjerm et al. (2020), explain tolerance as a person's willingness to tolerate or accept the values or behavior of a person or group of people. This can be a form of acceptance someone has when responding to differences, which is a religious belief. It is crucial to forming children's tolerant behavior towards others because this is one of the values needed in actual life (Bobir et al., 2018; Hjerm et al., 2020; Juwita et al., 2018). Students' tolerance behavior in schools with religious diversity can be identified through the daily activities during school hours. It is not limited to formal activities in the classroom but more to activities that allow students to move freely and act spontaneously when playing games during recess.

Salen and Zimmerman (2004), as cited in Landers et al. (2019), defined a game as "a system in which players engage in an artificial conflict, defined by rules, that results in a quantifiable outcome." Some research has been conducted on social interaction in several games (Ekman et al., 2011; Fox et al., 2018; Gray, 2012; Uz et al., 2015). In his study, Langener (2019) mentions that recent research has highlighted the value of elementary school children engaging in game design. Yet, only a few studies were conducted to foster tolerance behavior through playing, such as a study by Suprpto et al. (2019), who tried to foster tolerance in children through board games, and a study by Benatov et al. (2021), who investigated the effect of video gaming on increasing children's intergroup tolerance.

In this study, the researchers will not discuss the effect of certain games on children's tolerant behavior. This study provides an overview of tolerance behavior reflected in a school with a diverse community, especially in children's play. Erikson and Hurwitz (as cited in Whitebread et al., 2012) assert that children tend to learn and show their identity through desire, motivation, and mastery through play. Thus, paying attention to children's interactions in playing can help teachers in elementary schools to strengthen tolerance behavior. Therefore, the study aimed to find out children's tolerance behavior in their play. This study first explains religious tolerance in Timor Primary School, describes some types of games fifth-graders play at this school, and shows some of their tolerance behavior while playing.

## 2 Literature Review

Schools need to act as a socialization agent that spreads the values of diversity and tolerance to students. Hymel et al. (2019) assert that school is considered an ideal context in strengthening students' social skills in interacting with diverse others as one of the 21st-century skills. Martínez-Ariño & Teinturier (2019, p. 147) argue that schools with diverse religious beliefs become places for "children to learn and behave as citizens, especially in a pluralistic society." Tolerance to diversity (i.e., race,

religion, age, gender, political beliefs) is one of the social competencies that should be nurtured from a young age. Tillman etymologically states the definition of tolerance as a character or attitude of mutual respect to achieve peace (Supriyanto & Wahyudi, 2017). Tolerance is a significant factor in achieving peace because people foster the ability to respect the views of others regardless of their own beliefs. Supriyanto & Wahyudi (2017) suggest three aspects of tolerance from Tillman's theory: peace, respect for individual differences, and awareness. In the view of Suryana (2011), religious tolerance is closely related to harmony between religious communities. That is, tolerance is an act that prohibits discrimination against other religions that are different from the group. For example, adherents of the majority religion in a region allow the existence of minority religions.

Student play activities during recess can be a moment where students show tolerance and intolerance towards other students. The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP), as cited in Ozkal (2020, p. 123), defines recess as "a necessary break to optimize a child's social, affective, physical and cognitive development." Some studies recommend schools pay great attention to the students' playing process during recess to facilitate students' development of social skills. (Lodewyk et al., 2019; Massey et al., 2018; Parrott & Cohen, 2020). Henricks (2014), as cited in (Johnson et al., 2015), states that play refers to understanding oneself. He further explained that individuals play to recognize the character's environment and determine his position. Students playing activities during recess might be a conducive moment to see students' tolerance behavior and reinforce this attitude if students show prejudice or discriminatory behavior towards other students.

Students' intersecting identities, especially religious beliefs, might put them at risk of discrimination against their peers. The discrimination might lead to exclusion from playing activities, being an object of aggression, and victimization during recess. Snyder et al. (2003) revealed the observed rates of peer victimization of early elementary school students. Over (2018) also states that children prefer to play with members of their group and show discriminatory attitudes towards other groups. Children who experience peer rejection tend to be prone to depression, withdrawal, and lack of motivation (Killen et al., 2013). Thus, Ogelman et al. (2020, p. 324) suggest that teachers "observe play behaviors, types of play, playmate choices, conflict status and the consequences of conflicts" to provide guidance that might improve children's social skills. Teachers can use the results of observations of children playing to plan curriculum by ensuring that sociodramatic play occurs as one example of Developmentally Appropriate Practice in child education (Blaise, 2005). Role-playing as one form of sociodramatic play can be a way for teachers to manage social problems, such as bias and discrimination among students (Tsergas et al., 2021).

There are various types of plays that students play at school in Indonesia. Whitebread et al. (2012, p. 18-23) classify play into five types: "physical play, play with objects, symbolic play, socio-dramatic play, and games with rules." As the name suggests, the physical game is more dominated by activities requiring body movement, such as climbing trees, riding a bicycle, running, and playing soccer. The object game refers to playing activities focused on one particular object, such as snakes and ladders, quartets,

monopoly, and puzzles. The symbolic game emphasizes audio-visual symbols such as language, tone, and numbers (guessing games and Sudoku).

In contrast, the socio-drama game is a product of children's imagination based on the imitations of real life. Children play the role of characters, events, or phenomena that they find in their lives. Children usually develop the rule game by adopting general play, but some rules are changed accordingly. Playing hide and seek, jump rope, and chase are examples of this game.

Positive feedback could be given whenever students perform intolerant behavior when playing. Palagi et al. (2016, p. 1208) state that "play and tolerance are tightly linked by positive feedback in which the expression of one supports the expression of the other." Thus, student play activities, especially during recess hours, should not go unnoticed by the schools. Williams et al. (2019, p. 389) recommend future teachers "to develop skills and understanding related to effective recess delivery and supervision, just as any other part of the school day." Teachers can supervise children in their playing activities. If there are inappropriate actions or words that students address to other students or an act of discrimination in choosing a playmate, the teacher should intervene immediately. If teachers can even integrate it into the curriculum, for example by doing sociodramatic play in learning where the story can come from conflicts that exist when students play.

### **3 Research Methods**

#### **3.1. Types and Approaches**

This study used a qualitative research method with a phenomenological approach to analyze religious tolerance behavior in students in terms of children's play patterns. The phenomenological approach in Creswell's (2014) presentation describes certain phenomena through the direct experience of several individuals. (Creswell, 2013).

#### **3.2. Description of the Research Location**

Timor Primary School is located in Makassar, one of the cities in middle Indonesia. It is located around the Chinatown area, inhabited by people of Chinese descent who are Christian and Confucian. Three teachers and 22 fifth graders consisting of 9 boys and 13 girls participated in this study. The students have known each other since grade 1 because they always study together. The religious backgrounds of students are divided into four religions, namely Islam, Protestant Christianity, Catholic Christianity, and Buddhism. Some children live around the school; some are located quite far away (more or less 10 kilometers from the school). Parents of the majority of children work as day laborers and grocery traders.

#### **3.3. Data Collection Technique**

The data was collected through interviews, observation, and documentation. Semi-structured interviews in this study were conducted directly with teachers and students at Timor Primary School. The study uses the non-probability purposeful sampling

technique because the researchers need to select participants who fit the criteria. For instance, the fifth-grade students were considered able to give more understandable information. There was a diversity of religions in this class; to be precise, there were four different religions. Of the 22 students, 31.8% or seven were Christian, 13.63% or two were Catholic, 40.9% or nine students were Muslim, and one student or 4.54% was Buddhist. Observation in this study aimed to understand religious tolerance behavior in students observed through the context of children's daily play in the school environment. (Darlington & Scott, 2002) state that observation is an effective way of finding out what people do in particular contexts, the routines, and interactional patterns of their everyday lives. In addition, documentation took student personal data from school administration and other data deemed necessary. Creswell (2013) said that qualitative documentation data could be in public documents such as newspapers, official reports, and meeting minutes or documents. The documents collected serve to support findings in the field during interviews and observations.

### **3.4. Data analysis technique**

The data was analyzed using the data analysis techniques from Miles & Huberman (1994), which went through three stages; 1) Data Condensation, the process of selecting, focusing, simplifying, abstracting, and transforming previously obtained data under the focus of the research; 2) Data Display, the process of displaying data in the form of matrices, graphs, charts, or descriptions to help researchers relate one finding to another. This study presented the findings through verbatim coding of the interview results and a description of the results of the observations; 3) Drawing and Verifying Conclusion, conducted after the data has been collected and displayed. Conclusions are drawn based on the relationship between the data set results, interviews, and observations supported by documentation data. The entire data is then verified with theories regarding the research focus to find a conclusion. Conclusions were reconciled with field notes to ensure that the analysis was carried out correctly.

## **4 Results**

### **4.1. The Behavior of Religious Tolerance**

The researchers aimed to explain the phenomena of religious tolerance in Timor Primary School. The results show some forms of religious tolerance that were carried out, such as closing schools on religious holidays, accommodating formal learning for each existing religion, celebrating several religious events at school, and allowing teachers and students to attend worship even on school days. Outside teaching and learning activities, the teachers often visit each other's homes during holidays and religious events.

In terms of the peace aspect, students make friends regardless of the friends' religion. Students mingle with each other without any dominant relationship. Teachers and students have the freedom to join religious services even outside of holidays, for

example, worship at church on Saturday. Usually, other teachers will change the teaching hours of teachers who participate in religious activities.

Mutual respect can be seen from regular meals after religious holidays. For instance, after Eid, Muslim teachers would bring chicken curry, local food, and pastries to other teachers at school. Likewise, Christian teachers would buy cookies distributed at school as a form of celebration when Christmas arrives. In terms of respect, the school would cancel the learning at religious day celebrations, for example, Chinese New Year and Christmas, Eid, *Nyepi*, and *Galungan* days. Students take part in religious learning by personal beliefs without ever participating in the worship of other religions.

The awareness aspect, especially in the indicators of appreciating the kindness of others, is manifested in the attitude of the teachers when they accept invitations to attend Chinese New Year celebrations. One of the parents of the students invited the teachers to have lunch at his house to commemorate the Chinese New Year. The teachers happily attended the event. It also relates to open indicators. Parents of students are willing to invite teachers to come to their residence despite their different beliefs. They also provide special meals for Muslim guests.

#### 4.2. Description of Children's Play

Active play activities are carried out during the first break at 09.15 - 09.45 and the second break at 11.15 - 11.30. Playing activities during the first break are centered on the school field covering. The children spent the second break in their respective classrooms, except for a few children from lower grades who returned to the field. The field is an area of approximately 15 x 12 meters with paving blocks. The school field is in front of the two-story classroom building, teacher's room, principal's room, and parking area so that all activities in the field can be seen clearly.

Boys and girls have the same playing type because they always play together, in the classroom or on the school field. The playing types of children at Timor Primary School that are currently popular are physical, symbolic, and rule play. The description of students' play type is shown in the following table:

**Table 1.** Students' play types

Play Types	Name of the play	Description
Physical play and rules	Running or chasing	Each child had to run to save themselves from being touched. The first person to touch his friend says, "tek!". Then whoever is hit will find someone else to target.
	Hide and seek	One person would act as the "hunter," while the other would hide in a secluded spot to return to the "fort" before being discovered.

Symbolic games and rules	Communication(pun)	This game is played in groups consisting of 5 teams with 4-5 members in each group. The team leader receives a sentence and then conveys it to the team members in the front row. The front member conveys it to the person behind him, and so on.
Symbolic Play	Puzzles	Children also enjoy playing puzzles which are done verbally and spontaneously without selecting a winner. Usually the puzzle material is obtained and passed down from generation to generation.
Symbolic-Physics, Social Games	Brave honest play	Whoever is chosen at random, usually by the twirl of a pen, will choose between honesty and courage. If you choose "honest," the player will ask a question that the other player must answer honestly. This question is related to everyday life. However, if he chooses "dare," the child will give him a physical activity challenge, such as running or jumping.

It is seen from the table above that running or chasing is one of the physical-rule plays. This game combines physicality and rules because it involves running activities but still has clear rules. The rule was that every child had to run to save himself so as not to be touched. One person first touching his friend said, "tek!". Then whoever is hit will find other people to target. Each child tried to run as fast as possible so as not to be touched. Children will stop playing on their own or when the bell rings. Of the 22 students who participated in the study, seven students reported that running is their favorite play. Still, with the physical-rule combination, children often play hide and seek. One person acts as a "hunter," while the others hide in remote places to return to the "fort" before being found. The hunter would close his eyes and count down from 10. The children used 10 seconds to hide. Next, the hunter will look for other players until all are found and the hunter wins. However, if one person manages to infiltrate the fort, the pillars, or the school walls without being caught, the hunter loses. Children play hide and seek only when outside of class.

In addition to the physical-rule games, children like symbolic-rule play, especially puns. One example, which was played just last week, is *Komunikata*. This game is done in groups in 5 teams with 4-5 members for each group. The team leader received one sentence and was given 1 minute to memorize it and then convey it to the team members in the front row. The leading member conveys to the person behind him, and so on. The team that repeats the most words according to the initial sentence is declared the winner. The game lasts for 15-20 minutes. Children also enjoy playing riddles which are done verbally and spontaneously without selecting a winner. This game belongs to the type of symbolic game.

It is different from the honest and brave game that falls into the symbolic-physical-socio play because it involves linguistic, psychomotor, and reality. The way to play is that whoever is randomly selected, usually through a pen spin, will choose between

being honest or brave. If the player chooses "honest", then the other player will ask a question that must be answered honestly. This question is related to daily life. However, if he chooses to be "brave", the children will pose a challenge involving physical activity, such as running or jumping up and down.

### **4.3. Religious Tolerance Behavior in terms of Children's Play**

The third research question aimed to find out students' tolerance behavior in their play activities. Observing religious tolerance behavior through children's play types might provide an overview of students' tolerance at school. Play activities carried out by children individually and in groups with specific rules project their reality, especially tolerance.

The results show that some students' behavior during play meets peace, respect for individual differences, and awareness. As one of the peace indicators, care is shown when a child ran and fell; several children rushed to help him and invited him to play again. Fearlessness is seen from all the games where children feel free to play anything with their friends. The other indicator, Love, is found in close friendships between children in the classroom. Each child has at least one close friend with whom they play the most.

Indicators of respect include respecting one another, respecting the differences of others, and respecting oneself. The children sometimes mock each other until it ends in a fight, but it never involves religious matters. In addition, indicators of the awareness aspect include appreciating the kindness of others and being open. Appreciating the kindness of others can be seen from the children's interactions when playing hide and seek. A child accepted his friend's help to hide in a place unknown to the hunter. Being open is shown in the puns game. When dividing groups by counting numbers 1-5 and then gathering according to the same number, each child accepted any team member without protest.

When choosing playmates, the children only consider the nature of their friends. Five students (Fi, Al, Ip, Ri, and Fa) reported that they wanted a good person as their playmate. Two others (Di and Nu) added that their playmates should not be arrogant. One student (Ti) believed that a good friend is not naughty and must be patient. Politeness is the standard for Al, Au, Riz, and Sin in choosing a playmate. Riz did not want to be friends with rude people, whereas Sin likes friends who talk politely.

## **5 Discussion**

This study indicates that Timor Primary School appeared to implement religious tolerance among teachers and students; the students also performed some tolerance behavior in their play. Tolerance is vital to maintain social life so that it can continue to coexist in harmony. Thus, it is critically important to emphasize tolerance behavior in primary education. Coleman and White (2011) in Hill (2017) emphasize the importance of the education system in managing the right strategy in building pluralism. Children begin to form their attitudes towards differences since early



childhood and solidify these attitudes in their early adolescents (Gomez, 1991; Lawrence, 1997; Lintner, 2005).

The study used Tillman's aspects of tolerance to measure student tolerance, which may become the basis for compiling action plans to prevent and reduce intolerance among students. Not having prejudices, freeing others to carry out religious worship, and building good relations between fellow religious people are examples of religious tolerance behavior in everyday life. The results showed that SD Negeri Timor implemented religious tolerance behavior among teachers and students. Some forms of religious tolerance were closing schools on religious holidays, allowing students or teachers to attend worship even on school days, accommodating formal learning for each existing religion, celebrating religious events, and maintaining teacher-teacher, teacher-student, teacher-parent peaceful relationships. According to Widayati & Maulidiyah (2018, p. 685), "the provision of examples by parents and the environment (sociocultural) has a very high impact on the cultivation of tolerance for children."

Dauids & Waghid (2017) state that tolerant individuals can treat others equally and avoid discriminating against them even if they strongly disagree with their perspective. Also stated by Verkuyten (2021) that tolerance is considered as an essential and suitable reaction to the dilemma of enabling divergent lifestyles to openly articulate themselves and harmoniously exist alongside one another. Despite the different beliefs, the teachers and the students participating in this study showed a caring attitude. For example, during holidays and religious events, the teachers reported that they would visit each other's homes and change the teaching hours of the other teachers who attend religious events. On the other hand, students make friends regardless of the different beliefs their friends adhere to.

Students also seem to show some form of tolerant conscience during school playtime. The study found that the students played several games, referred to as physical, symbolic, socio-drama, and rule games (Whitebread et al., 2012). The students played running/chasing, hide and seek, word games, riddles, and brave and honest games. Some games were played on the school field, while others were in the classroom. Although the fifth graders at SD Timor have different religions; Islam, Protestant Christianity, Catholicism, Buddhism, the difference unseemingly affects their relationship, especially while playing. For instance, in playing *Komunikata*, it does not matter for them if they have to be in the same group with friends of different religions. Children respected each other, especially in the honest and brave game, where the questions given to the players who chose to be brave were unrelated to personal beliefs. In addition, although not in a team, several children appeared to offer and receive help from other players to hide when playing hide and seek games.

Jenvey & Jenvey (2002) state that play activity is also considered "important in the development of children's social, emotional, physical and cognitive skills." As play cannot be separated from children's daily activities, schools should take advantage of this activity to instill social values such as tolerance in this activity. The study of Ridgers et al. (2011) suggests that playtime is an opportunity for children to engage in social behaviors. Therefore, paying attention to student play activities can help teachers know how their students respond to diversity and look for ways to improve student tolerance behavior.

## 6 Conclusion

Based on the research results, Timor Primary School appeared to be a tolerant school. Some school policies and teacher decisions are based on aspects of religious tolerance: peace, respect, and awareness. The tolerant behaviors were also reflected in children's play activities. Indeed, children's play activities should not escape the teacher's supervision because, in this activity, the teacher can instill and reinforce character values, one of which is tolerance.

This study, however, is subject to several limitations. The researchers chose only one school and fifth graders, focused on several play types, and obtained very few relevant previous studies. Future research could involve many schools and students from different classes. The researchers also recommend focusing on one particular type of game to understand students' tolerance behavior better.

The study is considered to have pedagogical implications. The results of this study can provide information to teachers about student tolerance behavior which is the basis for teaching core competencies related to character. Teachers might also accommodate children's games in inculcating tolerance values and improving learning in the classroom.

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