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Project-Based Learning in Inclusive Education: The Development of Students Tolerant Attitudes at Pondok Modern Darussalam Gontor

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Abstract
In multicultural communities, especially educational institutions, the problem of intolerance based on religion and identity persists. As Islamic educational establishments, boarding schools (Pesantren) play a crucial role in fostering tolerance via inclusive teaching methods. The purpose of this study is to examine how Project Based Learning is used in inclusive education and how it affects students at the Pondok Modern Darussalam Gontor development of tolerant views. This research employs an ethnographic qualitative methodology. Over the course of a year, participant observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation were used to gather data. Thematic analysis of the data was carried out using the Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña model. The findings demonstrate how inclusive teaching is ingrained in Islamic boarding school culture at the Pondok Modern Darussalam Gontor. Students' social engagement, teamwork, and communication across differences are encouraged when project-based learning is implemented through a variety of project-based activities. Two strategies are used to build a tolerant mindset: active tolerance, which shows itself as collaboration and group involvement, and passive tolerance, which entails respect for one another's differences. Tolerance is a social ability that can be developed in a contextual and useful way through project-based learning. According to the study's findings, project-based learning-based inclusive education is useful in helping students at contemporary Islamic boarding schools develop a tolerant mindset and is appropriate as a teaching strategy in a pluralistic society.

Keywords: *ethnography; inclusive education; islamic boarding schools; project-based learning; tolerance*

INTRODUCTION

The phenomena of religious and identity-based intolerance remains a severe challenge in Indonesian social life. Mutual respect for diversity has not been fully internalized, even through schooling, as shown by a number of horizontal disputes. Numerous studies show that the school system's poor internalization of diverse values and inadequate tolerance literacy lead to an increase in socio-religious conflict (Zuhdi, 2021) and exclusivist views (Azra, 2020). This situation underscores the critical importance of educational institutions in establishing ideals of tolerance from an early age, especially in a culturally, ethnically, and religiously diverse society (Mulyasa, 2022). This circumstance highlights how important it is for educational institutions to inculcate tolerance ideals at a young age, particularly in a society that is diverse in terms of culture, ethnicity, and religion. Because it promotes openness, respect for variety, and equal social relations among students, inclusive education is viewed as a strategic way to fostering attitudes of tolerance (UNESCO, 2020). Islamic boarding schools hold a strategic position in the context of Islamic education, serving as both a hub for the dissemination of religious knowledge (Nata, A. 2021) and a means of fostering students' social character development so they can coexist peacefully in a pluralistic society (Ikhwan, A. et al., 2023). While a number of studies have examined tolerance education in Islamic educational institutions and boarding schools

(pesantren) (Huda, M., Qodir, Z., & Nurhayati, S. 2021). However, the majority of these studies continue to concentrate on institutional policies, normative aspects, and ideological values (Sulaiman, S., & Wibowo, A. 2023). Research specifically examining innovative, practice-based learning models, particularly Project-Based Learning within an inclusive education framework to foster a tolerant attitude among students, is still relatively limited. Additionally, there are not many studies in the literature on Islamic education today that portray current Islamic boarding schools as inclusive, project-based learning environments (Mahfud, C. 2022).

One such Islamic boarding school that employs a contemporary educational system that takes into account the social, cultural, and geographic origins of its pupils is the Pondok Modern Darussalam Gontor (Bahij, M., & Khoir, M. 2023). The inclusive educational atmosphere and different project-based activities make Gontor a useful backdrop (Hamid Fahmy Zarkasyi, 2020) for assessing the application of Project-Based Learning in establishing a tolerant attitude among students. Through contextual learning experiences, the project-based learning paradigm is thought to promote teamwork, social empathy, and critical thinking abilities (Kokotsaki, Menzies, & Wiggins, 2021). The consideration of how Project Based Learning, a component of inclusive education, shapes students' tolerant views in a contemporary Islamic boarding school setting is what makes this study novel. This study emphasizes the contextual and applicable practice of project-based learning in Islamic boarding school life, in contrast to earlier research that tended to be intellectual or normative. Thus, the purpose of this study is to analyze the Project Based Learning model in inclusive education at the Pondok Modern Darussalam Gontor and investigate its consequences on students' development of tolerant attitudes.

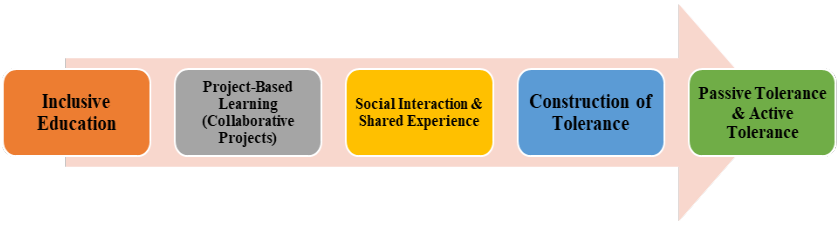


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework of PjBL-Based Inclusive Education in The Development Tolerant Attitudes.

METHOD

This study used an ethnographic and qualitative methodology. Because it enables researchers to gain a thorough understanding of inclusive education practices and the development of tolerant attitudes in students through the meanings, values, and social interactions that are intrinsic to the culture of Islamic boarding schools, this ethnographic technique was used (Windiani, 2016). In order to document collectively formed social meanings, ethnography focuses on the everyday experiences of research participants in their natural environment (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2020).

The study was carried out at Ponorogo, East Java, at the Pondok Modern Darussalam Gontor. Because of its varied social, cultural, and geographic backgrounds as well as its employment of a range of project-based learning activities within an inclusive educational framework, this Islamic boarding school was selected (Syarifah, S., Maskuri, M., Mistar, J., & Hosna, R. 2025). The Islamic boarding school is a pertinent ethnographic site for studying the implementation of Project-Based Learning and the continuous development of tolerant attitudes among students due to its status as a boarding school community. Students (santri), instructors (ustadz), and administrators of Islamic boarding schools who were directly involved in implementing inclusive education and project-based learning were the research subjects. Informants were selected purposively based on their involvement and knowledge of the research practices, then developed using snowball sampling techniques until data saturation reached (Cre-swell & Poth, 2021). Table 1 displays the attributes of the research informants.

Table 1. Characteristics of Research Participants

Informant Category	Number	Role in Inclusive Education & PjBL	Data Collection Techniques
Students (Santri)	20	Project implementers, collaborative group members	Observation, Interviews
Ustadz/Teachers	6	PjBL facilitators, activity mentors	Interviews, Documentation
Boarding School Administrators	3	Designers of inclusive policies and culture	Interviews, Documentation
Total	29		

Semi-structured in-depth interviews, documentation studies, and participant observation were used to gather data (M. Junaidi Ghoni, 2012). In order to completely comprehend social dynamics and cultural practices, the researcher engaged in participant observation by actively participating in Islamic boarding school activities for a year (Sugiyono, 2013). Informants' experiences and interpretations of inclusive education and tolerance were investigated through in-depth interviews (Nursapia Harahap, 2020), and documentation-such as project-based learning records, institutional archives, and activity programs-was used to support the data (M. Djunaidi Ghoni, Sri Wahyuni, & Fauzan Almanshur, 2020).

In accordance with the Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña methodology, which comprises data condensation, data presentation, and conclusion drawing and verification, data analysis was carried out concurrently and constantly (Miles et al., 2020). Through member checking, prolonged researcher involvement in the field, and triangulation of sources and procedures, data authenticity was preserved (Fridiyanto, M. Kholis Amrullah, Muhamad Taridi, 2023). In order to comprehend the cultural background of Islamic boarding schools, this study also took into account researcher reflexivity and research ethics (Flick, 2022).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In-depth interviews, documentation studies, and a year of participatory observation at the Pondok Modern Darussalam Gontor were used to gather the study's findings. Based on field data, the findings are provided descriptively to demonstrate inclusive education methods, Project-Based Learning (PjBL) implementation, and the development of tolerant attitudes among students.

Inclusive Education in The Context of Islamic Boarding Schools

The collaborative and non-discriminatory form of Islamic boarding school life at the Pondok Modern Darussalam Gontor is a manifestation of inclusive education, according to observations. Students from various socioeconomic, cultural, and geographic origins coexist and engage in the same environment without being separated according to their particular abilities, social standing, or place of birth. In a boarding school system, students participate in collective learning, worship, and organizational activities on a regular basis. This pattern of interaction creates a social space that allows for intensive encounters between students from diverse backgrounds. Written policies are not the only examples of inclusivity; room assignments, community service, student organizations, and group learning activities are also examples of everyday practices that demonstrate inclusivity. According to interviews with Islamic boarding school administrators and ustadz (Islamic teachers), the diversity of pupils is viewed as a component of the educational reality that needs to be controlled by fostering communal living. This research shows that Gontor's inclusive education is a cultural practice that has been assimilated into the system of Islamic boarding schools.

Project-Based Learning's Application in Inclusive Education

According to the study's findings, Pondok Modern Darussalam Gontor uses a variety of project-based activities that encourage student collaboration in order to implement project-based learning. Panggung Gembira (Happy Stage), Drama Arena, innovative contests, and Hajj customs are some of these events. Each activity is designed to be carried out in groups with a variable student composition. Students participate in the planning phase, task distribution, activity execution, and group assessment of outcomes during the project's execution. According to field observations, each group member contributes in a complimentary way, hence teamwork is crucial to the project's success. In Project-

Based Learning (PjBL) activities, the ustadz (teacher) largely serves as a facilitator, overseeing and guiding the project's development while the students collectively make technical decisions. Table 2 provides a summary of how Project-Based Learning is being used in inclusive education.

Table 2. Implementation of Project-Based Learning in Inclusive Education

Type of Project Activity	Learning Objectives	Form of Student Collaboration	Inclusive Values Developed
Happy Stage (Panggung Gembira)	Creativity and teamwork	Cross-regional group collaboration	Tolerance, mutual respect
Drama Arena	Artistic expression and empathy	Heterogeneous role distribution	Appreciation of differences
Pioneering Competition	Problem-solving and leadership	Collective teamwork	Cooperation and solidarity
Hajj Simulation (Manasik Haji)	Understanding ritual and social values	Group coordination	Equality and togetherness

These results suggest that PjBL serves as a platform for students to engage in intense social interaction in a diverse setting in addition to being a learning technique.

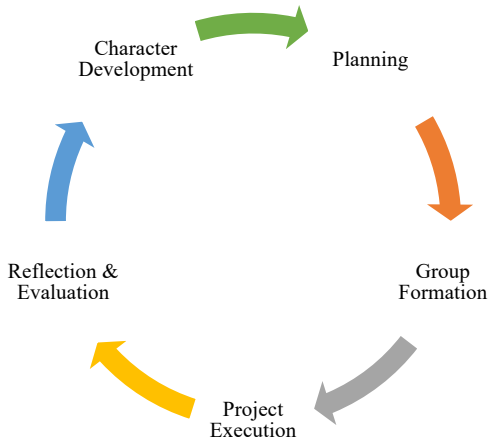


Figure 2. Implementation Cycle of Project-Based Learning in Inclusive Education

According to a review of field data, there are two primary ways that students at Pondok Modern Darussalam Gontor develop their tolerance: passive tolerance and active tolerance. Passive tolerance is demonstrated in mutual acceptance for variations in background, habits, and temperament among pupils. This mindset is demonstrated in day-to-day encounters, such as the acceptance of differences and the lack of discriminatory treatment. Students' interest in group projects, mutual support during project execution, and active participation in upholding order and ensuring the seamless operation of cooperative activities all demonstrate active tolerance. According to observations, students intentionally adjust to the traits and skills of other group members in order to ensure the project's success. Both types of tolerance are constantly developing as a result of project-based learning and cohabitation in the boarding school system. Table 3 provides an overview of how students' perceptions toward tolerance were constructed using field data.

Table 3. The Development of Students Tolerant Attitudes

Type of Tolerance	Attitudinal Indicators	Examples of Field Practice	Data Source
Passive Tolerance	Respecting differences in background	Not discriminating against peers	Observation, Interviews
Active Tolerance	Cooperation and collective participation	Working collaboratively in project teams	Observation, Interviews
Active Tolerance	Social solidarity	Helping one another during activities	Observation

The Effects of Project-Based Learning on Students' Lives

The findings of the study also demonstrate that the dynamics of students' lives are directly impacted when Project-Based Learning is implemented within an inclusive educational framework. Students showed enhanced teamwork, communication, and flexibility in a variety of groups. Students also taught how to use flexible role allocation and discussion to settle disagreements. Project-Based Learning helps to create a learning environment that promotes social solidarity and togetherness within the framework of Islamic boarding school life. Table 4 provides a summary of the effects of implementing Project-Based Learning-based inclusive education on the culture of Islamic boarding schools and the character of students.

Table 4. Implications of Project-Based Learning–Based Inclusive Education

Aspect	Main Implications
Student Character	Development of empathy, responsibility, and openness
Learning Process	Contextual and collaborative learning
Boarding School Culture	Strengthening moderation and social harmony
Theoretical Contribution	Integrative model of PjBL and inclusive education

Inclusive Education as a Cultural Practice at Pondok Modern Darussalam Gontor

According to field research, inclusive education at Pondok Modern Darussalam Gontor is viewed as a cultural practice ingrained in day-to-day Islamic boarding school life rather than only as a formal policy or pedagogical idea. Within the boarding school system, the diversity of students' backgrounds—whether social, cultural, geographic, or skill-related—is acknowledged as a typical aspect of communal life. Instead of being taught orally in this setting, inclusion is directly experienced through round-the-clock social interactions (Syarifah, S., Maskuri, M., Mistar, J., & Hosna, R. 2025). Students are used to living, learning, and working together without distinction based on background, according to the researcher's participant observations. Students are encouraged to organically develop a knowledge of diversity by the social space created by this communal lifestyle (Syarifah, Maskuri, Mistar, J., Anwar, S., & Azizah, N. 2025). These results are consistent with the inclusive education perspective, which highlights social interactions and contextual learning opportunities as the main strategies for promoting tolerance (Booth & Ainscow, 2021). According to an ethnographic viewpoint, Gontor's inclusive education practices are a component of the hidden curriculum (M. Akrim Mariyat, 2011), which consists of norms and values that are passed down through institutional culture and customs rather than just the written curriculum (Creswell & Poth, 2021). Accordingly, how students perceive diversity is shaped by the cultural framework of inclusivity at Gontor (Ju'subaidi, J., Lindgren, T., Mujahidin, A., & Rofiq, A. 2024).

Implementation of Project Based Learning in an Inclusive Education Framework

Project-Based Learning (PjBL) is a learning style that greatly supports inclusive teaching practices at the Pondok Modern Darussalam Gontor, according to observations and interviews. PjBL is executed through a variety of project-based events, including Hajj rites, Drama Arena, Panggung Gembira (Happy Stage), and pioneering competitions. Students from various backgrounds work together in a single team throughout these activities, necessitating cooperation, communication, and role-playing. In actuality, the ustadz (teacher) facilitates learning by giving students the freedom to plan, carry out, and finish projects on their own. This model helps students learn how to manage differences of viewpoint and character within a group (Dacholfany, et.al. 2024), as well as how to think critically and solve problems (Mahfudhoh, R., Bakar, M., & Fuad, A. 2023) and solve problems. These results support PjBL's salient features as a learning paradigm that prioritizes real-world and cooperative learning opportunities (Kokotsaki et al., 2021). From an anthropological standpoint, PjBL at Gontor functions as a social space where students form bonds and a sense of community in addition to being a teaching tool. Students can learn to value diversity in a practical, as opposed to a normative, sense thanks to the strong interactions that occur during the project process. This proves that PjBL uses important social interactions to directly support the growth of tolerance.

Development of Students Tolerant Attitudes: Between Direct Practice and Internal Values

According to a review of field data, there are two primary ways by which pupils at the Pondok Modern Darussalam Gontor develop their tolerance: passive tolerance and active tolerance. Mutual

respect for pupils' diverse backgrounds, beliefs, and cultures is an example of passive tolerance. In the meantime, cooperation, helping one another out, and keeping the peace during group activities are all examples of active tolerance. These two types of tolerance are created by continuous societal processes rather than appearing overnight. Differences become a part of the everyday dynamics that need to be faced and handled collaboratively due to boarding school living, project-based learning, and the organizational culture of the students (Mahfud, 2022). These results show how both techniques are integrated within the Islamic boarding school framework (Zuhdi, 2021), building on the tolerance education paradigm that stresses direct connection and personality development (Maskuri, Khadijatul Qodriyah & Zakiyah Bz. 2020).

According to an anthropological paradigm, tolerance is the outcome of a process in which values are internalized through repeated social behaviors. In order to preserve peace within the Islamic boarding school community, students view tolerance as both a moral principle and a social ability (Agustina, L., Maskuri, & Cikusin, Y. 2024). This supports the idea that lived experience, not only normative instruction, is the foundation of effective tolerance education (Nuruddin, N., Tarno, T., Amiruddin, F., & Khoir, M. 2025). According to research, students' character development is significantly impacted by the inclusive education focused on project-based learning at the Pondok Modern Darussalam Gontor. First, through group projects, this model helps kids grow in empathy, accountability, and tolerance for diversity. Second, students' capacity to adjust to the social diversity inherent in diverse societies is reinforced by Project-Based Learning (PjBL).

The establishment of a learning environment that fosters the growth of ideals of religious moderation is another implication. In addition to academic preparation, Gontor's inclusive education gives kids the social skills they need to be peacemakers in the community. These results are consistent with research showing how Islamic education promotes societal cohesion (Sulaiman & Wibowo, 2023) and moderation (Huda et al., 2021). Therefore, in the context of modern Islamic education, inclusive education based on Project-Based Learning (PjBL) in current Islamic boarding schools can be seen as a pertinent alternative model to be created, especially in tackling the difficulties of social fragmentation and intolerance.

CONCLUSION

According to the findings of this study, inclusive education at Pondok Modern Darussalam Gontor has evolved into a cultural practice that is ingrained in day-to-day Islamic boarding school life rather than only being implemented as a formal pedagogical strategy. Through a dorm system, group interaction, and institutional ideals that prioritize unity and acceptance for differences, the diversity of students' backgrounds is acknowledged as a social reality. The implementation of Project-Based Learning within an inclusive education framework has proven to play a significant role in shaping students' attitudes of tolerance. Students participate actively in teamwork, problem-solving, and collective decision-making through a variety of project-based activities. Through the creation of a social space that facilitates contextual and applicable conversation, negotiation, and learning across differences, tolerance is not only understood as a normative notion but also practiced as a social skill. The study's findings suggest that passive tolerance and active tolerance are two interconnected processes that shape students' attitudes on tolerance. Mutual regard for one another's diversity is an example of passive tolerance, but cooperation, solidarity, and group involvement in Islamic boarding school activities are examples of active tolerance. Ongoing shared experiences, supported by project-based learning and an inclusive Islamic boarding school culture, are the foundation of both types of tolerance. Theoretically, this study contributes to the development of inclusive education and tolerance studies in the context of Islamic boarding schools by confirming that Project-Based Learning can function as an effective cultural mechanism in fostering tolerance. Practically, the findings of this study indicate that inclusive project-based education can be a relevant alternative model for Islamic educational institutions in preparing a generation that is not only academically superior but also possesses a tolerant, moderate character, and is ready to live in a pluralistic society.

DECLARATION OF GENERATIVE AI

The authors declare that no generative AI or AI-assisted technologies were used in the writing process of this manuscript.

CONFLICTING INTEREST STATEMENT

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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