



## SOWING HARMONY: INCLUSIVE EDUCATION FOR ACTIVE TOLERANCE IN MULTICULTURAL SCHOOLS OF THE LAND OF RAFFLESIA

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**Abstract.** This study aimed to explore the practice of active tolerance in the multicultural school in Bengkulu City. The school is known, for its diversity, being a multicultural institution with students of diverse ethnicities and religions. This research employed a qualitative research with a case study design involving school principals, Islamic teachers, students, and parents of students at SMA Sint Carolus, Bengkulu City. Data were collected through participatory observation to understand school interactions, in-depth interviews, and document analysis to understand the school's curriculum and religious materials. Using qualitative research methods with a field research approach provides more space to explore the implementation of active tolerance more deeply in Catholic schools. This study showed that the implementation of three strategic efforts, the Dual Lens Curriculum, the Empathy Circle Forum, and the Communal Solution Project, significantly transformed students' character from passive tolerance to inclusive active tolerance. The findings revealed that strengthening cognitive flexibility through multi-perspective materials and developing radical empathy in a safe encounter space successfully broke down prejudice and primordial barriers in multicultural schools. The implications of this research emphasized the importance of synergy between schools and families. This research proved that respect for self-identity rooted in the home was the main key in building organic solidarity and sustainable harmony in Bumi Rafflesia.

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## INTRODUCTION

Active tolerance is an essential behavioral construct that students must possess to live harmoniously amidst the diversity of modern society. Unlike passive tolerance, which merely tolerates differences, active tolerance within an inclusive education framework requires students to consciously demonstrate curiosity, empathy, and proactive involvement in understanding the diversity

around them. This encompassed the cognitive dimension of dissecting stereotypes, the affective dimension of experiencing others' experiences, and the behavioral dimension of fostering cross-identity collaboration within the school (Hasanuddin et al., 2025; Sitanggang & Sitorus, 2025). Within the educational ecosystem, achieving this level of active tolerance is an indicator of a school's success in shaping students' character, which is not only inclusive in thought but also transformative in concrete actions to foster unity amidst diversity (Otsuki, 2025; Panmei, 2025).

Students' success in mastering active tolerance skills will have a direct impact on creating a safe school climate, minimizing conflict, and fostering creative collaboration (Iftanti et al., 2025; Sirichuenvichit & Prarokijjak, 2025). When students are able to practice active tolerance, they no longer view differences in background as a threat but rather as an asset that enriches their perspectives in solving various social problems in multicultural schools (Brehm & Langer, 2025; Mutchima, 2025). This is crucial considering that future challenges demand individuals who are able to work in heterogeneous teams with a high level of adaptability, regardless of identity barriers. Therefore, strengthening this active tolerance variable should not just stop at the theoretical level in textbooks, but must be internalized as a permanent character that underlies every social interaction of students, both in the classroom and in the wider community (Aira & Doom, 2025; Lutz et al., 2025; Michael, 2026).

The current phenomenon in several multicultural schools in the land of Bengkulu (Bumi Rafflesia) region showed signs of erosion in the value of togetherness, fueled by group exclusivity and a lack of meaningful interaction between students of diverse backgrounds. This has led to the emergence of social barriers within the school environment, where students tend to only interact with peers who share a particular identity. As a result, the seeds of prejudice, negative labeling, and even subtle acts of discrimination have begun to emerge, which, if left unchecked, will lead to a breakdown in social harmony within the educational environment. The long-term impact was very worrying, namely the emergence of a generation of young people who are hesitant to navigate diversity and easily provoked by sectarian issues, which could ultimately threaten the cohesion of Bengkulu's distinctive culture, which has long been known for its openness.

In response to this phenomenon, schools have begun offering solutions through the implementation of inclusive education designed to re-sow the seeds of harmony in the learning environment. This strategic solution was implemented by creating "encounter spaces" through adaptive curricula and collaborative activities that encourage students to step outside their identity comfort zones. The school was working to transform classroom policies to be more diversity-friendly and to design social projects that involve the active participation of all students without exception. Through this systemic approach (Fitriya, 2023; S et al., 2023), the school was expected to become an active laboratory of tolerance, where every difference is not only accepted but celebrated as part of the school's intellectual and spiritual heritage. This step was

a concrete effort to ensure that the value of inclusivity is a key foundation in all educational policies.

Previous studies on tolerance in schools have generally focused on students' theoretical understanding or passive tolerance, measured through formal questionnaires, without examining inclusive practices. Research by BR & Tarmidiyono (2023); Qodriyah & Asfiyah (2025), for example, primarily highlighted the role of Pancasila Education in enhancing students' knowledge of harmony, but has yet to address active implementation in multicultural settings. Similarly, a study by Mukhsin et al. (2024) and Suryani & Muslim (2024) examined religious moderation but did not specifically utilize an inclusive education approach to foster active tolerance in students. Much of this literature also fails to address the specific context of multicultural schools in developing regions, leaving a gap in practical guidance for fostering harmony amidst unique local diversity.

This research presented a different perspective: integrating the concept of inclusive education as the primary engine for fostering active tolerance in multicultural schools. Its strength lies in its effort to refine the traditional, theoretical approach into a more implementable one through a learning design that integrates all elements of diversity. An interesting aspect was the use of Bumi Rafflesia, a location with distinctive multicultural characteristics, making the results more grounded and relevant to local wisdom. The main objective of this research was to formulate an effective inclusive education model in sowing harmony and fostering students' proactive attitudes in respecting differences, so that the educational process was able to produce inclusive and strong-character agents of peace.

## **METHODS**

This study used a qualitative approach with a case study design to explore the practice of active tolerance in SMAK Carolus Kota Bengkulu, a multicultural school that had a diversity of students in terms of ethnicity, religion, and culture. The subjects of the study include the Principal, 3 students, and 3 teachers who were directly involved in activities related to tolerance and diversity. The selection of participants was conducted by purposive sampling, taking into account their role and experience in promoting active tolerance in schools. The researcher used interview guide questions in this study, observation, and documentation. The interview guide is designed using English with open-ended questions and face-to-face interviews. The data analysis technique used the Miles and Huberman Interactive Model with data condensation activities to sort out core themes, display (presenting data in a systematic narrative), and conclusion drawing/verification to find patterns of relationships between variables. Data validity was carried out through a triangulation process of sources and techniques, namely by comparing perspectives from various parties and matching interview results with field facts.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

### Result

#### The "Dual Lens" Curriculum (Cross-Perspective Literacy)

This concept worked in a cycle called "The Inclusive Vision Cycle." Imagine an object in the center of a circle, with students standing around it wearing colored glasses.



Figure 1. The Framework of "Dual Lens" Curriculum

This framework indicated a dual-lens approach that differed from traditional approaches that provide learning resources using textbooks, local narratives, cultural videos, and guest speakers. The teacher's role in this concept was as an architect of perspective and facilitator of dialogue, while the student's position is that of a critical inquirer who dissects biased information. This concept was considered intellectual property to deepen the material. Written reflections/discussions address understanding across perspectives. The integration of material in the Dual-Lens Curriculum began with topics close to students' daily lives but with rich dimensions of diversity, such as discussions of local history, culinary traditions, and the concept of citizenship. For example, in History or Social Studies lessons, teachers highlighted narratives about the struggle for independence or local figures in the Bumi Rafflesia region. Rather than focusing solely on names and dates, teachers presented perspectives on how different ethnic groups or communities in Bengkulu made their unique contributions during that period. This enabled students to recognize that their regional identity was shaped by the collective hard work of various groups, fostering a sense of inclusive ownership of a shared history.

Another example that was very easy for teachers to implement with students is integration into local environmental or geography themes. Teachers presented material on natural resource management by comparing the local wisdom of the Rejang or Serawai tribes with modern technological approaches or central government policies. Students are invited to discuss the advantages of each approach in maintaining environmental balance in Bengkulu. Through these discussions, the subject matter no longer felt dry and theoretical but

became lively as students saw recognition of the traditional knowledge held by their ancestors and their classmates from diverse backgrounds.

Furthermore, themes regarding celebrations of holidays or traditional traditions can be integrated into arts and culture or civics lessons in greater depth. Teachers didn't just ask students to memorize traditional dances or costumes, but also encouraged them to examine the universal philosophical values behind these traditions, such as honesty, courage, or cooperation. Students are asked to bring stories from their families about how these values are practiced at home. In this way, the learning material became a bridge for students to get to know each other's "heads" and "hearts," so that inclusive literacy was built naturally through simple topics that are relevant to their daily lives.

### **“Circle of Empathy” Dialogue Forum (Safe Encounter Space)**

The primary focus was not on arguing or finding out who was right, but rather on creating a safe environment for each student to share their experiences, anxieties, or hopes. Through this forum, differences in ethnicity or religion were no longer barriers, but rather bridges that allowed students to recognize that, despite these differences, each shares similar feelings and vulnerabilities. For teachers, implementing this forum required acting as facilitators who maintained the psychological safety of the class, rather than judges. Teachers began the session by establishing ground rules, namely the principle of listening without judgment and maintaining the confidentiality of students' stories. Teachers can begin by asking personal yet light-hearted prompting questions, such as sharing the meaning of a name or a favorite family tradition. Throughout the process, teachers were responsible for ensuring that each student had equal time to speak and ensuring there are no interruptions. Teachers must also be able to capture the essence of students' stories and then draw them into universal values, so that students can see that fear, joy, and hope are universal languages that unite them amidst the diversity of Bumi Rafflesia.

For students, this forum provided a means to develop empathy and the courage to be inclusive. Students are encouraged to practice "active listening," where they give their full attention to a friend who is speaking without preparing a rebuttal in their mind. When a student heard a friend from a different background share a story about the challenges they face, prejudices or stereotypes naturally began to dissolve. Students learned that friends who were previously considered "strangers" actually share similar hobbies, dreams, or even concerns. This activity gradually fostered a sense of brotherhood and organic solidarity, so that when minor conflicts arose in the future, they had a strong emotional foundation to resolve them peacefully through a perspective of active tolerance.

There were several strategic work instructions in this discussion forum. 1) Empathy Circle: Preparing the Space (The Safe Circle). The teacher instructed students to move their tables to the side and arrange their chairs in a perfect circle. The teacher sat at the same level as the students to demonstrate equality.

2) Opening and Ritual (Checking In): The teacher handed out an object (e.g., a talking ball) to symbolize the right to speak. Only the student holding the object may speak, while the others listen attentively. 3) Narrative Exchange (Sharing Heart): The teacher introduced a simple theme (e.g., "One thing that makes me proud about my family"). Each student took turns sharing a short story for 1-2 minutes. 4) Empathy Response (Appreciation): After everyone had spoken, the teacher instructed students to offer a word of appreciation to the person next to them for their courage in sharing. 5) Closing (The Common Ground): The teacher summarized the commonalities that emerged during the forum to emphasize that beneath different identities, there is a shared humanity.

Of course, there were also several selected materials or discussion topics specifically designed to spark in-depth discussion in this Empathy Circle Forum. This material was chosen because of its universal nature, yet it remains relevant to the multicultural context of Bumi Rafflesia. 1) The Meaning Behind Names: Students were asked to share the origins or meanings of their names. Names often carried prayers, hopes, or family cultural identities. This discussion helped students realize that everyone carries a noble identity and hopes from birth. 2) Small Traditions at Home: Every family certainly had unique customs, from how to eat together, celebrate big days, to how to greet parents. Sharing these will open students' eyes to the fact that although the methods were different, the value of love in every family was the same. 3) Hobbies that Unite: Discuss things that were universally loved, such as music, sports, or movies. This material was effective in breaking down identity barriers and showing that students from different backgrounds can have very strong shared interests. When teachers choose materials, they start with easy materials/topics. For the initial session, used numbers 1 and 2 so that students first felt comfortable with each other. Teachers can incorporate local elements from Bengkulu, such as discussing the values of the Tabut tradition or the hospitality of residents, to strengthen the sense of love for the region.

**Table 2: Composition of Teachers' Religions**

No	Religion	Total	Percentage
1	Islam	4	23,6 %
2	Catholic	11	64,8 %
3	Christian	2	11,8 %
<b>Total</b>		17	100 %

This role was very helpful for Islamic students, especially for student guardians who were still worried about the influence of other religions on their children. Religious worship facilities for students were also provided by the school. Students who want to perform religious rituals are facilitated without discrimination. For example, a place of prayer for Muslim students or a kind of selter can be used for worship for Muslim students and other religions. This facility was very helpful in the integration process with multicultural educational institutions. Muslim students can freely carry out prayer services in the shelters provided. This selter, specifically intended for places of worship, can

be used by students of other religions to pray, such as Catholicism, Christianity, Hinduism, Buddhism and Confucianism. This joint place of worship was also a place of integration and communication for multifaith students. This kind of concept has a lot of existence in public places in the world.

### **Collaborative Project “Communal Solutions” (Action-Based Learning)**

The implementation of this project began with the role of inclusive collaboration scenario designer. The teacher not only assigns assignments but also ensures that groups are divided into cross-identity groups to prevent the formation of exclusive camps. The teacher directed students to focus on real-life issues surrounding the school in Bumi Rafflesia, such as waste management, reforestation, or anti-bullying campaigns. Throughout the process, the teacher acted as a consultant, monitoring group dynamics, helping them overcome communication barriers, and ensuring that each student, regardless of background, had a strategic role on the team. The teacher was also tasked with assessing not only the final product of the project but also how students valued the contributions of their diverse teammates.

For the students, this project served as a living laboratory to test the resilience of their inclusive character. Students were required to step out of their comfort zones and learn to communicate with peers who may have different speaking styles or ways of thinking. As they complete the project, students will realize that the diversity of team members actually provides many creative ideas that they would not have thought of if they were working alone. The experience of working together to improve school facilities or help local residents fosters a strong sense of belonging. This was the pinnacle of active tolerance, where students feel part of a larger identity as "agents of change" who needed each other for the collective progress of their school community.

The "Behind the Name" topic provided a natural entry point for engaging parents in active tolerance learning in multicultural schools. A child's name was not merely an administrative identity, but rather a prayer, hope, and representation of cultural roots entrusted to them by their parents. By bringing this topic into the classroom, the school indirectly invited parents to "be present" and shared their life philosophy through the history of the name. This collaboration began when students were assigned to discuss with their parents at home the reasons, meanings, and cultural backgrounds behind their names. This process fostered intergenerational dialogue at home, where parents transferred noble values and family identities to their children, who will then carry on as "treasure" to be shared in the classroom.

This collaboration became even more meaningful when teachers invited parents to contribute written narratives or short audio recordings explaining the meaning of their child's name. In the classroom, when students shared the meaning of their names, they were essentially giving voice to the values inherited from their parents. For example, one student explained that his name comes from a regional language meaning "peacemaker." Here, active tolerance grew when other students recognized that their peers were raised with similar

values, despite coming from different backgrounds. Parents played a role as providers of authentic emotional content, ensuring that school learning didn't feel dry, as it's rooted in the authentic identities formed within the family environment.

The integration of these three efforts systematically transformed students' character from passive tolerance (simply allowing differences) to active tolerance (embracing, understanding, and collaborating with differences). Multicultural schools in Bumi Rafflesia have successfully transformed into harmonious ecosystems, where inclusive education served as the primary foundation for developing proactive agents of peace. The success of this entire series of efforts was also largely determined by close collaboration with parents, who acted as instillers of identity values and primary sources for children at home. Synergy between schools and families ensured that messages of harmony learned in the classroom were consistently reinforced within the family environment, so that active tolerance becomes an ingrained character trait. With the emotional involvement of parents, inclusive education no longer stood alone as a formal curriculum, but rather transformed into a collective movement to nurture diversity in Bumi Rafflesia.

## Discussion

The Dual Lens curriculum concept within the framework of inclusive literacy was a pedagogical approach designed to undermine the dominance of a single narrative in multicultural classrooms. Philosophically, this concept views every social phenomenon or subject matter as having rich dimensions and only being fully understood when viewed from multiple perspectives (Efstratopoulou et al., 2023; Mai et al., 2023). In its implementation, this curriculum did not intend to replace nationally established content standards, but rather to enrich their delivery by introducing a second or third lens that represents the perspectives of minority groups, local wisdom, or alternative narratives that have been overlooked (Efstratopoulou et al., 2023; Hill et al., 2023; Solodka et al., 2023). Thus, the learning process was no longer simply a one-way transfer of information, but rather an effort to deconstruct prejudices and stereotypes that may be attached to a particular topic (Azis et al., 2024; Hakel & Magin, 2024; Michael, 2026).

The operational form of this curriculum emphasized developing students' cognitive competence through bias analysis and dialectical dialogue. In each discussion, the teacher acted as a perspective architect, deliberately encouraging students to ask questions about the other side of a story. This trained them to recognize when information was biased. Students were encouraged not only to understand the material textually but also to engage in cross-cultural reflection by placing themselves in the shoes of others with diverse backgrounds. The result of this concept was the birth of inclusive literacy, where students can appreciate the validity of others' perspectives without losing their personal identity. By habituating themselves to viewing the world through diverse lenses, harmony in multicultural schools was created due to a genuine recognition of diverse ways of thinking. The implementation of the Dual Lens Curriculum has

successfully increased students' cognitive flexibility. Students were no longer trapped by a single narrative or narrow stereotypes, but were instead able to analyze information from various cultural and social perspectives. As a result, students' inclusive literacy was strengthened; they became more critical of prejudice and had an objective knowledge base to appreciate the diversity of identities that exist in Bumi Rafflesia.

The Empathy Circle Forum was a structured meeting space designed to foster emotional closeness between students beyond their formal identities (Hasan & Juhannis, 2024; Nurteti et al., 2024). In multicultural schools, students often interact only superficially, harboring prejudices because they never truly get to know the humanity of their peers from different backgrounds. This concept utilized a dialogical approach where students sat in a circle, symbolizing equality, without any desks or partitions (Afwadzi et al., 2024; Halim, 2023; Manahung et al., 2023).

The Empathy Circle Forum has proven effective in breaking down emotional barriers between students. Through this safe meeting space, students successfully develop radical empathy, recognizing the shared human values that existed despite their outward differences. Through collaboration with parents (as in the "Behind the Name" lesson), students felt more valued for their identities, which in turn fostered a sense of organic camaraderie and a willingness to listen without judgment.

The Communal Solutions Project was an action-based learning strategy that places students in real-life collaborative situations to solve challenges within the school or community (Aitkenhead et al., 2024; Chen et al., 2023). In this concept, active tolerance was no longer discussed as a theory but rather experienced as a functional necessity. In multicultural schools, students were often trapped in homogeneous groups (with only friends of the same ethnicity or religion). Through this project, the school intentionally broke down these barriers by forming heterogeneous work teams. The project's success was not determined by how correct any one person's opinion was, but rather by how effectively these diverse team members can complement each other, negotiate, and collaborate to achieve a common good (Akarcaay Ulutas et al., 2023; Ratnawati et al., 2024).

The Communal Solutions Project was the culmination of active tolerance's transformation from mere attitudes into concrete actions. By working together in heterogeneous teams to solve real-life problems in the school, students practice negotiation skills, share roles, and rely on each other. The end result was the formation of inclusive group solidarity, where students view differences as strengths (assets) for achieving common goals, rather than as barriers to interaction. Theoretically, this research extended the concept of tolerance from a passive attitude to a proactive one through a three-pillar model (cognitive, affective, and psychomotor), while enriching the literature on inclusive education in the context of multicultural schools in the Bumi Rafflesia region. Practically, this research provided operational guidance for educators to transform classrooms into peace laboratories through the Dual Lens Curriculum

and Empathy Circle Forum strategies, which involve real collaboration with parents. The implications of these findings called for a more inclusive redesign of curriculum and school policies that institutionalize inter-identity encountered spaces. So, that synergy between teachers, students, and families can be consistently created. Ultimately, this research confirmed that strengthening active tolerance cannot stand alone without the support of the family ecosystem, where parental involvement in exploring children's identities was key to cultivating sustainable harmony in the educational environment.

## CONCLUSION

Harmony in multicultural schools did not grow automatically by simply placing diverse students in one space. It must be cultivated through conscious efforts to recognize the "humanity" behind each identity. Active tolerance provided that sustainable peace began with the courage to open oneself, listened to others' narratives without prejudice, and collaborate across primordial barriers. This finding confirmed that each individual carried a noble heritage from home as reflected in the philosophy behind their names. Which, when celebrated together, transformed differences from potential conflict into intellectual wealth. Ultimately, inclusive education in Bumi Rafflesia was not simply about acceptance, but about building a strong sense of mutual need, where parents and teachers worked together to ensure that every child felt they had a safe place to grow in diversity.

The implications of this research called for a redesign of learning modules that were more action-oriented and the institutionalization of spaces for emotional encounters between students, teachers, and parents at school. However, this study was limited to a specific multicultural school in the Bengkulu region, so the dynamics found may vary if applied to areas with contrasting social characteristics. Therefore, suggestions for future research included expanding the scale of the study to different educational levels or using longitudinal methods to observe the consistency of this active tolerance character as students transition into the wider community. Furthermore, developing a digital platform as a collaborative medium between schools and parents in monitoring the development of students' inclusive character is also a very promising research opportunity for the future.

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