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The Discovery Learning Model in Inclusive Education to Foster Tolerance at Pondok Modern Darussalam Gontor

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Abstract

This study aims to examine the implementation of the Discovery Learning model in inclusive education to foster tolerance at Pondok Modern Darussalam Gontor, a pesantren known for the diversity of its students' backgrounds. The background of this research is based on the importance of creating an inclusive and harmonious learning environment amid the cultural, ethnic, and socioeconomic plurality of the students. The research employs a qualitative approach using the ethnographic method, involving field observations, unstructured interviews, and documentation conducted over the course of one year within the environment of Pondok Modern Darussalam Gontor. The findings indicate that tolerance education at Gontor is implemented through two models: the direct model, which emphasizes social interaction among student groups, and the indirect model, which focuses on developing open-minded personalities toward differences. The Discovery Learning model is applied in various learning activities, where students are encouraged to actively explore, discover, and collaboratively solve problems. This process not only enhances students' cognitive and spiritual abilities but also cultivates mutual respect and tolerance, both in passive and active forms. The study concludes that the application of the Discovery Learning model in inclusive education at Pondok Modern Darussalam Gontor is effective in shaping students' tolerance attitudes and contributes significantly to the development of character education models in Islamic boarding schools and other educational institutions in Indonesia.

Keywords: discovery learning, inclusive education, tolerance attitude

INTRODUCTION

Pondok Modern Darussalam Gontor is widely recognized as an Islamic educational institution that emphasizes character building and communal values amid the diversity of its students. Within this pesantren environment, students come from various regions, ethnicities, cultures, and socioeconomic backgrounds. This diversity presents unique challenges in creating an inclusive and harmonious learning atmosphere, where every individual can be accepted, respected, and grow together without discrimination.

Education plays a vital role in shaping the character and attitudes of learners, especially within the context of a diverse society. One of the main challenges in today's educational landscape is how to create an inclusive learning environment that can accommodate individual differences in terms of ability, social background, culture, and religion. (Pahrudin et al., 2009)

As one of the most renowned Islamic educational institutions in Indonesia, Pondok Modern Darussalam Gontor is well known for its educational system that emphasizes character formation, tolerance, and unity amid the diversity of students coming from various regions. To support this vision, an effective learning model is needed to instill tolerance among the students.

In facing this reality of plurality, inclusive education becomes highly important to be implemented in Gontor (Zuhdi, 2018). Inclusive education not only ensures access to education for all learners but also emphasizes acceptance, respect, and collaboration among students from diverse backgrounds. (Maskuri et al., 2020) One of the learning approaches that can support inclusive education is the Discovery Learning model. (Madanih, 2023) This model provides students with opportunities to learn through exploration, discovery, and direct interaction, thereby fostering mutual respect and tolerance toward differences in culture, ethnicity, gender, language, or religion—as these differences often become sources of communal or interethnic conflict. (Mariyono et al., 2023)

The context of this research focuses on how the Discovery Learning model is implemented within the inclusive education setting at Pondok Modern Darussalam Gontor, and to what extent this model is effective in shaping students' tolerance attitudes. This study is highly relevant considering the importance of nurturing a young generation that is not only academically intelligent but also tolerant in character and capable of living harmoniously in a multicultural society. Therefore, this research is expected to make a significant contribution to the development of character education models in Islamic boarding schools and other educational institutions in Indonesia.

Known as the Trimurti of Gontor, Pondok Gontor was founded by K.H. Ahmad Sahal, K.H. Zainudin Fananie, and K.H. Imam Zarkasyi. They envisioned an educational institution that could produce students with broad skills and insights, alongside a deep understanding of religion. Their aspiration to introduce more advanced educational methods in Indonesia stemmed from their educational experiences abroad.

The pesantren is an original and authentic educational institution rooted in Islamic teachings. According to K.H. Imam Zarkasyi, the pesantren provides a legitimate, authentic, and pure form of national education. Long before the establishment of formal schools, pesantren education had already existed and has since proven to be essential in the spread of Islam, religious instruction, knowledge transmission, preservation of Islamic traditions, and the training of future scholars and community leaders.

Pondok Gontor promotes an educational philosophy that integrates general knowledge with religious understanding. This approach aims to develop students who are capable of contributing to various fields — including social, economic, and cultural spheres — while maintaining a strong foundation in religious values. Therefore, Gontor is dedicated to educating a generation prepared to face the challenges of the modern world.

There has not yet been a comprehensive study examining the implementation of the Discovery Learning model within the context of Inclusive Education at Pondok Modern Darussalam Gontor, specifically in shaping tolerance attitudes. This research seeks to fill that gap by developing a theoretical framework that connects the cognitive processes of Discovery Learning with the affective formation of tolerance, analyzing its practical implementation in the field, and designing contextually relevant instruments and models that can be replicated by other educational institutions.

The concept of inclusion, which allows students from diverse social, economic, and cultural backgrounds to learn together, also serves as one of Gontor's foundational principles. This approach promotes tolerance among students and helps build a harmonious and respectful environment. (Bakhtiar et al., 2025) Therefore, Pondok Modern Darussalam Gontor is dedicated to being a learning environment that goes beyond mere academics.

METHOD

The research approach to designing tolerance development at Pondok Modern Darussalam Gontor employs a qualitative research methodology with an ethnographic approach, in accordance with the previously mentioned challenges and objectives of the study. Both natural and human-created phenomena are described and illustrated through qualitative research. (Sugiyono, 2015)

The primary research site for this study is Pondok Modern Darussalam Gontor, located in Gontor Village, Mlarak District, Ponorogo Regency, East Java. The research was conducted from November 2023 to November 2024, spanning a total duration of one year. Triangulation, which includes direct field observations, data collection through unstructured interviews, and record-keeping, serves as the main method employed in this field research. (Ghoni et al., 2020) After all the data were collected, the data analysis techniques used were Data Condensation, Data Display, and Conclusion Drawing/Verification. (Miles et al., 2014)

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Meaning of the Tolerance Education Model

Tolerance among Muslims means embracing diversity and avoiding fanaticism in all its forms.(Jamaruddin, 2016) In facing differences, tolerance requires generosity and open-mindedness (Mahmud, 2012). Umar Hasyim defines tolerance as the freedom to practice one's beliefs or to manage one's own life, provided that such actions and decisions do not conflict with the essential conditions for maintaining social order and peace(Hasyim, 1997). Al-Ghazali argues that justice and sound reason must coexist with tolerance. Tolerance does not necessarily lead to error or contradict the fundamental principles of truth. In other words, tolerance is not apathy, denial of reality, or complacency in ignorance. He asserts that this is the definition of tolerance regarded as an essential part of Islamic teaching(Alhashmi et al., 2020).

Undoubtedly, the Prophet Muhammad's (peace be upon him) government in Medina was the first example of tolerance in Islamic history. Islam truly flourished after Muslims left Mecca, when the Prophet

and his companions demonstrated that Islam was a comprehensive religion—in both belief and practice. Nevertheless, Christianity and Judaism, which had been practiced in Medina since its founding, continued to exist. This implies that not all residents of Medina at that time embraced Islam. However, the Prophet's teachings were non-aggressive and did not aim to convert Christians and Jews. Therefore, the Charter of Medina was created as a means to maintain social stability in this multi-religious community by establishing a peaceful and supportive environment. The 47 articles that make up the Charter detail the rights and responsibilities of Medina's citizens, including freedom of religion (Khasani, 2021).

Vogt (1997) proposed two models for implementing tolerance education: the direct model and the indirect model. The first emphasizes intergroup contact, or direct social interaction among students from different backgrounds. This approach requires diverse student backgrounds as part of the learning process. The second model focuses on how students develop as individuals who accept differences. In addition to secondary and higher education, this approach is now being applied in elementary schools (W.P., Vogt, 1997)

From a categorical perspective, tolerance can be divided into two types. The first is passive tolerance, in which adherents of different religions allow others to freely express and maintain their views. The second is active tolerance, where individuals assist followers of other religions in carrying out their religious activities while maintaining security and order during worship, as long as those activities do not contradict their own religious practices (Anandari & Afriyanto, 2022). By applying these models, inclusive education aims to build a fairer and more equitable educational system in which every child can reach their fullest potential.

There are significant variations in the implementation of tolerance across Islamic boarding schools (pesantren) in Indonesia. This is due to the fact that students represent a heterogeneous group of learners and potential social actors. This includes religious, cultural, ethnic, organizational, and individual tolerance. Professional educational management, character education, and national awareness are crucial for the implementation of tolerance education. Understanding others' perspectives, cultivating empathy, fostering a culture of dialogue, appreciating diversity, and learning about various cultures are key ways to promote tolerance.

The Inclusive Education Model in Shaping Tolerance at Pondok Modern Darussalam Gontor

Based on the data collected by the researcher through both observation and interviews, it was found that the implementation of inclusive education in shaping tolerance at Pondok Modern Darussalam Gontor is carried out through two models: the direct tolerance education model and the indirect tolerance education model.

The first model emphasizes direct social interaction among student groups (intergroup contact) with diverse backgrounds. This model requires the existence of diversity among students in the learning process. The second model focuses on personality development, encouraging students to be open-minded and accepting of differences.

This finding aligns with Vogt (1997), who stated that tolerance education can be implemented through two models: direct and indirect tolerance education (W.P., Vogt, 1997). The researcher also discovered that in the process of implementing inclusive education to foster tolerance at Pondok Modern Darussalam Gontor, tolerance is practiced in two categories — passive tolerance and active tolerance.

1. This corresponds with the view of Anandari, Anatansyah Ayomi, and Dwi, who explained that there are two types of tolerance: Passive tolerance, where followers of each religion allow adherents of other religions to freely express and practice their beliefs; and

2. Active tolerance, which involves assisting followers of other religions in performing their religious activities, maintaining security and order during worship, even though they hold different beliefs, as long as it does not interfere with their own religious rituals (Anandari & Afriyanto, 2022).

The Discovery Learning Model

In several learning activities, students are encouraged to explore and discover knowledge independently. In this teaching and learning system, the ustadz presents material that is not in a final form, allowing students the opportunity to search for and find answers on their own through a problem-solving approach. Problem-solving is a method that requires students to identify, think critically, find solutions, express opinions, and collaborate through scientific learning activities. This process positively impacts students' cognitive and spiritual abilities and fosters mutual respect among them.

To achieve the goal of developing tolerance, appropriate strategies and steps are needed through the Discovery Learning approach. Discovery Learning refers to a process of learning by searching and discovering independently. In this model, the teacher presents learning materials that are open-ended, providing students the opportunity to find concepts or solutions on their own using problem-solving techniques (Efendi et al., 2013).

A good teacher should involve students actively in identifying problems, processing and interpreting

information, speaking, listening, writing, constructing, performing, exploring, investigating, and collaborating. Based on the field data, the researcher concludes that several inclusive education activities in shaping students' tolerance attitudes at Pondok Modern Darussalam Gontor employ the Discovery Learning method.

Discovery Learning provides opportunities for students to think, discover, express opinions, and work collaboratively through scientific learning activities. This learning model plays an important role in the educational process as an alternative to conventional or lecture-based methods. It enhances students' cognitive and spiritual capacity and promotes mutual respect among peers (Efendi et al., 2013).

Although Islamic Religious Education bears the same responsibility to guide learners, inclusive Islamic education holds a particularly significant role in educating students to become members of society who are socially aware and capable of developing tolerant attitudes.

This aligns with the thoughts of Maskuri and Ahmadi M (2024), who assert that becoming a teacher is not merely a professional choice but also a calling of devotion—an effort to advance the nation, religion, and society. The challenges are not easy, especially when dealing with highly diverse learning environments (Maskuri & Ahmadi M, 2024).

Based on the researcher's interview with a staff member from the Guidance and Counselling Departement, it was conveyed that when issues of intolerance among students arise—such as disrespectful behavior during discussion activities (for example, mocking other students when they express their opinions)—the teacher or senior students from grade 5 or 6 act as mediators. They attempt to reconcile the situation by providing understanding and explanation about the importance of mutual respect and tolerance among students. Therefore, ustadz and senior students play a crucial role in nurturing tolerance among junior students through awareness and appreciation of differences (*Wawancara Staf Pengasuhan Santri Pondok Modern Darussalam Gontor*, 2025).

Problem-solving is a method that requires learners to find answers (discover) on their own, without direct assistance. Through problem-solving, learners can uncover new and higher-level principles, even if they cannot yet articulate them verbally. One of the learning methods that has been increasingly applied in advanced educational institutions is the Discovery Learning method.

Data obtained through observation and documentation show that the researcher found an inclusive education model for developing tolerance attitudes based on the Discovery Learning approach at Pondok Modern Darussalam Gontor. This model can be identified in several key activities, including:

1. Religious Studies and Discussions
2. Fiqh and Ushul Fiqh Lessons
3. *Fathul Kutub and Bahsul Masail* (Classical Text Interpretation and Problem Discussion)
4. *Al-Tadrib wa al-Ikhtibar fi Kasyf al-Mu'jam* (Training and Evaluation in Lexical Analysis)
5. *Al-Tarbiyah al-'Amaliyah* (Practical Teaching Training)
6. *Naqdu Tadris* (Lesson Critique Sessions)

These activities reflect how inclusive education and Discovery Learning principles are integrated into Gontor's learning environment to develop students' tolerance, critical thinking, and mutual respect.

CONCLUSION

Based on the research conducted at Pondok Modern Darussalam Gontor, it can be concluded that the implementation of the Discovery Learning model within inclusive education has proven to be effective in fostering tolerance among students (santri). This model encourages students to be actively involved in the learning process through exploration, discovery, and problem-solving, both individually and collaboratively. Through intensive and cooperative social interaction, students learn to respect one another, accept differences, and develop empathy, both in terms of passive tolerance (granting freedom of belief) and active tolerance (assisting others in the peaceful and orderly practice of their religious activities).

Tolerance education at Gontor is implemented through two main approaches: the direct model, which emphasizes intergroup contact among students from diverse backgrounds, and the indirect model, which focuses on the development of open and inclusive personalities. Learning activities based on Discovery Learning—such as religious studies, book discussions, fiqh lessons, and *bahsul masā'il* (Islamic legal deliberations)—provide opportunities for students to think critically, express opinions, and collaborate in an atmosphere that values diversity.

The success of this model is also supported by the active role of teachers (ustadz) and senior students who act as mediators in resolving conflicts and instilling the values of tolerance through role modeling and educational dialogue. Thus, Discovery Learning not only enhances students' cognitive and spiritual abilities but also helps shape a tolerant character that is highly relevant to living in a multicultural society.

This study recommends that the Discovery Learning model be further developed and adapted in

Islamic boarding schools (pesantren) and other educational institutions as an effective strategy for nurturing a younger generation that is intelligent, well-mannered, and capable of living harmoniously amid diversity.

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