IMPLEMENTATION OF TOLERANCE AND MUTUAL COOPERATION VALUES IN STRENGTHENING CHARACTER EDUCATION FOR CHILDREN AT THE KAMPUNG BHARU GUIDANCE CENTER, MALAYSIA

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Article Info	ABSTRACT
	The importance of character education in Indonesia aims to create social harmony in the midst of the diversity of Southeast Asia, where tolerance means respecting differences and mutual cooperation involving group cooperation. The purpose of this study is to explore the application of the values of tolerance and mutual cooperation to strengthen character education in children at the Kampung Bharu Guidance Studio, Malaysia, a non-formal institution that serves children from migrant families. The research method uses descriptive qualitative methods, research is conducted through participatory observation, semi-structured interviews with studio managers, and documentation of activities from September to October 2025. The findings in this study reveal that the values of tolerance and mutual cooperation are instilled through routines such as scouting activities, mutual cooperation to clean the environment, and morning moral coaching. The manager acts as a role model by showing a polite and empathetic attitude, while parental participation through communication and collaboration groups reinforces the consistency of values between the studio and the home. This conclusion emphasizes that informal studios manage to positively shape the character of migrant children. This research contributes to the development of an inclusive character education literature, and supports education policies that are sensitive to local contexts.

1. INTRODUCTION

Character education has become a major priority in efforts to improve the quality of human resources in Southeast Asia, including Indonesia and Malaysia. Core values such as tolerance and mutually beneficial cooperation function as crucial social capital, enabling individuals to live harmoniously in diverse societies, resolve conflicts peacefully, and collaborate productively for the common good. Character formation is not limited to

formal school settings; everyday interactions at home, within the social environment, and in non-formal educational institutions such as guidance centers play a vital role in shaping children's attitudes and behaviors from an early age. According to Sumadi et al. (2021), effective character formation requires the development of habits, role modeling by adults, and a supportive social environment, all of which are highly relevant in this context.

Social changes marked by increased mobility, family migration, and economic dynamics create new challenges in the implementation of character education. Children from migrant or non-citizen families often face administrative barriers, financial pressures, and social dislocation that limit their access to formal education services. In such circumstances, guidance centers and community learning centers emerge as important alternatives, as they provide both learning spaces and social environments for children who may be marginalized from the formal system. Research by Loganathan et al. (2023) emphasizes that non-formal institutions function as pathways of inclusion, helping marginalized children gain access to education and enriching social interaction experiences.

In this study, two interrelated social values are the main focus: tolerance and gotong royong (mutual cooperation). Tolerance enables individuals to respect differences in religion, ethnicity, and culture, while refraining from discriminatory behavior. Meanwhile, gotong royong is understood as a tradition of collective work and mutual assistance for the collective interest. Previous studies indicate that fostering tolerant attitudes is more effective when combined with real experiences of cross-cultural interaction through collaborative activities; beyond reducing prejudice, such interactions also build empathy and social skills. On the other hand, studies on the relevance of gotong royong among younger generations suggest that although this collective value originates from tradition, it remains relevant when reformulated into participatory activities that align with contemporary needs and contexts (Murtadlo et al., 2024).

Despite the extensive discussion on character education, there remains a research gap concerning the specific implementation of tolerance and gotong royong values at the level of guidance centers, particularly those serving migrant communities such as those in the Kampung Bharu area of Malaysia. Many previous studies have focused on formal schools or national policy evaluations, while the practices and dynamics of community-driven non-formal institutions often managed by volunteers and operating with limited resources have received far less attention. As noted by Mahanani et al. (2022), guidance centers possess distinct operational characteristics, including more flexible curricula, more intensive relationships with families, and managers who often assume dual roles as educators and social facilitators.

One crucial aspect of the implementation process is the role of guidance center managers or facilitators as role models (modeling). Beyond merely facilitating activities, adults who consistently demonstrate tolerant and cooperative behavior in daily interactions such as when resolving minor conflicts, distributing tasks, or encouraging children's participation provide concrete examples that help children internalize these values. Systematic literature reviews indicate that educators' readiness and beliefs regarding character education curricula significantly influence implementation success. Therefore, training and mentoring for facilitators constitute a strategic necessity (Muzakkir et al., 2024).

Family involvement and community networks are also key supporting factors that strengthen the continuity of character formation. Empirical evidence shows that synergy between activities at guidance centers and parenting practices at home creates an integrated learning environment, reinforcing the values acquired at the center. Conversely, without parental involvement, the impact of non-formal activities tends to be temporary and easily disrupted when children return to less supportive environments. Accordingly, effective implementation models must include mechanisms for regular communication between managers and families, as well as collaborative activities that invite parental participation—such as community clean-up initiatives, joint art performances, or local cultural celebrations as media to integrate formal, non-formal, and informal learning (Loganathan et al., 2023).

The implementation of tolerance and gotong royong values is defined as a systematic process of integrating these social values into practical activities within the guidance center environment. This implementation goes beyond theoretical concepts, encompassing a series of carefully designed actions, including intervention planning, activity execution, and monitoring and evaluation to ensure that these values are genuinely embedded in children's daily lives. Within this framework, character education through real practices becomes the primary operational foundation, ensuring that character education is not merely theoretical but is manifested in children's behavior.

The significance of this research lies in its aim to explore in depth how tolerance and gotong royong values are applied in the daily practices of guidance centers in Kampung Bharu, as well as to identify supporting and inhibiting factors in their implementation. The findings are expected to generate operational recommendations, such as participatory activity designs, training models for facilitators, and family engagement strategies that can enhance the effectiveness of character education in non-formal contexts. More broadly, this study is expected to contribute to the literature on character education by providing empirical evidence from migrant and diasporic contexts, thereby serving as a reference for the formulation of inclusive policies that are sensitive to local realities.

From a methodological perspective, this study employs a descriptive qualitative approach to capture the complexity of social interactions, the subjective meanings held by practitioners, and the dynamics of informal practices that are difficult to measure using purely quantitative instruments. The qualitative approach enables in-depth exploration through interviews, participatory observation, and documentation, resulting in rich narratives and evidence-based practical recommendations.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a descriptive qualitative approach aimed at providing an in-depth depiction of how the implementation of tolerance and gotong royong (mutual cooperation) values strengthens children's character education in a non-formal setting at the Kampung Bharu Guidance Center, located in the Wisma Sabarudin Complex, Jalan Raja Alang, Kampung Bharu, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. This site was selected due to its relevance to the focus of the study. The research was conducted over the period from September 4, 2025, to October 1, 2025. The research subject was the head of the guidance center, who served as the key informant, while the research object was the

implementation of tolerance and gotong royong values, encompassing guidance activities, instructional strategies, and their impact on children's character formation.

Prior to the implementation of value-habituation activities, an initial observation was carried out to describe the children's character conditions and interaction patterns within the guidance center. The observation results indicated that many children had not yet consistently demonstrated tolerant attitudes and collective behaviors. For instance, the frequency of helping peers in difficulty was relatively low, participation in group cooperation was limited, and social interactions tended to be individualistic. Tolerance toward differences in cultural or social backgrounds had also not been well internalized, often leading to minor misunderstandings in daily interactions. This initial portrayal served as a comparative baseline for assessing attitudinal changes following the implementation of character values.

The implementation of tolerance and gotong royong values was carried out through structured stages. First, the guidance center management collaboratively developed activity plans and value-habituation methods with the relevant team. Subsequently, activities were implemented repeatedly and consistently, such as through joint community service programs, cleanliness routines, group activities, and moral briefings at the beginning of the day. Next, the involvement of teachers or center managers was strengthened, and where possible, parents or external parties were also engaged to ensure that these values were reinforced at home and within the broader community. Finally, observation and documentation instruments were used to monitor implementation and evaluate changes in children's behavior over time. This planned approach ensured that the implementation process was effective and accountable.

The main components applied included tolerance values, namely respect for differences in culture, background, and habits, as well as gotong royong values, which encompass cooperation, mutual assistance, and collective responsibility for the common good. Their implementation took the form of joint cleanliness activities, group assignments, habituation of greetings and courteous behavior, and activities involving helping peers who experienced difficulties. In addition, a supportive social environment constituted an important aspect, where an inclusive atmosphere and positive interactions contributed to meaningful learning experiences. The integration of values, activities, and environment is expected to foster strong and holistic character development among learners.

Data sources comprised primary data (in-depth interviews with the key informant) and secondary data (activity documentation, photographs, student attendance lists, and relevant literature). Data collection techniques included direct observation of activities at the guidance center, semi-structured interviews with the key informant, and documentation of archival and visual materials. Data analysis was conducted through three main stages: (1) data reduction, involving summarizing, focusing, and selecting relevant data; (2) data presentation, organizing findings into descriptive narratives or thematic tables to facilitate understanding of patterns and relationships among themes; and (3) conclusion drawing and verification, interpreting the results, linking them to character education theories, and conducting data source triangulation and member checking, where necessary, to enhance the credibility of the findings.

3. RESULT AND ANALYSIS

Effectiveness of Collective Habituation Programs in the Internalization of Values

Collective habituation programs function as an approach to character education that emphasizes the repetition of meaningful behaviors within a shared social environment. With a structured and sustainable framework of activities, these behaviors can develop into ingrained habits among students, thereby making the process of value internalization more efficient. Habituation that is integrated into institutional culture—such as routines of maintaining cleanliness, collective prayer or meditation, and cooperative activities—provides a social environment that reinforces value learning through direct interaction and group-based reinforcement. This approach aligns with findings in habit formation research, which highlight the role of repetition within specific contexts in achieving behavioral automatization (Lally et al., 2010).

The findings indicate that the guidance center implements a series of routine activities such as scouting programs, gotong royong (mutual cooperation), and morning moral reinforcement, reflecting an approach to value learning through practice and direct experience. In interviews, the managers explained that before learning activities begin, children are gathered and given advice and reminders about the importance of mutual respect, helping peers who are experiencing difficulties, and behaving politely. These activities are conducted regularly so that children become accustomed to positive behavior and respect for others.

This approach is consistent with meta-analytic findings on character education, which emphasize the importance of repeated social experiences integrated into children's daily lives in order to modify behavioral patterns (Brown et al., 2023; Jeynes, 2019). The mechanisms of change operating in this context include habit formation, social reinforcement, and learning through role participation when children engage in shared tasks.

Gotong royong activities play a crucial role because they involve collective responsibility, role distribution, and direct experiences of observing the outcomes of cooperation. From a developmental psychology perspective, such collective experiences help children form social schemas regarding roles and obligations, while also enhancing empathy through observation of others' needs and efforts (Brown et al., 2023). The managers also reported that children who initially tended to use harsh language became more polite and respectful toward one another. This indicates that habituation routines at the guidance center have successfully brought about tangible changes in children's social behavior.

Nevertheless, these positive impacts are maximized when activities are conducted regularly and supported by effective facilitation. Facilitator quality, activity frequency, and active child participation influence the degree of behavioral change. Therefore, while the routines implemented by the guidance center represent a solid initial step, they should be complemented with simple monitoring methods, such as observation rubrics or activity journals, to document progress and provide feedback for program improvement.

Moreover, collective habituation creates opportunities for value reinforcement across contexts. When children learn gotong royong at the guidance center and experience its repetition in community activities involving parents, this value is more likely to become

part of the child's social identity a condition that increases the likelihood of applying the value across different contexts (Brown et al., 2023).

The Role of Managerial Modeling as a Learning Mechanism

Role modeling demonstrated by managers and teachers serves as a crucial learning mechanism, as learners generally imitate behaviors exhibited by models they perceive as credible. Consistency between managers' words and actions produces concrete behavioral examples that can be observed and emulated. Social-cognitive theory explains that the main processes in social learning include observation of models, information retention, reproduction, and motivation (Bandura, 2001), making integrity in managerial actions a key element for successful value internalization.

Interview results position the manager as a central figure who provides direct examples, such as greeting others, shaking hands, and encouraging children to help one another without resorting to punishment. The manager stated that children are taught to greet and shake hands when meeting others. During classroom activities, if a child has not completed assigned duties, other children are encouraged to help and remind them without scolding. Theoretically, these practices can be explained through social learning theory, which emphasizes observation and imitation as primary pathways for learning social norms. Recent studies confirm that consistent role modeling accompanied by opportunities for practice enhances value internalization among children (Osman, 2024).

Several practical aspects contribute to the effectiveness of modeling within the guidance center context. First, behavioral consistency: when managers consistently display polite behavior and respect for differences, they help establish observable norms for children on a daily basis. Second, the integration of modeling with positive reinforcement such as offering praise when children help their peers strengthens desired behaviors and helps children associate actions with positive social feedback (Ariani et al., 2022). Third, modeling within real-life activities for example, managers demonstrating how to help during gotong royong activities and then inviting children to practice accelerates the transition from observation to application.

To enhance the effectiveness of modeling, it is recommended that the guidance center implement strategies such as developing brief guidelines on positive reinforcement language, organizing training sessions for managers or volunteers, and designing simple role-play scenarios to practice conflict resolution without punishment. Such measures would improve the consistency of role models and strengthen the resilience of value internalization against external environmental influences.

Parental and Community Involvement as Reinforcers of Value Continuity

Parental and community participation strengthens consistency in the value internalization process, as children receive and experience consistent moral messages across school, home, and social environments. Successful interventions include guidance on domestic activities, regular interaction between teachers and parents, and collaborative community initiatives. The integration of school-based educational activities with family support creates a holistic character-learning environment, allowing values to be transferred across multiple contexts. Research in early childhood education reveals a positive correlation between parental involvement and the development of character traits such as autonomy and accountability (Dewi & Widyasari, 2022).

Collaboration between the guidance center and parents has been functioning effectively. The manager explained that communication is frequently conducted through messaging groups to remind parents to continuously support character education at home. When children encounter behavioral difficulties, the center collaborates with parents to identify solutions. Parental involvement functions as a mechanism for transferring values from the institution to the home, ensuring that children receive consistent messages across life contexts. Meta-analyses and empirical studies indicate that structured involvement not merely occasional communication such as parent workshops, joint family activities, and practical home guidelines, is associated with better behavioral outcomes among children (Castro et al., 2015; Diana et al., 2021).

In practice, the guidance center can expand parental participation beyond reminder messages by providing concise reading materials for parents (e.g., one-page guides) on how to give praise, assign household tasks that incorporate gotong royong values, and apply consistent, non-punitive corrective techniques. Research shows that combined school–home interventions are often more effective than interventions conducted in only one environment.

The role of the broader community is equally important. Inviting community leaders or organizing large-scale gotong royong activities involving residents creates a supportive social environment that reinforces consistent behavioral models. As a result, tolerance and gotong royong values become not merely internal policies of the guidance center but shared community norms. Such collaborative strategies help reduce value conflicts between the guidance center and the wider social environment.

Multicultural Challenges in Strengthening Character Values

Strengthening character values in multicultural social environments presents various challenges, including diverse interpretations of values, mismatches between learning materials and local conditions, and limited multicultural pedagogical competencies among educators. Addressing these differences requires curriculum adjustments oriented toward local contexts, enhancement of teacher competencies, and intercultural dialogue. Culturally sensitive approaches facilitate the contextual interpretation of universal values, such as tolerance and gotong royong, across diverse community groups (Cathrin & Wikandaru, 2023; Novidayanti et al., 2023).

Interviews with the manager revealed that one of the greatest challenges in instilling tolerance values at the Kampung Bharu Guidance Center is the diversity of children's backgrounds. They originate from various countries, including Indonesia, Malaysia, Myanmar, and Thailand. The manager stated that children often need reminders not to imitate inappropriate language, as they grow up in environments influenced by diverse cultures. This diversity creates a multicultural environment that, on the one hand, offers opportunities for social learning, but on the other hand can lead to minor misunderstandings due to differences in language, habits, and cultural norms. Consequently, managers must actively serve as role models capable of bridging these differences to prevent conflict among learners (Setiawan et al., 2024).

These findings reinforce the view that multicultural education is a vital approach to fostering tolerance within non-formal educational institutions, particularly in heterogeneous communities. In a similar context, a study published in the International

Journal of Multicultural and Multireligious Understanding (IJMMU, 2023) demonstrated that the internalization of tolerance values is effective when children are actively engaged in cross-cultural social activities. Thus, the approach applied at the Kampung Bharu Guidance Center aligns with multicultural education practices that emphasize habituation of respect for diversity from an early age.

Furthermore, UNESCO (2019), in the Global Education Monitoring Report, highlights that diversity in students' social and ethnic backgrounds should be addressed through inclusive learning that prioritizes empathetic communication and humanistic values. This principle is reflected in the direct examples provided by managers, such as encouraging children to greet one another, shake hands, and help each other in daily activities. These practices are consistent with findings by Yuhanis et al. (2020), which suggest that character education is most effective when managers serve as consistent role models of positive behavior.

Moreover, gotong royong values serve as a central pillar in fostering a sense of togetherness within the guidance center. According to Aryaningsih et al. (2024), gotong royong extends beyond physical cooperation to encompass social concern and shared responsibility in building a harmonious learning community. In practice, gotong royong activities such as environmental clean-ups and assisting peers in difficulty have become concrete forms of character learning at the Kampung Bharu Guidance Center.

Nevertheless, challenges persist when children bring less polite habits or speech patterns from their external environments. As the manager explained, "We often have to remind children not to imitate inappropriate language, because they grow up in environments influenced by diverse cultures." This statement underscores the importance of the manager's role in continuously reinforcing character values. This perspective aligns with Setiawan et al. (2024), who argue that character education in multicultural settings requires sustained value reinforcement through role modeling and ongoing communication.

In conclusion, multicultural challenges should not be viewed as obstacles but rather as opportunities for educators to enrich character education approaches. Collaboration among educators, parents, and the surrounding community is a key factor in cultivating an educational ecosystem that respects diversity and strengthens social solidarity. The efforts undertaken at the Kampung Bharu Guidance Center demonstrate that tolerance and gotong royong values can be effectively internalized through concrete examples, positive habituation, and the support of an inclusive social environment.

4. CONCLUSION

Research conducted at the Kampung Bharu Guidance Center in Malaysia demonstrates that the values of tolerance and gotong royong (mutual cooperation) effectively strengthen children's character education in non-formal settings. These values are instilled through routine activities such as scouting programs, collaborative environmental clean-up, and moral guidance, which habituate positive behaviors and cultivate awareness of respecting differences, helping others, and working collaboratively. The role of the guidance center managers as role models, together with the involvement of parents and the community, creates synergy across learning

environments. The multicultural backgrounds of the children present learning opportunities for social development, with managers consistently maintaining an inclusive atmosphere. Overall, the guidance center plays a vital role in shaping national character, particularly for migrant children, and serves as a model for other non-formal institutions in fostering a generation that is morally grounded, empathetic, and committed to collective solidarity. This study underscores the importance of a holistic approach that engages all stakeholders in achieving practical and sustainable character education.

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