

Fostering Tolerance in Multicultural School Environments Through Problem-Based Learning: A Case Study

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Abstract: Education plays a significant part in the development of tolerance, which is the primary basis for the establishment of harmony and peace. The management of the cultural, religious, and social variety of its students is an important responsibility that falls on the shoulders of schools, which are official educational institutions. This research was carried out at SMK Pustek Serpong, and it was inspired by the phenomena of intolerance that exist among students from various backgrounds. To foster active contact, collaboration, and an appreciation of differences through problem-solving related to diversity, a problem-based learning model was selected as the appropriate instructional approach. In the context of a multicultural educational setting, the purpose of the study was to promote tolerance using problem-based learning. Case studies, observations, interviews with informants, and documentation were considered as part of the qualitative methodology used. Despite obstacles such as teachers' lack of understanding, students' initial unwillingness to welcome differences, and time limits, the findings suggest that problem-based learning has the potential to cultivate attitudes of tolerance among students. To summarise, problem-based learning has the potential to cultivate tolerance among students who come from a variety of backgrounds.

Keywords: Problem-Based Learning; Tolerance Attitude; Fostering Tolerance; Civic Education; Multicultural School Environment; Multicultural Learning; Problem-Solving Skills; Cooperative Learning.

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1. Introduction

Humans are creatures with individual and social characteristics, so they naturally need to interact with others to fulfil various needs in life. In social life, every individual will inevitably encounter and communicate with people from diverse backgrounds, including differences in religion, culture, ethnicity, and language [11]. This aligns with Albert Bandura's Social Learning Theory, which emphasises that individuals can acquire knowledge and form behaviours by observing and imitating those around them. Thus, social interaction is not only crucial for fulfilling basic needs but also serves as an important means of character and behaviour formation through shared experiences. Indonesia, a developing country that embraces the motto "Unity in Diversity" as the foundation of its unity values, serves as a concrete example of extraordinary diversity. Variations in religion, culture, ethnicity, and language form the unique identity of this nation, which is generally recognised as multiculturalism [1].

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Diversity or plurality is a reality of life that requires everyone to continuously strive to understand and respect one another. This plurality encompasses ethnic and linguistic diversity, as well as differences in religious beliefs and practices.

Indonesia is a country that recognises various religions, including Islam, Christianity, Catholicism, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Confucianism. The foundation of religious diversity lies in the commonality of spiritual meaning and an open attitude toward interfaith dialogue. By deeply understanding this diversity, an awareness will grow that, despite differences in practice and doctrine, a spirit of unity in faith remains [5]. The richness of diversity often becomes a major strength for a nation, but it can pose serious challenges if it is not accompanied by mutual respect and tolerance. Inter-religious and inter-ethnic conflicts in Indonesia often stem from the inability of society to maintain mutual respect. To prevent the continuation of such conflicts, the cultivation of tolerance must begin at an early age, with education as the primary foundation in shaping the character and attitudes of individuals who uphold the value of tolerance [3].

Education plays a crucial role in shaping a person's character and behaviour from an early age. This is clearly stated in Law No. 20 of 2003 concerning the National Education System, specifically in Paper II, Articles 2 and 3. Article 2 emphasises that national education is based on the values of Pancasila and the 1945 Constitution. Meanwhile, Article 3 states that education aims to develop potential and shape the character and civilisation of the nation, to enlighten the lives of the people. The goal is for students to become faithful individuals who are God-fearing, morally upright, healthy, intelligent, skilled, creative, independent, and responsible as citizens upholding democratic values [2]. The learning process is not only limited to the mastery of knowledge but also involves strengthening moral, ethical, and social values that shape the whole personality.

Tolerance in the religious and socio-cultural spheres is an attitude that values diversity and respects differences. This includes acceptance, respect, and appreciation for communities with beliefs, traditions, or worldviews that differ from those of the dominant group. Tolerance also involves active efforts to avoid discrimination, violence, and various forms of injustice toward minority groups [3]. In the field of education, this attitude plays a crucial role because its implementation can create a safe and welcoming learning environment for all. Amidst the rise of issues of intolerance and social discrimination, shaping students' tolerant character is a strategic step to minimise conflict and appreciate diversity. Research by Sari et al. [4] entitled "Building Knowledge and Attitudes of Tolerance Through Civic Education in Elementary Schools," also emphasises that fostering a tolerant attitude requires a positive classroom atmosphere and role models from teachers who respect differences.

Tolerance is a crucial foundation in social life and can be instilled through education from an early age. Efforts to develop this attitude require collaboration among various parties, including families, communities, and educational institutions. In particular, the school environment plays a central role in shaping students' characters through daily learning activities [14]. As a formal educational institution, schools have a strategic position to instil the principles of tolerance in the spirit of *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika*. Through an effectively designed teaching and learning process, schools can provide a deep understanding of the importance of respecting differences and diversity. One learning model that is particularly well-suited for this purpose is problem-based learning. In this model, students are encouraged to solve problems related to the diversity of backgrounds in their surrounding environment.

Problem-based learning can serve as a bridge to strengthen tolerance among students. By analysing and identifying issues related to diversity, students not only learn to appreciate differences but also gain skills in collaboration and effective communication. Through group discussions and problem-solving, students are given the confidence to find solutions that incorporate various perspectives [8]. Several studies have emphasised the significance of cooperative and multicultural learning approaches in educational settings. Kamila et al. [12] show that heterogeneous group structures in cooperative learning can encourage interaction between students from different backgrounds, create opportunities for dialogue, and enhance collaborative problem-solving skills. Meanwhile, Ondja et al. [6] emphasise that multicultural education plays a significant role in mitigating intolerant behaviour in school environments. Kurnia and Mukhlis [9] examined the implementation of problem-based learning through the classroom action method and noted an increase in tolerance after several cycles of implementing this learning method.

From a practical standpoint, problem-based learning facilitates cooperation among students with diverse beliefs, cultures, and perspectives. Such interactions provide learning experiences that enrich not only students' cognitive abilities but also their affective and social aspects. These values of diversity are also supported by school policies that prioritise inclusivity and comfort for all parties [7]. However, challenges still arise, particularly due to differences in understanding between individuals and the influence of external environments that can hinder the development of tolerant attitudes [13]. Research conducted by Nosar and Samdirgawijya [10], entitled "Implementation of Tolerance Values for Vocational School Catholic Students in Samarinda City," reveals that problem-based learning helps foster students' understanding of the importance of tolerance values in a multicultural society.

This learning model also strengthens interactions among students from diverse religious backgrounds. The research findings suggest that participation in the program fosters openness and mutual respect among students, thereby creating a more inclusive and harmonious learning environment. Based on initial observations, researchers noted symptoms of intolerance among students at SMK Pustek Serpong. One example of this was behaviour that belittled other students because of their darker skin colour, accompanied by negative labelling of Eastern groups. Such actions are classified as forms of intolerance that risk causing emotional harm and interpersonal conflicts among students. Given the central role of schools in character development, SMK Pustek Serpong is expected to actively foster a tolerant attitude toward students from diverse backgrounds. Differences in religion, ethnicity, culture, or language often lead to miscommunication and potential conflicts if not managed through an inclusive educational approach.

Given the urgency of the issue at hand, this study focuses on efforts to foster tolerance among students, particularly in the context of multicultural schools such as SMK Pustek Serpong. Through the application of a problem-based learning approach, this study aims to cultivate behaviour that promotes mutual respect and appreciation for individual differences. It is hoped that by strengthening students' understanding and appreciation of cultural, religious, linguistic, and ethnic diversity, they will be able to create a safe and inclusive learning atmosphere free from potential conflicts. Additionally, this research is expected to contribute as a reference for educators, policymakers, and education practitioners in designing learning models that emphasise the development of a tolerant character. By instilling the value of tolerance from a young age, it is hoped that Indonesia's young generation will grow not only academically but also with integrity, social awareness, and the ability to interact harmoniously despite differences.

2. Methods

This study employs a qualitative approach, utilising a case study method, to investigate the development of tolerance through problem-based learning at SMK Pustek Serpong. The research location was selected based on the characteristics of the school as a vocational education institution with a high level of social and cultural diversity, making it appropriate for examining this learning approach in building students' tolerance. The research process spanned from the planning stage to the thesis writing phase, with a series of activities systematically scheduled.

The data collected consisted of primary and secondary data. Primary data was obtained through direct observation of the learning process and semi-structured interviews with 40 students, the school principal, Pancasila Education teachers, and the vice principal for curriculum. Secondary data included journals. The data collection techniques employed included observation, interviews, and documentation. To ensure the validity of the findings, the researcher conducted triangulation of sources, techniques, and timing of data collection. Data analysis was conducted qualitatively through three main stages: data presentation, data reduction through coding, and interpretation of coding results to identify patterns and themes related to the strengthening of tolerance attitudes in the context of problem-based learning.

3. Results and Discussion

Based on the results of interviews and observations conducted, it appears that the problem-based learning model at SMK Pustek Serpong has been consistently implemented (Table 1).

Table 1: Implementation of the problem-based learning model at SMK Pustek Serpong

No.	Observed Aspects	Frequency of Occurrence
1	Teachers present real-world problems	90%
2	Students engage in group discussions	87%
3	Teachers act as facilitators	85%
4	active student participation	82%
5	discussions involving diversity issues	75%

Through this model, students are actively involved in solving real-world problems relevant to their lives, impacting their understanding of the importance of respecting different views and opinions. Teachers also present real-world problems relevant to students' daily experiences to stimulate contextual learning. Through this approach, teachers encourage students to engage in group discussions and guide them to find solutions independently, without providing explicit answers. In their role as facilitators, teachers guide the discussion and emphasise the importance of collaboration among group members.

Based on the data above, it is evident that teachers consistently apply problem-based learning approaches by involving students in group discussions. This strategy not only develops students' critical thinking skills but also strengthens social interactions among individuals from diverse backgrounds. Such interactions form the primary foundation for developing tolerance in the

school environment. The success of implementing problem-based learning lies, in part, in the strategy of forming heterogeneous learning groups composed of students with different religious, cultural, and ethnic backgrounds. The dynamics of these groups encourage the exchange of perspectives and experiences, thereby enriching students' understanding of diversity (Figure 1).

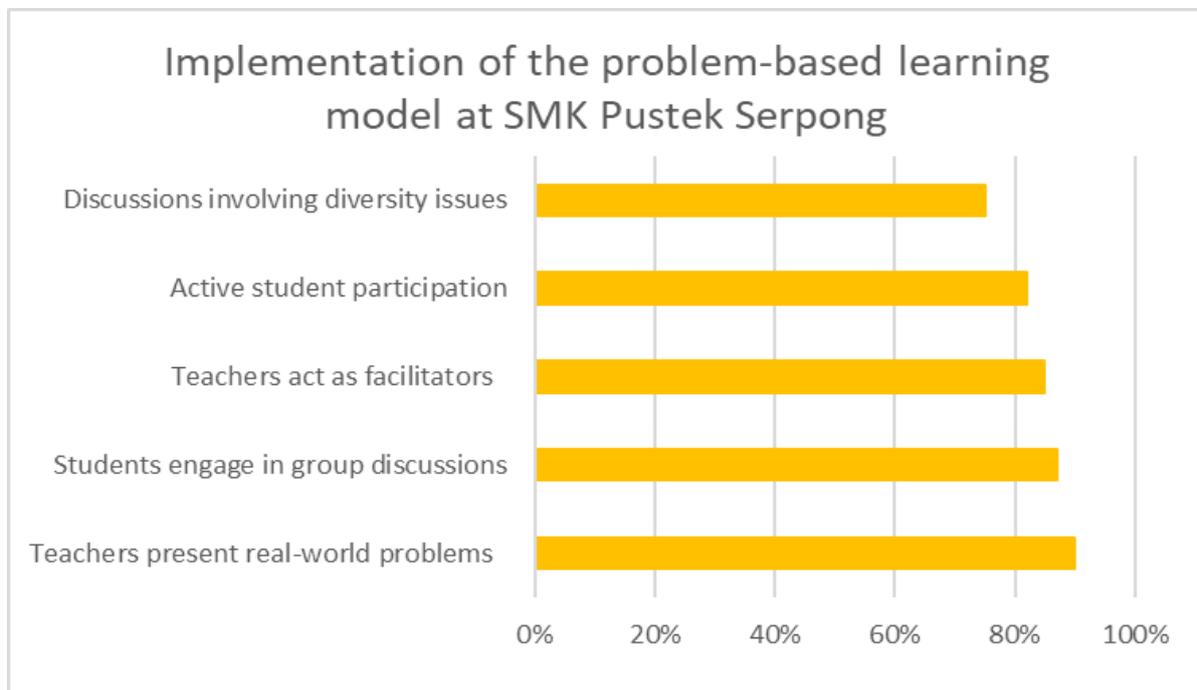


Figure 1: Application of the problem-based learning model at SMK Pustek Serpong

The inclusive group discussion process fosters attitudes of mutual listening and respect for differences, which are essential in developing a tolerant character. Another factor that contributes to the success of problem-based learning is the role of teachers as facilitators. Teachers do not merely deliver material, but also guide the discussion and problem-solving process. With this approach, students are motivated to think critically and creatively, and learn to appreciate the contributions of other group members. The exemplary attitude of teachers who demonstrate tolerance serves as a model of positive behaviour that students internalise in their daily lives.

The success of problem-based learning cannot be separated from several obstacles in building tolerance, particularly regarding basic understanding. Some students exhibit a narrow interpretation of tolerance, particularly in religious and cultural contexts, which can hinder collaboration in group discussions and potentially lead to conflict. Additionally, limited implementation time and disparities in student abilities within groups also contribute to challenges in implementing problem-based learning. Beyond schools, families also play a crucial role in shaping students' character. Students raised in families that value tolerance tend to be more open and adaptable, whereas those from less supportive backgrounds often face challenges when interacting with peers from different backgrounds.

Table 2: Summary of the used image dataset

No.	Obstacles Found	Student Response	Teacher Response
1	Lack of basic understanding of tolerance	65%	80%
2	Limited implementation time	70%	78%
3	Inequality of student abilities in groups	62%	65%
4	Steering between students	60%	75%

Based on Table 2 above, which was obtained through interviews and field observations, several obstacles to implementing a problem-based learning model to build tolerance attitudes at SMK Pustek Serpong are identified. The main challenge expressed by students and teachers is the lack of basic understanding of the concept of tolerance, with 65% of students and 80% of teachers recognising this limitation. Additionally, the limited implementation time posed an obstacle, as discussions and problem-solving in PBL require more time than conventional approaches. The existence of stereotypes among students also indicates that social bias has not been fully eradicated, despite the collaborative learning process. The lack of teachers' experience in implementing

problem-based learning methods, along with the uneven abilities of students within one group, also increases the complexity of implementation. Despite these challenges, teachers continue to demonstrate dedication in shaping tolerant attitudes through innovative learning strategies that place students at the centre of the learning process.

To overcome the challenges of implementing problem-based learning, the school adopted a collaborative approach that involved all stakeholders. Teachers receive training to improve their skills in developing contextual and engaging problem-based learning scenarios. At the same time, parents are included through regular forums to harmonise perceptions regarding the formation of tolerance values between the family and school environment. In addition, character-strengthening activities are regularly held as a forum for students to practice and habituate tolerant behaviour in daily life.

Cross-cultural programs, such as joint recitations and collaborative papers involving students from diverse backgrounds, play a significant role in fostering tolerance within the school environment. Through these activities, students not only gain insight into diversity but also experience first-hand, in-depth social interactions with peers from different backgrounds. This experience fosters the development of empathy and understanding of differences, which are essential foundations for forming a tolerant attitude (Figure 2).

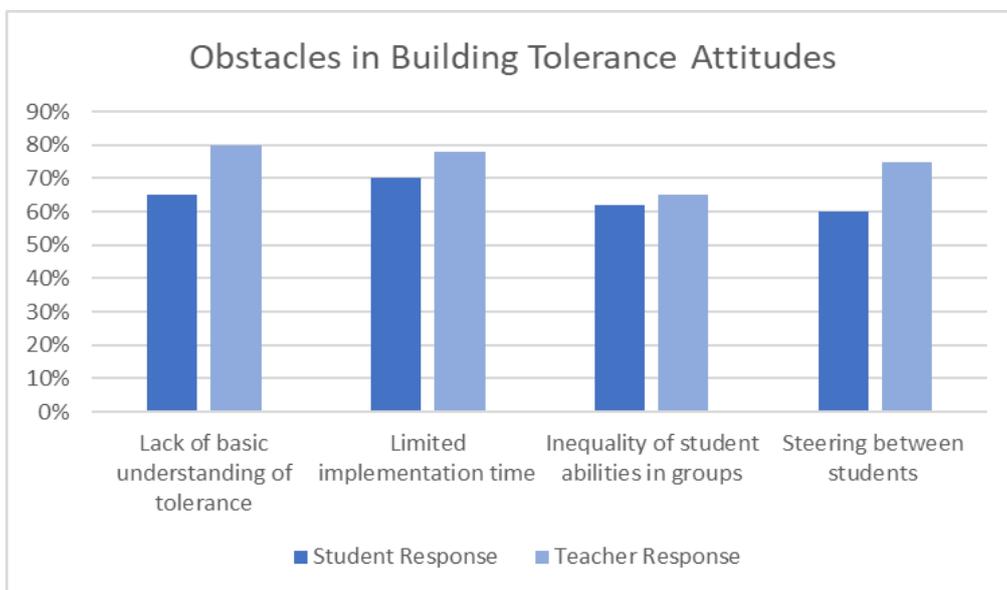


Figure 2: Obstacles in building tolerance attitudes

The data from this study also revealed that all student respondents agreed that respecting differences in views, backgrounds, and beliefs is crucial for realising a safe and harmonious learning atmosphere. This high level of awareness is a strong foundation for school institutions in instilling a culture of tolerance. By providing a supportive environment, students feel freer to express themselves and establish social interactions, which in turn strengthen mutual respect among them. The implications of this research underscore the importance of enhancing teachers' capacity to implement problem-based learning for character education. Special training is needed to help teachers manage heterogeneous group dynamics and design learning problems that are relevant to the context of student diversity. In addition, schools need to expand their networks with multicultural communities to provide students with real-life experiences that foster an appreciation for differences. Overall, this research shows that building tolerance through problem-based learning is a complex process that requires the synergy of various factors. Despite the challenges, joint efforts from schools, teachers, students, and parents can create an inclusive and harmonious learning environment. Thus, problem-based learning is not only a good learning model, but also a means to shape the character of students who are tolerant and respect diversity. This research is expected to contribute to the development of character education in Indonesia, especially in the context of multicultural education. By instilling tolerance from an early age, it is hoped that future generations will be able to coexist in diversity, creating a peaceful and harmonious society.

4. Discussion

The outcomes of this study demonstrate that the problem-based learning (PBL) strategy is applied by presenting genuine problems that are both relevant to the subject matter and closely connected to students' daily experiences, as evidenced by the previously given research data. The core of this learning strategy is to get students involved with real-world problems that require them to think critically, collaborate, and reflect on what they have learned. In this structure, students collaborate in

small groups to examine problems, discuss alternative solutions, and reach conclusions using group reasoning. During this method, the teacher acts more like a facilitator than a traditional teacher. They lead discussions and encourage students to participate without giving them exact answers. This teaching method helps students think creatively and critically, collaborate to solve problems, and develop positive attitudes toward learning with others, thereby improving both their academic and social skills. PBL encourages independence, responsibility, and teamwork by giving students control over their own thoughts and solutions. In terms of promoting tolerance, the PBL method has had a big impact on how students think about other people, especially their ability to tolerate, respect, and appreciate differences. When students work together in groups with people from different ethnic, religious, and socio-economic backgrounds, they naturally learn about different points of view and ways of thinking. This experience teaches kids how to listen carefully, communicate politely, and handle differences positively. Through these kinds of encounters, kids not only improve their ability to think critically, but they also learn more about empathy, respect, and being open-minded. Because PBL requires students to collaborate, reach agreements, manage differences, and work toward common goals, it is a great way to teach tolerance. These experiences help people become more socially mature, culturally sensitive, and peaceful, which are all important for maintaining peace in many social and educational settings.

A school that is open to everyone is really important for making these results stronger. Schools that encourage acceptance, celebrate differences, and have rules that respect different religious and cultural backgrounds make a safe place where tolerance can grow. The supportive environment of SMK Pustek Serpong helps students get along and live peacefully together. Teachers are important agents of change because they show respect and empathy by being role models for tolerance. Their constant work to promote acceptance and understanding through classroom activities, guidance sessions, and daily encounters makes the school's culture of inclusion much stronger. Also, teaching people about diversity, empathy, and the importance of regularly appreciating differences makes tolerance an even more important value at the school. The use of PBL at SMK Pustek Serpong also shows how new ways of teaching can connect academic learning with moral and social growth. The method helps students relate what they learn in class to the bigger picture by including real-world challenges that are similar to problems in society. Cognitive growth and ethical awareness develop concurrently in this process. Students not only acquire knowledge and skills but also learn social ideals that help them become responsible citizens. They learn to be patient, understanding, and effective negotiators when they encounter problems similar to those in real life, such as differing opinions or quarrels in a group. These skills are crucial for living and working effectively in a society that is becoming more diverse and multicultural.

The study finds that various problems make it harder to use PBL to teach kids to be more tolerant, even though it has its benefits. One of the biggest problems is that pupils don't fully comprehend what tolerance really means. Some people think that tolerance is just accepting others without doing anything, while others think it is actively supporting and appreciating differences. This conceptual gap frequently hinders the establishment of collaboration and the integration of diverse perspectives among learners from varying backgrounds. Because of this, group work can often be difficult, especially when personal biases, stereotypes, or strong views get in the way of free discussion. The situation is made further harder by the fact that students have different levels of emotional maturity, which affects how they handle disagreements or conflicts in their teams. Aside from differences in ideas, students' views about tolerance are also greatly affected by their family and social backgrounds. The values learned at home have a big impact on how people act and interact with each other at school. Students who grow up in places that value respect, courtesy, and empathy tend to be more open-minded and adaptable when they are with people from different backgrounds. On the other hand, people who haven't been exposed to many multicultural principles or whose families educate them not to interact with people who have different ideas may have a hard time getting used to the school's welcoming climate. So, schools that teach tolerance need to consider these differences by including activities and interventions that gradually help all kids become more aware, empathetic, and respectful of each other.

Students' ideas of and actions of tolerance are also shaped by things outside of school, like their friends, the attitudes of their community, and the media they watch. In certain circumstances, being around stories or attitudes that divide people or are unfair might strengthen intolerance, making the school's job harder. Adolescence is also a time when people are figuring out who they are and are more emotionally sensitive. This makes pupils more likely to be influenced by their peers and feel pressure from groups. To deal with these issues, we need to use comprehensive and ongoing educational interventions that encourage empathy, inclusion, and social responsibility. This study also found other problems, such as students making too many jokes or teasing each other in ways that are rude or discriminatory, and students not being able to agree because they don't understand each other's cultures. These may seem small, but if they aren't handled appropriately, they can add up and make it hard for people to respect each other. To address these behaviours, schools need to adopt a proactive strategy that includes structured supervision, open communication, and reinforcing school rules that emphasise respect and cooperation. Teachers and school counsellors are very important for helping kids think critically and settle disagreements. They assist students in realising how their words and actions affect other people.

SMK Pustek Serpong employs a comprehensive and collaborative approach, uniting the efforts of many people, both inside and outside the school, to address these problems. Teachers, counsellors, and school officials work together to plan lessons and activities outside of class that encourage respect and teamwork. The school ensures that every group assignment includes pupils

from different backgrounds so that each team reflects the school's diversity. This planned grouping helps students learn to manage differences and improve their ability to work with people from different cultures. After group work, teachers also hold debriefing sessions to help students reflect on what they learned about teamwork, discuss problems they faced, and learn about respect and tolerance. The school collaborates with parents, community leaders, and police officers from outside to create a safe and welcoming environment for students to learn. Parents are encouraged to teach their children about tolerance at home by talking about it and setting a good example. Local governments and community leaders also hold workshops or classes on how to get along with others and understand them better. These partnerships help tolerance education reach more people than just the classroom. They make it a part of the greater community. Getting outside stakeholders involved not only makes the message more morally powerful but also provides students with real-world examples of how people from different social groups may work together.

The modest but continuous increase in students' social interactions and group dynamics shows that these coordinated efforts are working. Group assignments and classroom projects that include people from different ethnic and religious backgrounds are becoming important ways to promote inclusion. Students say they have more empathy and understanding for variety and can connect better with people who are different from them. Classroom discussions, peer feedback, and interactive learning activities all encourage open communication and mutual respect. The school helps students face and think about their biases by giving them chances to talk to each other. This helps them learn to be tolerant as a real-life experience instead of just a theory. Also, having policies that support tolerance education in the school strengthens its institutional base. Rules and standards clearly state that students should not act unfairly towards others and should treat each other with respect and equality. Regular checks and assessments make sure that these rules are always followed. School counsellors are educated to deal with incidents of intolerance sympathetically and productively, employing restorative methods that teach instead of punish. Workshops, cultural exchange events, and community service programs further these efforts by providing children with hands-on experiences to learn how to work together and be kind in various situations.

The study finds that the cooperation of all stakeholders—teachers, counsellors, management, parents, and community members—is crucial for creating an inclusive, peaceful, and problem-solving learning environment at SMK Pustek Serpong. The combined efforts of these groups ensure that tolerance is not only taught but also lived out through everyday encounters and the ethos of the institution. The school effectively connects academic learning with moral growth by using problem-based learning, supportive policies, and relationships with other schools. This integrated approach is expected to have effects that go beyond the educational setting. It will help students become socially responsible individuals who can foster peace, understanding, and unity in society. The use of problem-based learning at SMK Pustek Serpong goes beyond just academic goals and becomes a powerful way to change society. It gives kids the mental abilities to solve problems and the emotional and moral maturity to get along with people from different backgrounds. The inclusive educational framework resulting from this study illustrates the synergy of pedagogical innovation, institutional support, and community participation in fostering a generation that prioritises empathy, mutual respect, and harmony over division. Because of this ongoing commitment, the school is a good example of how education can help people be more tolerant, peaceful, and make long-term societal change.

5. Conclusion

Based on the research results conducted at SMK Pustek Serpong, it can be concluded that problem-based learning is an approach that can foster tolerance among students from diverse religious, ethnic, cultural, and linguistic backgrounds. Through active involvement in solving real-world cases relevant to their lives, students are encouraged to appreciate differences and collaborate in an inclusive learning environment. This model also fosters the development of critical thinking, communication, and collaboration skills, which are the primary foundations for cultivating a tolerant attitude. The diversity of learning groups serves as a medium for exchanging perspectives and experiences, ultimately enriching students' understanding of the values of pluralism and respect for diversity. However, some obstacles hinder the implementation of problem-based learning in building tolerance. Among these are students' limited understanding of the basic principles of tolerance, insufficient learning time, and the presence of stereotypes and prejudices among individuals. These factors have the potential to hinder the internalisation process of tolerance values if not handled systematically. Differences in the level of openness and empathy between students also affect the speed at which they absorb these values. In addition, teachers face challenges in managing diverse classroom dynamics and in designing learning experiences that are truly contextual and relevant to students' daily lives.

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Data Availability Statement: This study's data availability statement shows the researcher's commitment to transparency and responsibility in data use. Interviews with the principal, curriculum vice principal, Pancasila Education teacher, and 40 students, along with classroom observation and learning document collection, provided primary data. Sources of secondary data included journal articles on tolerance and problem-based learning frameworks. All data can be accessible by relevant parties while protecting respondent anonymity. Further research or replication in different contexts can use these data. For data access and security, all data was stored methodically and securely. Methodological transparency was maintained by documenting collection and analysis. Thus, this research emphasises both findings and the integrity and ethics of data.

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Ethics and Consent Statement: Approval from the relevant ethics committee was obtained, and participants gave informed consent prior to data collection.

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